

UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW 2012 SESSION

STAKEHOLDER REPORT ON GHANA SUBMITTED BY GHANAIAN CHILDREN CLUBS/COMMITTEES

INTRODUCTION

In Ghana efforts towards children's participation in decisions that affect them is gradually gaining weight due to awareness raising in institutions, government agencies and at community level through civil society organisations and government efforts. Initial traditional practices of children being "seen but not heard" has given way to more consultation with children by parents, guardians, government departments and agencies and at institutional level though adults still determine limits to the full acceptance of children's participating actively in family and community decisions.

With commitment to ensuring the well-being of children, World Vision has increased its efforts towards children's participation by encouraging the formation of children's clubs under its Area Development Programmes (ADPs) as means of providing children with platforms to advocate for their rights, share knowledge or raise concerns on advocacy issues. This report is a collation of consultations children held within schools and in communities where they reside in rural and sub-urban communities, to represent children's voices. Children were given copies of the UNCRC, World Fit for Children and extracts from the previous Ghana's report to the UN CRC Committee and guidelines for the process of collecting information and putting the reports together themselves by setting a 12-member children's committee at a central place. Entitled "Bihi Baġsim" which means "Children Speak and Share Knowledge on Concerns", this report represents the voices of children themselves to this 2012 Universal Periodic Review as their contribution to promoting their active participation from the national to the global level and ensuring that their right to be heard is upheld. The following were recognised as the universal of rights of children all over the world

- ❖ *Right to participate in decision making, Right to education, Right to development, Right to survival and Right to protection.*
- ❖ *Protection from all forms of exploitations, neglect, abuse and violation of all children's rights*

RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

The information gathering for this report focused on the UNCRC as children discussed each article and the protocols and analysis from their findings on whether they are being met or not and what must be done to ensure that all children's rights are respected. The children selected their own focus for discussion - child education, child health, protection from abuse, exploitation, harmful socio-cultural and traditional practices and current well-being of children. The children involved in the process held consultations with children from the primary, junior high and senior high schools and children out of schools in the communities.

The children acknowledged that the government of Ghana, since ratifying the conventions on the rights of the child in February 1, 1990, has put in place many measures to ensure that children's rights are upheld. The children in schools know that there are now laws that protect them from all forms of abuse, exploitation, neglect by parents and guardians and even institutions like orphanages are also made to ensure the protection of children under their care. However, most children in school and all those who have never attended school are ignorant of such provisions for their rights and protection. To the children, out of ten parents and other guardians interviewed on awareness to children's rights and protection and provisions by the Ghana

government against child trafficking, FGM, violence against children and forms of abuse, among others, none have any knowledge. They therefore placed the level of lack of awareness at household and community by vote at 98% in both rural and sub-urban areas. Thus, Articles 2, 3 and especially 42 are not being met to their expectation.

Protection from all forms of Child Labour or social and economic exploitation of children

According to the Ghana Child Labour Survey compiled by the Ghana Statistical Service¹ 2,474,545 that constitute 39% of 6,361,111 children in Ghana are either self-employed or are actively engaged economically. Also, 57% of Ghanaian children aged between 5-14 years are involved in some form of child labour and 25% of girls, on the average, are forced into some domestic servitude or early marriages. An estimated total of 1,273,294 that form 20% of these children are engaged in moderate or worse forms of child labour - petty trading on streets, agricultural production and processing; or are working in the mining and fishing sectors. Other most common economic activities children are engaged in apart from street hawking are stone quarrying, sand winning, shallow or deep sea fishing, cattle, goats and sheep shepherding, bonded domestic workers or being engaged in ritual servitude in the chief's palace or at shrines (e.g. Trokosi system). Children on the streets between 10-17 years do not have any committed adult supervision and are therefore said to be the most vulnerable. Majority of these street children have become prey to child prostitution and training as criminals².

- Findings from the children indicate that children are found in the mining industry; at stone quarries cracking stones to sell and majority are on the streets to fend for themselves due to parental neglect, death of parents or poverty. Most of these children are exposed to all kinds of danger, including rape, being deceived and kidnapped for use in rituals and even trafficking.
- Some parents make their children get their own food to eat in the house and wherever they find themselves and so they are forced to work to meet their needs.
- Not all children in the northern parts of Ghana are allowed to go to school since parents need them as shepherd boys or girls to take care of their sheep, goat and cows daily. Children from school have to go out and sell to contribute to buying their school uniform, paying for school examination and stated fees at the primary level since basic education is free. Those in Junior and High schools work as farm labourers and some girls work as domestic workers.
- A traditional practice of fostering where firstborns are given to siblings of parents allow them to use these children as they like has led to most of these children not going to school, being mistreated and forced to travel to Accra or other cities to work as "Kayaye" or head porters so that they can raise money to prepare for marriage but their children go to school. Girls are the most affected as some relatives use them in their business and do not pay them for their services. Most of these girls leave under very bad conditions and are open to all forms of dangers. 80% of such girls have the moneys they make taken from them so that they can serve for longer periods.

Children's Nutrition and Health

UNICEF situational analysis of Ghanaian children from 1992 to 2008 indicate to a positive progress in the reduction of infant mortality or death rates from ARI, malaria and the six killer disease due to improved use of insecticide treated mosquitoes nets, exclusive breastfeeding of children and improved ante-natal and post-natal care³. Under child nutrition, percentage of children under 5 years from 2008 identifies the Eastern, Central, Northern and Upper East as areas with highest records of stunted growth at 28-34%. For wasting, Western, Ashanti, Volta, Brong Ahafo and Upper West recorded 20-30% but Greater Accra recorded below 20% underweight. Anaemia prevalence also registered 47% among children. This signifies wide spread malnutrition among children in nine out of ten regions of Ghana with rural communities being most affected

¹ Ghana Statistical Service, Ghana Child Labour Survey, March 2003

² MOWAC, Ghana's Report 2007²; Fact-finding Exercise on Commercial Sex in the KEEA District, Central Region, 2004

³ UNICEF, A Situational Analysis of Ghanaian Children and Women, 2010; GDHS, 2008

due to regional disparities in the provision of health facilities. Even though government statistics show that poverty has reduced to 28% nationally, the children reiterate the fact that, rising cost of living locally has led to most children living only one full meal during the evening without the required quantity of protein, and other needed vitamins and minerals since most meals have high carbohydrates – more local rice, yams, cassava or cooked guineacorn or millet flour with fish powder in local soups, stew or sauce or they are eaten raw with hot pepper. Most children do not have enough food and so go begging in the streets or engage in trade to feed whilst other often sleep on empty stomach. The children therefore estimate that the level of stunted growth, wasting and underweight is higher than any stated among rural and the urban poor.

- Government has tried to contribute to improving child nutrition by introducing the school feeding programme but this is more in the metropolitan and sub-metro areas and selected rural community schools. To the children, those in cities and sub-urban areas in district capitals rather have parents who can afford at least two balanced diets compared to remote rural communities where these starve. They therefore call for equity and fairness since this is discriminatory and does not ensure the survival and healthy development of children in Ghana. Though government and civil society efforts are commendable for meeting articles 2, 6, 24, they need to step up to meet the MDGs.
- Due to poverty, parents are not able to meet health cost and so prefer to buy off the counter drugs or depend on herbs for taking care of children. Therefore, children die from overdose, wrong prescriptions and expired drugs from drug peddlers who come to sell on market days in the villages. Depending on the distance, such children are buried in the village and so do not give full record of registered child deaths. Another example is, every year, children die from cerebro spinal meningitis (CSM) that cause many deaths in the northern, upper east and west regions of Ghana and there was a recent outbreak of epidemic that claimed the lives of children and women because instead of going to the hospital, they relied on self-medication. This shows the unfair regional and district health facilities' distribution and access to qualified healthcare. The only well equipped hospital are the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra, Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital in Kumasi and the Tamale Teaching hospitals. Sub-Metro hospitals, clinics and health post are found in district and regional capitals. Though government has tried to increase rural health access through the Community Health Improvement Programme and Services (CHIPS compound) these health post are poorly resourced.
- The Ghana Health Services place immunization coverage for under 5years at 78-85% in rural communities and over 90% in urban areas but the children insist that though parents are aware of the need to ensure full immunization for their children, majority do not ensure that and so do not fully send the children due to transportation difficulty, distance and how far health workers and volunteers are able to go.

Child Education

As its commitment to the education for campaign, government has, over two decades now invested in infra-structural provision and improvement of existing facilities, creating other learning and incentives for teachers and modifying curriculums as well as ensuring available learning materials are available. Government has taken pragmatic steps to where 1,226 schools have been initiated and are various stages of completion to increase accessibility and also reduce number of children learning under trees and deplorable conditions. In addition, 21 science resource centres have completed and handed over to second cycle schools in 7 regions; 380 six-unit classrooms for primary and junior education have also been constructed and 52 dormitories are also almost ready. Government has released an amount of GH¢36.8million (approx. \$21.2million) from the GetFund for the construction of lecture theatres, libraries, accommodation, computer laboratories, to mention a few and to increase school enrolment, school feeding programmes have been introduced to

improve the nutritional status of children. Government has also initiated national educational reform initiatives by introducing the 2008 Educational Act 778 for structuring education in the country; the introduction of sub-sector specific policies for Science, Technology and Mathematics Education (STME), Technical and Vocational Educational Training (TVET), Special Education and Inclusive Education (SpED) and the Capitation Grant that ensure Free Compulsory Basic Education (FCUBE) and improving parity between boys and girls-child education⁴. School uniform and textbook distribution have also been initiated in 2009 to increase children's interest in enrolment and retention. This has led to higher retention rates for completion in primary education. However, retention in junior and senior schools has been low due to distance, poverty and teenage pregnancy, lack of teachers, among others with girls being most affected⁵.

To the children, parents do not value education much and so are not committed and so children are asked to skip school to work on farm, assist in selling during market days or are sent to take care of beggars and other disabled members of the family in streets. Moreover the facilities provided by government are not evenly distributed since children Pong Tamale Senior High Schools live in deplorable conditions as most sleep in mosquito infested classrooms, poorly constructed dormitories with torn mosquito nets and sometimes have no food since what is provided often times are less than the population of students. They believe these conditions can be found in most sub-urban and rural schools. Another major of concern is the annual quality of Basic Education Certificate for Examination results that result in 45-50% of children not qualifying into senior high schools and so end up on the streets since vocational and technical training and accessibility are also limited. They believe that Ghana waste its future human resource by not thinking through how to salvage the situation but seem content at the trend. They are worried about their future as most schools still lack adequate qualified teachers and the few seem more concerned about their own graduate education than commitment to needed child learning capacity that they believe can adequately prepare them for the future. Some of the school still lack good furniture for comfortable learning and so children lie on the ground. They also concerned over the fact that when decisions are being taken on educational reforms they are even consulted for their opinions and views to be heard and so when policies to not meet expectations since they may not be beneficial, institutional authorities do not care. An example to change of number years in senior high school to four years with any infrastructural analysis or impact on poor parents and reversal to three years after. They believe government should consult more with them with the principle of "the best interest of the child" and the type of future human resource required, informing such consultations.

CHILD PROTECTION

Child protection issues discussed centred on child abuse, child trafficking, violence against children, child early marriages, child neglect due to divorce by parents or polygamous marriages; revisiting existing traditional and socio-cultural practices that encourage practices negative to children and plight of children due to unfair inheritance of parental properties, widowhood rites, puberty rites and beliefs in communities. Other concerns also centred on the plight of disabled children who suffer discrimination, stigma as spirit or cursed children and are either killed or isolated or used as rituals in some communities. They also discussed sexual abuse against girls and recent increase in male child sexual abuse by adult males that traumatise them and lead to all sorts of psycho-emotional complications. Stories were shared on how deceit, coercion and sometimes even threat is used and being defenceless, they are forced to give in but are afraid to report due to fear of stigmatisation, being blamed or punished. Key perpetrators identified are close relatives, teachers, peers and others who pretend they want to help them pay fees or take care of them. The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) report for 2009 indicates that though HIV infection reduced from 3% in 2003 to 1% in 2005, this has risen to 1.9 in 2008 and is now 2.1 among pregnant youth 15years and above. Adolescent pregnancy has also been on the increase with recorded sexually transmitted diseases among the

⁴ Ghana Education Service 2008 and 2009 report/Ministry of Education 2010 report

⁵ Education Sector Review Report, 2008; UNICEF Situational Report, 2011

even the younger girls; with boys fathering most of such female children's pregnancies⁶. Also data is not available on levels of drug addiction but anecdotal reports indicate an increase in number of children on drugs in both junior and senior high schools.

Though Ghana has the Juvenile Justice legislations and related policies to ensure children in conflict with the law are given age appropriate trials and incarceration, these are not enforced. Children also feel defenceless when they become victims of adult abuse due to attitude of the police, families and the community that try to shift the blame labelling them with bad names. The children saw a deep gap between government policies, laws and other legislations put in place to protect them and commitment to ensuring enforcement from the national to the district and least community levels. The children feel that if the UNCRC, the MDGs and other global interventions can achieve desired results, they must be seen as agents of change since it is their future being and well-being that are being discussed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. If Articles 12, 13, 14, 16 and 17 that demands for children's right to information, airing their opinions and also giving weight them can be realised fully, government, civil society organisation must engage more with children and must recognise contributions they can well make from primary to senior high levels.
2. Government must make sure Article 17 where mass media has a role for creating more awareness to issues is central. They feel present political debates on the radio and some of media forms are not helpful to them since they indirectly incite dissensions, violence, disrespects authority and can affect state security. To them freedom of speech also means respecting the rights and dignity of others and must inform how adults in the media conduct themselves. They want more children's participation to share their concerns.
3. Government must budget and encourage the District Assemblies (DAs), National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), Commission On Rights and Administration of Justice (CHARJ) to carry out intensive education on the UNCRC, the Ghana Children's Act 560, legislation on child trafficking, child labour and others passed over the years to inform them on the implications since almost all community members, teachers and parents do not know the, and so flouts them all the time. This is to meet what the requirements for Articles 3, 4, 6, 19, 27, 29 and 30 requests the state or government to do.
4. On the plights of disabled children, all efforts must ensure creating disability awareness on actual causes, possible help and support and education for parents and community leaders to stop the kind of treatment given to them due traditional belief of disability being caused by the gods and leading silently killing innocent children and mother who give birth to them in northern, upper east and west and other areas where such ethnic groups that practice this traditional beliefs resides. This is to fulfil Articles 23, 24, 25 and 27.
5. Though government through the Ministry of Women and Children is doing such wonderful work to ensure their protection, improvement in health, education and general welfare, there must be more effective decentralisation and initiative of programmes at the district and community levels and children must not only be invited during the Day of African Child and given things to say but must be a more involved at all levels.
6. This process of discussing and submitting their views on the UNCRC and other laws and policies must be a continuous practice to enable them share their concerns and monitor implementation.

⁶ NACP report, 2009