



OPEN LEARNING EXCHANGE GHANA – UNESCO ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



ACHIEVING QUALITY UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION 2015: MAKING THE DREAM A REALITY



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Introduction

Education for all is a prerequisite for a sustainable world and is a profound way to reduce economic and class disparities, which could threaten world peace and prosperity. Ghana, just as many countries, have committed to the tenets of achieving Universal Basic Education by 2015 to provide the foundation for sustainable development. However, with less than five years to 2015, there are genuine concerns that the country may not achieve its target and the quest for a quality universal basic education will forever remain a dream.

Open Learning Exchange Ghana (OLE Ghana) as its contribution to turning this dream into a reality with support from the UNESCO Cluster office in Accra brought together stakeholders in the education sector for a roundtable discussion on the theme:

'Achieving quality universal basic education 2015: Making the dream a reality'.

Present at the discussions were representatives from civil society, publishers, teacher groups, media, the private basic schools, the public basic schools, research institutions, the universities, examination bodies, colleges of education, OER champions, the Ghana Education Service and the Ministry of Education.

The discussions were chaired by Prof J. Akpanglo-Nartey, a Board member of OLE Ghana and the current Rector of Zenith University College in Accra. A presentation was made on the current scenario on the educational front by Dr. Yaw Ankomah of IEPA, University of Cape Coast and Prof J Anamuah-Mensah, a retired VC of the University of Education Winneba and the Executive Chair of OLE Ghana and TESSA. The Honorable Minister of Education was represented by Dr Pealore, Director SHRMP.

The write up on the discussions is structured in the following way:

- A. summary of proceedings
- B. feedback from group discussions
- C. issues arising from discussions
- D. conclusion

A. Summary of proceedings

The Programs Director of OLE Ghana, Mr. Kofi Essien, in his introductory remarks to start the day's programme reminded all gathered that there was a drop of greatness in every human being and education had to be so fashioned to unearth and grow this drop of greatness. Prof. J. Akpanglo-Nartey was later introduced as the chairperson for the occasion.

Prof J. Akpanglo-Nartey in accepting to chair the function drew attention to the fact that our quest as a country to achieve quality universal basic education and the Millennium Development Goal 2 raised a number of interesting issues that needed examining. These he said included the following:

- Who qualifies for basic education? Is it only children from the age of kindergarten to JHS?
- What about others such as adults who do not have any formal education? Do they also need basic education? What form should that take?
- Do we include such adults (and have we included) in our quest to achieve universal basic education?



- Are we addressing the issue of sacrificing quality for numbers (quality in exchange for the mere desire to achieve universal basic education)?
- Teachers, Teacher professional development, and the untrained teacher: how do we factor all these in Quality Universal Basic Education (QUBE) equation?
- Are activities of civil societies (their sheer numbers, how they work, their attitude/relationship with other like minded organizations, their capacity to deliver) inimical to achieving QUBE?

The Chairman concluded his opening remarks intimating that it was issues such as those enumerated above that led OLE Ghana with support from the UNESCO Cluster office in Accra to organize this round table discussion. He added that for the organization it was its first step towards fulfilling its mission of working with other stakeholders to achieve QUBE by the target date.

The Minister for Education in a speech read on his behalf lauded the role of civil society organizations and development partners in education provision and delivery in the country. He reiterated the government's commitment to providing quality universal basic education as shown in government policies culminating in the education Act 2008 and the revision of the ESP for 2010-2020. He indicated that there has been some success as seen in the increase in school enrollment numbers due to interventions put in place but was quick to add that the national averages tend to hide differences presented by geographical locations and poverty levels.

The Minister of Education accepted that there were challenges that needed to be addressed bordering more on quality as revealed by current National Education Assessment scores and BECE as well as SHS pass rates. He stressed that there was the need to pay attention to the marginalized and disadvantaged if we were to achieve true quality universal basic education as a country.

Dr Yaw Ankomah and Prof J. Anamuah-Mensah in their presentation on the current scenario on the Ghanaian education front in general and that of basic education in particular reminded all gathered of certain commitments we have made as a country. These included; the Millennium Development Goals, the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education policy, upholding the rights of the child, International Labour Organization Convention for eliminating child labour and lastly the Education For All (EFA) goals.

They posited that education was the pillar upon which modern nations attain total development adding that in today's global world, though a country may be endowed with a myriad of natural resources it can hardly develop if it fails to develop its formal education system. In their view education could help change society by improving and strengthening skills, values, communication prosperity and freedom.

Dr Yaw Ankomah and Prof J. Anamuah-Mensah also in their presentation acknowledged efforts made by successive governments to lay strong emphasis on the progress of Ghana's educational system with the major goal ultimately being to improve the quality of people's lives. However, they felt strongly that this basic goal continues to elude the nation mainly because implementation of policies has been beset with lack of adequate inputs as well as lack of commitment on the part of major stakeholders. They claimed that notably, basic education, which is supposed to lay the foundation for all subsequent education, has been fraught with inequities and inequalities. Thus in spite of the genuine efforts of governments at providing quality basic education, a significant proportion of the population has not received any



effective education that will enable them contribute meaningfully in the national development efforts.

In their view, despite the remarkable gains a lot still needed to be done. They intimated that the attempts to fulfill the commitments made as a nation has resulted in the overcrowding of classrooms coupled with lack of resources, outmoded pedagogy, untrained teachers, shortage of teachers, etc. Ghana's performance therefore in respect of targets set at attaining Universal Primary Education (UPE) at the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000 has been less than impressive. Citing Ghana's EFA Development Index (EDI), which stands at 0.791, the presenters pointed out that Ghana was far away from making the dream of achieving quality universal basic education by 2015 a reality.

However in concluding their presentation, Dr Yaw Ankomah and Prof J. Anamuah-Mensah believed that we could as a country turn this dream into a reality but only if issues bordering on quality, incentives to make the rural areas attractive to trained teachers, and improvement in conditions of service generally were addressed.

Participants after the presentation went into four groups to discuss four key issues identified as crucial to the attainment of quality universal basic education in the country.

B. Feedback from group discussions

Group 1 was to discuss strategies that could be employed to capture out of school and marginalized children so that true quality universal basic education could be achieved.

The group defined out of school children as those children who have never seen the four walls of a classroom before as well as school drop outs while the marginalized were those children who for one reason or the other were disadvantaged and could not have an education as a result of that. Group members cited poverty, physical disabilities, learning disability, cultural practices, child labor, lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials as well as the lack of requisite human resource as being the cause of out of school and marginalized children.

The group suggested the following as possible strategies that could be employed to help curb this phenomenon.

- There should be the strict enforcement of existing policies.
- The basic school curriculum should be made interesting enough. It must reflect 21st century teaching and learning skills, and be culturally appropriate to attract children to school. In this regard, in-service training needs to be strengthened and made flexible to enable all teachers to benefit and upgrade themselves continually.
- Though the idea is to practise inclusive education there might still be the need to create and appropriately resource more special schools.
- School buildings need to be built closer home and designed to cater for the challenged.
- Public education should be stepped up to demystify educational policies such as the Education Sector Plan so that there can be that collective ownership of



the education process. In this regard, the district assemblies and education offices should embark on advocacy work, especially to get pupils in schools.

- There is the need to prioritize what needs to be done to achieve quality universal basic education in the country and this should be made public so that with one mind we could, as a country, execute this agenda.

Group 2 was tasked to look at how ICTs and Open Education Resources (OERs) could contribute to delivery of universal quality basic education

In the group's submission they bemoaned the fact that normally when ICT is mentioned the tendency is for attention to be focused on computers. This in their view already limits the argument as to what ICTs can do to enhance quality universal basic education.

In their view ICT covers a wide range including household appliances such as television and radio, and other technologies examples being cell phones, CDs, pen drives, information van and many others.

The group indicated that among the many ways ICT could aid in the attainment of quality universal basic education the following could be considered:

- Integrating ICT in teaching and learning to make teaching and learning more fun
- Using ICT to create a rich resource center complete with all kinds of teaching and learning materials. This in their view will provide opportunities for storing and distributing teaching and learning resources thus transcending time and physical barriers.
- Using ICT for research on emerging educational trends.
- Using ICT to create platforms for mounting and delivering teacher professional development programmes.
- Using ICT for networking purposes among teachers in particular and educationists/education stakeholders in general, resulting in the creation of communities of practice.
- The use of the media to explain educational policies and activities. The group called for the emulation of best practices elsewhere, where whole television and radio stations were setup purposely to produce and broadcast educational programmes including actual teaching and learning process.

On the issue of the emerging Open Education Resources concept, the group indicated that OERs provided a free source of useful ready material for teaching and learning and as a country we must position ourselves to take advantage of this emerging phenomenon.

Group 3 was to examine how the collaboration between civil society organizations, development partners and government could enhance the country's chances of achieving quality universal basic education by 2015. Some of the strategies they suggested are listed below.



- A review of existing accountability systems, identify gaps and develop effective monitoring systems to ensure effective implementation of strategic plans put in place to help the country achieve quality universal basic education by the said date.
- Emphasis on civil society organizations involvement in promoting community and grassroots as well as parental ownership of education.
- Civil society organizations should be encouraged to contribute to monitoring and evaluation of educational programmes through the conducting of independent research based on key indicators. They are to ensure that the research results are unpacked to reveal to all and sundry the real situation on the ground particularly in marginalized areas.
- Civil society organizations should unite and call for their effective participation in various educational policy decisions, interventions and established processes such as donor support negotiations.

Group 4 examined how the higher education system could support quality universal basic education provision in the country. They suggested the following:

- There should be the institutionalization of the partnership between National Council for Tertiary Education and GES.
- Tertiary institutions should be encouraged to participate in action research on the education front as well as in curriculum review/revision.
- Tertiary institutions should carry out outreach programmes in schools and communities to share research findings and positively influence education provision and delivery.
- There could also be a stronger linkage with development partners for research purposes as well as piloting of best educational practices.
- Carry out monitoring and evaluation of practicum students as well as tracer research of the teacher graduates they produce.
- Tertiary institutions should take a second look at the content and nature of professional development programmes they plan for teachers as well as its timing. This is to ensure that it responds to the current needs of the educational system and the timing appropriate.

C. Issues arising from the discussions

A number of issues arose from the group reports. These have been raised below for further consideration and discussion.

Definition of Basic Education: One issue that caught attention was the fact that universal basic education had to be defined within a particular geographical context, in this case the Ghanaian context. It was pointed out that going by Ghana's definition, universal basic education was not limited to the MDG 2 which refers to universal primary completion. There is therefore a wider scope to cover. Covering such a wide scope comes with its own challenges. These challenges are even more pronounced when sentiments of early childhood education care givers echoed at the discussions indicated that as a country we have neglected this level of education. For many this



level of the education process is crucial and should form the bases for any hope of attaining quality basic education.

Questions such as the following keep coming up. What are the policies in place to train more professional minded early childhood care givers? What are the clear cut policies on how as a nation we should prepare early childhood care givers to adequately provide the bases for quality universal basic education? What pedagogy innovations are they being introduced to? What are the policies in place to ensure that those specifically trained to teach at the early childhood level remain at the level?

The question then is, do we have to narrow the scope we have set for ourselves as a country in our definition of universal basic education?

Role of the Media: Another issue that cropped up was the need to explore and exploit the power of technology in aiding the provision of quality basic education. There were calls for the media to give fair reportage and join in advocacy work so as to explain educational issues and whip up general support for educational programmes. References were made to other countries where TV and radio stations have been set up and dedicated to educational programmes alone.

Certainly, this is a call in the right direction but this will involve some investments and commitments as a nation. Are we ready as a nation to make these investments and commitments? Do we start by examining the country's TV and radio landscape to find out if four years away from 2015 there is any single programme on air that solely and exclusively deal with education and education related issues despite our general claim that education is the bedrock for national development?

Teacher professional development: The need to encourage teacher professional development also did come up for discussion. The quality of our current crop of teachers was questioned with regards to their readiness and preparedness to provide quality universal basic education. There was the general feeling that more had to be done to make them 21st century teachers. Tertiary institutions were requested to make flexible arrangements for teachers to avail themselves of the opportunities they provide to upgrade themselves. The role technology could play in the provision of teacher professional development was raised. Attention was drawn to activities being carried out by educational authorities to strengthen in-service training but then this raises the question as to how much is known about these programmes and its success stories as well as challenges.

Perhaps the quest for a sustained and quality teacher professional development programme should begin with an impact assessment of the current in-service professional programmes in place and innovative ways deployed, making use of technology, to address the teacher professional development needs of the Ghanaian teacher.

Technology and education delivery: One suggestion that was strongly tabled for discussion was the use of technology in aiding the provision of quality universal basic education. There was the strong belief that apart from serving as a platform for rolling out teacher professional development programmes, its potential to provide a rich store of educational resources should be considered. This was tied in with the benefits provided by the emerging OER movement.

However, the integration of technology into our educational system does raise questions as was evident at the discussions. How prepared are we as a country to



integrate technology into our educational system? Do we have teachers who can access and comfortably use technology especially for educational purposes? Can teachers evaluate, adopt and adapt online resources to use in their classrooms? What about local content? Realistically should we not be looking at processes that would make it naturally appealing for teachers to want to access and use technology in education delivery and these open resources?

Role of civil society organizations and development partners in provision of quality universal basic education: The discussions indicated the strong desire of civil societies to be more and more involved in processes and decisions affecting education delivery in the country. However there was the complementary call for civil society organizations to be better organized and their activities better coordinated so that they can be more visible on the educational front. This raises the issue as to which civil society is doing what and where and at what level of the education sector.

Do we as a country have an open-to-all regularly updated directory of civil society organizations operating in the country? A directory which provides credible and comprehensive data which could give educational stakeholders a good idea as to how civil society organizations could be effectively brought on board in the delivery of education in the country? A directory which provides information as to possible collaborative activities with other civil society organizations? A directory which also makes civil society organizations answerable to the communities they work in and those they claim to fight for?

Bringing the curriculum alive: Another major issue that came up for discussion was the need to make the curriculum more responsive to the national needs, more interesting and its delivery in tune with current pedagogical practices. The power of technology to make teaching and learning fun was brought to the fore. Tertiary institutions were called upon to carry out research and results disseminated with the emphasis being placed on action research.

There is an interesting link between the need to do more to bring the curriculum alive and the call at the discussions to strengthen the link between tertiary institutions and development partners. This call could be seen as a positive call in so far as resource mobilization for these researches is concerned. It could also speed up the uptake, dissemination and/or implementation of these results. With civil society organizations at the discussions asking for increased participation in education delivery processes, one could also consider what role they can play in the action research equation all aimed at bringing the curriculum to life.

D. Conclusion

Clearly the feedback from the discussions indicates that there are still a lot more questions to be asked and issues to be discussed. In this regard, OLE Ghana, as indicated at the round table, will create a QUBE online forum where all interested people could continue with the discussions, share and cross fertilize ideas all aimed at leaving our educational system better.

The discussions also underscore the need for all educational stakeholders in building common synergies and working together to execute the country's QUBE agenda.

We at OLE Ghana do have some concrete ideas on how collectively we can move forward on some of the issues raised during the round table and welcome all others



who are interested in working with us in true partnership spirit to address these issues so that we can make the dream of achieving QUBE in 2015 a reality.

