

## PRESS BRIEFING

### Memorandum of Issues in the Basic Education Sector

#### Introduction

Ghana has been implementing the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy since 2005, with the aim of ensuring all citizens of basic school-going age enroll and complete basic school with relevant learning outcomes without financial barriers. Eighteen years into the implementation of FCUBE, there still exist significant access and quality deficits in the delivery of basic education, the drivers of which impact negatively on the work of teachers and learning outcomes. The deficits manifest in the following dimensions:

#### 1. High number of Out-Of-School children

According to the Ghana Statistical Service, 1 million children aged 4-18 are not in school - representing about 10 per cent of the age cohort. This is primarily due to the lack of public basic schools in underserved communities, even as the population increases. At least 2,000 new basic schools are required to absorb the out-of-school children into formal basic schools. However, given the current rate of constructing new schools, this may take the next 10 years to accomplish.

#### 2. The slow growth of public basic schools

Between 2015 and 2021, public basic schools grew by 12 per cent with private schools growing by 68 per cent. In the medium term 2018-2021, only an average of 0.8 primary schools were constructed each year per district. The slow growth of public schools, due to the lack of adequate investment in basic school infrastructure suggests government is shifting the responsibility of providing free compulsory universal basic education to the private sector, which is beyond the financial reach of the poor. This, among others, accounts for the high number of out-of-school children.

#### 3. Lack of Junior High Schools in a quarter of primary schools

Ghana's basic education comprises primary and Junior High School (JHS). About 25 per cent of primary schools across the country do not have JHS, a situation that seriously affects basic school completion. In the Northern Region, close to 60 per cent of primary schools lack JHS. As a result, distance commuted to school increases, with many learners dropping out after completing primary school six (6), especially in rural Ghana. A cohort survival analysis of Eduwatch using the Ministry of Education's EMIS data indicates only 63 per cent of pupils who enrolled in KG in 2011//12 completed JHS in 2022. Years of Civil Society engagement with the Ministry of Education on the need to accelerate the construction of JHS in underserved districts has yielded insignificant results.

#### 4. Overcrowded classrooms

The low investment in expanding public basic schools has led to overcrowding in urban and peri-urban schools, driving down quality. In Municipalities like Adentan, Weija-Gbawe, Ga North, Kpone Katamanso and Ga West, the average primary school class size is more than 60, almost twice the recommended class size by the Ghana Education Service. This has negative effects on the quality of teaching in a new curriculum which requires participatory learner-based teaching approaches. How can a teacher in a class of 124 at Papase Roman Catholic Basic School (Amasaman) apply participatory teaching approaches?

#### 5. Schools under trees, sheds and dilapidated structures

There are over 5,400 schools existing under trees, sheds and dilapidated structures, a situation which negatively affects, teaching, learning, and learning outcomes. The general learning environment is not only a disincentive for teachers to accept postings, but also demotivates existing teachers, while making school attendance unattractive to students. The government in 2021 announced a programme to replace all schools under trees, sheds and dilapidated structures with decent new school buildings by 2025. Till date, only 17 have been completed. Given the current pace, it will take Ghana more than 300 years to eradicate the over 5,400 schools under trees, sheds and dilapidated structures, which is unacceptable.

#### 6. Students, and teachers without desks and seats

The Ministry of Education reports that the proportion of pupils without desks has increased from 30 to 40 percent between 2017 and 2021. This translates into 2.3 million pupils without desks, with the highest proportion reported in the North-East Region (80%) and Northern region (70%). The issue of teachers without chairs and writing table is also prominent in many deprived schools. The desks deficits have led to overcrowded classrooms, with 3-5 pupils on one desk, pupils sitting on stones and improvised stools, and others laying on the floor. All these situations affect their writing skills and learning.

#### 7. Lack of adequate textbooks

Four (4) years after introducing a new primary school curriculum, there are only a few textbooks available for three (3) out of 10 subjects. The situation has severely affected the effective implementation of the new curriculum, as teachers are unable to facilitate learning without adequate textbooks.

#### 8. Procurement of laptops to replace textbooks in Senior High Schools

Government's plan to procure 1.3 million laptops to replace textbooks in Senior High Schools across the country does not represent efficient and prioritised use of public funds in the face of a heavily underfunded basic education sub-sector.

## 9. Lack of exercise books for needy pupils

Prior to 2015, there existed a free exercise book policy for public basic schools. This afforded children from poor households an opportunity to have exercise books to participate in learning. In 2017, government introduced a free exercise book policy in Senior High Schools and discontinued that of basic schools. According to the Ministry of Education, providing free exercise books, notebooks and learning materials have helped improved learning in Senior High Schools. Basic schoolteachers on the other hand continue to struggle to teach effectively when some pupils do not have exercise books, which is the case in many schools in the 75 deprived districts and urban slums. The lesson on benefits of free exercise books in secondary schools is useful for basic schools.

## 10. Poor financing of basic education

The access and quality deficits espoused above are primarily, the result of poor financing of public basic education over the years. Since 2012, when 27 per cent of the total national budget - the equivalent of 7 per cent of GDP was spent on education, the financing trend has declined to only 12 per cent budgetary allocation in 2023 - the equivalent of only 3 per cent of GDP. This is in the face of a growing economy and growing population.

The introduction of free senior secondary education, which has been impactful on access and transition, has taken a significant portion of already declining funding to the education sector. Resultantly, basic education's share of the education sector's discretionary expenditure declined from 18 per cent in 2014 to 6 per cent in 2020, and further to 4 per cent in 2023[1]. The declining allocation is worsened by low budget execution for discretionary expenditure, due to poor disbursement of allocated funds, which averaged 55 per cent by September 2022 for the 2023 financial year.

## 11. Capitation Grant

In 2019, government announced an increment in the capitation grant amount to GHC 10. Over the years, increasing inflation has reduced its real value from five (5) exercise books in 2019 to only two (2) exercise books in 2023. Even more disturbing is the untimely disbursement, as the Grant remains in arrears of almost two (2) years. The poor financing of basic education has adverse effect on the management and delivery of teaching and learning, accounting for the poor learning outcomes recorded in public basic schools.

## 12. Poor financing of feeding grants for Special Schools and the Ghana School Feeding Programme

Feeding grants for Special Schools are in arrears for almost two (2) years, creating severe challenges for managers of Special Schools. Similarly, the Ghana School Feeding Programme is also in arrears of a year, forcing many caterers to boycott cooking for pupils. Beyond the delayed disbursement and arrears, the recently proposed increase in budgetary allocation to the Ghana School Feeding Programme from 0.97 pesewas to 1.20 pesewas is unrealistic and cannot provide lunch for pupils at a time Senior High Schools who receive a budget of GHC 3 per pupil for lunch are even complaining about inadequate feeding budgets. There is greater concern about the medium-term expenditure projection of the Ministry of Finance to cut the Ghana School Feeding Budget by 25 per cent in 2025. This is unacceptable, as many poor children may drop out of school.

## 13. Shifting cost of basic education to parents

The poor disbursement of the Capitation Grant has compelled many schools to shift the cost of running basic schools to parents. Though unsustainable, some of these unintended costs include the cost of conducting examinations, utilities, among others. In some schools, parents are even required to pay for school desks, or bring same, as a condition for admitting their wards. This is because, there are no funds to maintain broken desks or produce new ones. While teachers are mindful of the ban on fees, in the absence of funds for running schools, without parental contributions, education service delivery at the basic level will pose a grave challenge.

## 14. Non-payment of utility bills in basic schools

Public basic schools pay for utilities at commercial rates which are very expensive, and since the capitation grant does not cover utility bills, schools are almost always in arrears and often fail to provide utility services. Many schools do not have money to buy pre-paid electricity, or have been disconnected for non-payment of electricity bills, and are therefore unable to participate in the government's Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics agenda as electricity is needed to power the devices and accompanying programmes. In the absence of government funding, some schools are compelled to levy pupils against the fCUBE policy.

## 15. Lack of incentive for rural teachers affecting teacher deployment

Almost two decades after the 2006 Education Reform Committee recommended allowances for teachers who accept postings to rural and deprived parts of Ghana, no action has been taken. Ghana is one of few countries where the salaries of urban teachers is the same as those teaching in deprived communities.

The lack of political will by successive governments to incentivise teaching in rural/deprived communities has resulted in the shortage of teachers in such areas. While government has long initiated some discussions on this matter, the delay in taking concrete action is an issue of urgent concern.

### **16. Politicised recruitment of teachers**

We are gravely disturbed about the recent public distribution of teachers' appointment letters by some Members of Parliament (MPs) a week before the Ghana Education Service released letters of appointment to teacher applicants. The public claim by the MPs about the role they played in securing appointment letters for teachers who were political party agents, suggests that political factors, other than the demand for teachers, may have influenced to a higher extent, the 2023 limited teacher recruitment. The politicized deployment of teachers has negative implications for teacher management and equitable distribution of teachers, especially in districts where MPs are not from the ruling government.

### **17. Medium-term expenditure framework under IMF**

As Ghana enters another International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme for the medium-term (2023-2025), the Ministry of Finance apart from allocating only 12 per cent of the budget to education, projects to allocate 11 per cent in 2024 and 2025, while cutting the Ghana School Feeding Programme budget by 25 per cent in 2025. The medium-term (2023-2025) expenditure estimates contained in the 2023 budget are obnoxious to education and require immediate revision to reflect the minimum funding norms of 15 per cent budgetary allocation to education. It is also necessary to rather increase the school feeding budget in line with inflationary trends, and maintain if not increase, the number of beneficiaries from the current 3.4 million.

### **18. No consultation on new secondary education strategy**

Teachers and Civil Society Organizations are major partners in executing the government's education agenda. There is a general lack of consultation by the Minister of Education on major education policy and reform issues. Last year, the Minister of Education announced a new strategy to increase secondary education to six years. It is sad to note that, as important as teachers and civil society organizations are in the nation's education development, we have not been consulted on the said strategy. All efforts to get the Ministry of Education to present the strategy to us for discussion and inputs have so far proven futile. The continuous unilateral decision making of the Minister of Education has a strong potential to affect the quality of education policy formulation, implementation, and sustainability.

## Recommendations

- a. The government must increase the budgetary allocation to education from the current 12 per cent to at least 15 per cent of the total national budget, using the supplementary budget window, and prioritize the disbursement of allocated discretionary education budget to increase the low budget execution to at least hundred percent by the end of the current financial year.
- b. The anticipated budgetary increment in a (above), which amounts to over GHC 4.3 billion, should as a matter of urgency and necessity be allocated to augment the hugely underfunded basic education goods and services budgets, and construct about 5,000 schools existing under trees, sheds, and dilapidated structures.
- c. The government must develop an emergency infrastructure expansion plan for overcrowded urban and peri-urban schools. The Plan must also include a purposive approach to bridging the 25 per cent gap between primary and JHS while providing new schools for underserved communities.
- d. The government must deploy desks to all the 2.3 million pupils in underserved schools. Partnerships with the Forestry Commission and the private sector should be pursued.
- e. The government must discontinue the plan to procure laptops for SHS and ensure that basic schools have the full complement of textbooks.
- f. The government must immediately procure textbooks and workbooks in all relevant subjects for all basic school pupils.
- g. The government must re-introduce the supply of free exercise books to all public basic schools.
- h. The government must diversify the financing source for the Capitation Grant to include the Annual Budget Funding Amount, which is more reliable, while benchmarking its annual increment with annual inflation data.

### Recommendations

- i. The government must disburse approved funds for financing arrears and the current cost of feeding in special schools and under the Ghana School Feeding programme. Additional allocations must be made in the 2023 supplementary budget to augment the inadequacies.
- j. The government must depoliticize the recruitment of teachers by removing MPs from the recruitment process.
- k. The government must implement the long advocated and recommended 20 per cent allowance for teachers in deprived areas.
- l. The government must put the secondary education strategy on hold until consultations with teachers and civil society organizations have been held to inform its review.
- m. The government must release all arrears on the Capitation Grant to end the imposition of various forms of fees on pupils. The Grant must be increased to absorb the cost of utilities, with automatic annual adjustments instituted in line with inflationary trends.

### Signed

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**STAR-Ghana Foundation**

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**Action Aid**

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**Africa Education Watch**

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**Ghana CSOs Platform on SDGs**

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**CAMFED**

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**GNAT**

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**GNECC**

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**CCT**

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**World Vision**

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**ICDP**