



EDUWATCH STATEMENT ON THE PROCUREMENT OF GHC 34.8 MILLION WORTH OF PAST QUESTIONS FOR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Africa Education Watch (Eduwatch) is an Education Policy Research and Advocacy Organization working with Civil Society, Governments, and the Private Sector to promote an equitable, accountable and responsive education system to drive the development of a highly competitive human capital in Africa. At Eduwatch, we believe efficiency in the use of education resource is key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 4 by 2030.

Background

During the 2012 Presidential Debate and 2016 electioneering campaign, His Excellency the President of the Republic, (then candidate Akufo Addo) succinctly diagnosed Ghana's biggest problem when he decried the then government's abuse of single source/restricted tender procurement methods, causing poor spending efficiency and waste. His promise to make competitive bidding the norm when given the nod was very receptive and reassuring to Civil Society. Later, a Danquah Institute Report on selected public procurements between 2010-2016 suggested that an estimated 65% savings could have been made if contracts were subjected to competitive tendering.

Spending Inefficiency in Africa's Education Sector

The African Development Bank in its Africa Economic Outlook 2020 report indicated that, even though Africa ranks 2nd globally in terms of its 5% GDP allocation to education, the continent ranks last in spending efficiency. It went ahead to predict that if Africa's spending efficiency increases from an average 50% to the level of Latin America (Average 75%), primary school completion rate would increase from 79% to 98%.

Spending Inefficiency and Financial Waste in Ghana's Education Sector

The challenges in Ghana's education sector scarcely includes bad policies. Indeed, there are mainly two – Inefficient Spending and Poor Management. Amid these two systemic deficits, no matter the objectives, strategies and resourcing of policies and programmes, there are bound to be poor, inequitable, or unsustainable outcomes. The 20% drop out rate at basic level, lack of adequate teachers in deprived schools, poor teacher supervision, the existence of 5,000 schools under trees, lack of desks, exercise books, school uniforms, textbooks etc. at the basic school level are all symptoms of Mismanagement and Spending Inefficiencies, considering that Ghana ranks very high among the countries committing most resources into education.

Are Past Questions necessary?

We support the decision to provide all resources required to adequately prepare students for examinations. We have no objection to the supply of past questions, answers and examiners reports to support students so far as the teaching authorities recommend and find same useful in adequately preparing students ahead of their examinations. It is on this basis that we commend government for providing the past questions.

The 'Pasco' Procurement Deal and Spending Efficiency

There are concerns with Spending Efficiency arising out of the decision by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to subject the procurement of GHC 34.8 million worth of past questions to a single-source procurement method. Selecting repeatedly for two years, a company without

Africa Education Watch.

25 Nii Torgbor Avenue, ARS, East Legon. Ghana-West Africa.

Tel. 0303975001 | Email: info@africaeducationwatch.org | Twitter & Facebook: @AfricaEduWatch

www.africaeducationwatch.org



a track record in Ghana's publishing industry to publish and supply about 450,000 copies of past questions raises more questions.

Copyright issues

The explanation by the Ministry of Education (MoE) that its decision to use Kingdom Books and Stationery as single source procurement beneficiary for the GHC 34.8 million contract is due to a copyright mandate issued to Kingdom Books by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) raises more questions. While the WAEC Act of 2006 (Act 719) does not confer the copyright over WAEC's past questions to WAEC, after being paid by MoE to conduct assessment of Ghanaian students, it shall be useful to share any such subsidiary contract conferring such copyrights to WAEC for public review. Regardless, what prevented/prevents the MoE from [also] obtaining the copyright permission and engaging its own publishers competitively rather than supporting the current monopolistic arrangement which ties Ghana down to an unfavorable procurement method?

Recommendations

1. The MoE must obtain the copyright permission over subsequent past questions, answers etc. before commissioning publishers competitively to print same on their behalf.
2. The MoE must demonstrate its practical commitment to competitive procurement methods to assure the Ghanaian public of the premium it accords the core tenets of spending efficiency. This should be pursued through a paradigm shift from the regularized restricted tendering and single source methods of procurement at the Ministry to a more competitive approach.

Sustainability

At present, regular textbooks in Senior High Schools are used for over three years before replacement. What then is the justification for procuring over GHC 30 million worth of past questions on a disposable basis annually, when these past questions are scarcely used beyond six weeks in a year?

Recommendation

It is our considered opinion that, the procurement of past questions should happen once in every three years, just as textbooks. Students should deposit the over 400 paged past question books with their respective schools after examinations, just as is done for all textbooks, to enable the subsequent batches to use for two more years. With wifi available in Senior High Schools, GES must support school heads to take the responsibility of sharing soft/hard copy updates of subsequent years' questions with teachers to facilitate their engagement with students.

Conclusion

The two major systemic issues in the education sector are spending and management inefficiency. All others are symptoms. The MoE and agencies must demonstrate beyond the rhetoric that, making competitive procurement a culture is a genuine government policy without which education SDGs cannot be attained by 2030.

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