

# Stakeholder Consultation Report

Towards Better Pathways for Achieving Equal  
Educational Opportunity for All

April 21-22, 2016



the  
Education  
Commission



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## About VIAM Africa

VIAM Africa is one of Africa's leading progressive think tanks that provide independent reviews of education and social policies in Sub-Saharan Africa. We are Africa-wide, independent and non-partisan. We are funded by organizations and individuals that wish to see a vibrant education and social policy debate and reform as well as through our own events. Our head office is in Aberdeen-United Kingdom, with VIAM Africa (Ghana), VIAM's dedicated think tank for Ghana, operating out of offices in Accra.

**Our mission** is to develop and advance knowledge that transforms lives of people through innovative education and social policy research and reforms.

**Our purpose** is to conduct and promote research into, and the shaping of public opinion in crime and victimization, education and social stratification, climate change, education finance, governance, gender issues, corporate social responsibility and social policy (health & social care, welfare and poverty).



## Executive Summary

This consultation exercise collated the views of 54 participants comprising technocrats and consumers of public education from a large, mainly rural local authority in Accra, Ghana. The purpose was to support ongoing steps, by the UN Education Commission, to improve financing of public education, through the development of a renewed and compelling investment case, and financing pathway for achieving equal educational opportunity for children and young people.

The following observations were made in this exercise:

1. A large proportion of participants (46) understood the associated long-term benefits of educating their children.
2. Parents desire to educate their children is challenged by economic and socio-cultural factors.
3. Lack of supportive environment, infrastructure and incentives, seems to make it difficult for government to compel parents to send their children to school within the remit of the constitutional provision of free compulsory, universal, basic education (FCUBE).
4. Numerous factors aside irresponsibility, illiteracy, and low income make it hard for some parents to make the necessary investment into the education of their children.
5. Outdated curriculum, poor parental involvement and backward socio-cultural norms are some obstacles challenging quality education delivery.
6. Majority of participants were of the view that enrolment will increase dramatically in technical and vocational training institutions at the secondary school level compared to grammar/general secondary schools.
7. Majority of participants are of the view that across board financing of education has proven expensive over the years, thus government should cross-subsidize and develop a special programme for orphans from low income homes to get education.



## Forward

*Crucial to the realization of inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG 4) is decentralized participation involving community members and other important stakeholders.*

Education is among the top priorities by governments across the world. In the United States, both Policy reform advocates and Politicians are concerned about how to revive and enrich public education to maintain economic competitiveness and world influence. In china, efforts to consolidate status as the world's manufacturing hub has received considerable support through significant education reform. In Ghana, the discussion is gradually migrating from getting more people into school to improving the quality of the learning experience.

The task to ensure quality outcomes and quality investment into critical areas at the basic, secondary, technical, vocational and tertiary educational levels is however beyond the government; hence the need for community ownership and participation in facilitating a successful educational reform.

## About the Consultation Exercise

VIAM Africa Center for Education and Social Policy undertook this consultation exercise on behalf of the Education Commission, a global initiative under the chairmanship of Gordon Brown, United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education. The Commission's goal is to develop a renewed and compelling investment case and financing pathway for achieving equal educational opportunity for children and young people. In order to take into account as many experiences, perspectives and sources of evidence as possible, the Commission invited a diverse range of organizations and entities to host consultation sessions.

VIAM organized sessions in selected communities in Accra, the capital city of Ghana to gather input of key education stakeholders, including technocrats and consumers of public and private education (parents and guardians), to support the Commission's development of a strong and comprehensive final report.

This falls in line with VIAM's resolve to serve as a resource for government departments and agencies, education institutions, philanthropic foundations and others committed to improving access, quality and management issues in education. Although the Commission demanded just a page report which we submitted, we have prepared this report as our contribution to extending the discussion on improving quality education including finding better financing pathways.

## Participants' Responses

Over 50 people participated in this consultation. Consultation sessions were held at three different locations; first two sessions in the afternoon and the last session in the evening. These locations were of close proximity to the settlement of participants. Each session began with an overview of the Commission's work as required, after which discussions around key questions began. Owing to differences in literacy among participants, some of the discussion questions had to be rephrased in a language semi-literate and illiterate participants can understand. Questions were also translated into the main local dialects for some participants to understand (Ga, Twi, and Ewe). Responses received were quite huge and transcribing everything will result in a voluminous report, so they were aggregated according to similarities in responses and relevance to the discussion questions. Participants' responses have been anonymized due to ethical considerations.

### •Education Benefits

According to the Global Partnership for Education, if all students in low-income countries left school with basic reading skills, 171 million people could be lifted out of poverty. This is equal to a 12% cut in global

poverty. In addition, one extra year of schooling increases an individual's earnings by up to 10%. In Sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 1.8 million

children's lives could be saved if their mothers had at least secondary education. Obviously, the returns on education are endless.

In this consultation, a large proportion of participants (46) understood the associated long-term benefits for educating their children. According to Mr. Sowah, a Mechanic and father of three, sending his children to school is a matter of *"giving them a chance his parents could not afford him"*. He wants his children to be great people in the future and the surest way to make this possible is to give them the best education to the best of his ability.

This means that even though Mr. Sowah had little or no formal education, he is abreast with the enormous benefits that education could offer an individual and as a consequence would not hesitate to send his children to school.

Other participants identified with this view. For Efua, an office clerk and a single mother, she will send her child to school *"to broaden his mind, learn new languages and things about the world...things are fast changing in the world and I want my child to keep up with these changes"*. Again, most of the participants agreed with Efua, arguing further that education is a tool that can be used to bridge the gap between the developed and developing countries.

A country with an educated population is able to help direct the development process of their country because they are not oblivious of the changes that are happening around them in the global world. Other parents (21 participants), mentioned that the underlying factor for sending their children to school is to prepare their children for future opportunities and demands; and upward mobility. Most of these parents appear to view their children as their most precious treasure and as such giving them the needed education will open opportunities for the children that they the parents never had. In return, they expect their children will grow up with better life chances to help cater for their siblings, eliminate the level of poverty in the family.



## • Failure to Invest in Education

Parents desire to educate their children is however constrained by economic and socio-cultural factors. High unemployment, cost of living and entrenched cultural beliefs prevent some parents from educating their children.

In order to sufficiently answer the question of whether parents should educate their children or not, one will have to look at the immediate environment they live in and their personal circumstances. Does the environment empower them economically to educate their children? If yes, does the environment has the necessary structures and incentives in place in the form of school facilities, teaching and learning materials, scholarships, transport system, among others to enable parents educate their children?

Government investment in education appears to show limited improvements in quality to satisfy the expectations of parents who send their children to public schools. Beyond that, lack of supportive environment, infrastructure and incentives, seems to make it difficult for government to compel parents to send their children to school within the remit of the constitutional provision of free, compulsory, universal, basic education.

Mawuli, a Researcher at University of Education (Winneba), explained why government is equally constrained in satisfying all levels of education with required resources. According to him, *“there are various sectors competing for limited resources of government. The more you push for one sector, the more another one suffers. So those at the helm of affairs have to exercise discretionary powers at a point. Their decisions will not satisfy everybody but the end of the day, a decision needs to be taken to keep government machinery functioning”*. This has been a big challenge for governments in most developing countries, thus, the decision as to which sector gets what bearing in mind the principle of opportunity cost.

On the part of parents, do they have to be educated to understand the value of education?

According to Lawson, an Electrician, “some parents did not receive any education so they do not understand the importance of educating their children”.

This view did not sit well with some of the participants, who argued that failure to invest in education is not that simplistic. In the face of rising unemployment resulting in low income, poor family planning, increase in teenage pregnancy in low income homes, broken homes as a result of divorce, it has become hard for some parents to make the necessary investment into the education of their children.

Some also questioned the return on education in recent times. Hajia Barikisu, a leader of a women’s group in the community, said, *“Do you think people educate their children to come and sit at home? People don’t see the point (to spend money on their children’s education) because those who are even educated are jobless and not productive in society. The system is not ready to accommodate graduates who are churned out every year. I agree it takes some time to see the benefits of education. Not all parents can be that patient. I understand. But, just look around you?”* Hajia seems to have a point about the fact that the returns on education sometimes are not immediately felt by a family of a prospective graduate.

However, it can be argued that the returns on education can not only be limited to material needs of the family but also the acquisition of knowledge that the child has been exposed to.

So invariably, the family might not benefit immediately in terms of money but the knowledge acquired by the child can be of enormous benefit to the family, the community and the country as a whole.

If this made clear to parents, it will be a first step to solving the problem of parents being reluctant to invest in the education of their children. For 13 other participants, it is simply greed on the part of duty bearers, who at best, give lip service and little attention to issues related to public education in the country.

## • Quality Education

According to UNICEF (2000), quality education includes:

- a. Learners who healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities
- b. Environments that are healthy, safe, protective, and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities
- c. Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace
- d. Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skillful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities
- e. Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society

Addressing the various components of quality education has been a challenge in Ghana. Pro-poor interventions such as the school feeding program (at GHS1.50p per child) though has contributed to educational access and partially solved the problem of absenteeism at some basic schools, it has woefully failed to deliver nutritious meals for pupils, and currently some school authorities are now protesting against it. Other investments such as free distribution of school uniforms, sandals, scholarships, among others have largely not been transparent and well-targeted either. In most cases, those who really need these materials are neglected while distribution appears to be done to achieve certain political and partisan objectives.

But what has been the biggest single obstacle to raising educational quality in Ghana?

Ebenezer, a primary school head teacher contends that, *“it boils down to outdated curriculum. A situation where industry is dissatisfied with the quality of graduates points to a failed educational system. What and how students are taught is very important. Until this fundamental issue is addressed, we will be going round in circles”*. The curriculum in Ghana even though have undergone series of reforms have failed to address the basic problem of preparing the prospective graduate at any level for the real world. Within the context of the curriculum, there seems be weak connection between classroom experiences and critical sectors of the economy, particularly at tertiary level. This eventually seems to lead to the production of graduates who do not fit into the critical areas that would lead to a boom in the economy. Several stakeholders including the Association of Ghana Industry have blamed the problem of unemployed graduates on this factor.

Other participants (11) viewed the seemingly bad economy, poor involvement of parents in the education of their children (three participants) and backward socio-cultural norms (16 participants) as some of the obstacle affecting educational quality. For instance, Naa Atswei, an office worker and a mother of four, argued that *“some parents do not even bother to visit their children at school to check how they are doing, talk to the teachers, and question outrageous fees. They just sit at home and complain and refuse to do anything about it. The teachers (in public basic schools) are not good. Some are really annoying. They are always asking money for extra classes. Because they are not well paid by government, they are always finding ways to take money from us (parents). All they do is to take money. So our children go to school and come home without learning anything. District Inspectors from the Ministry the Ministry of Education are also not serious. They do not report the true state of affairs to their superiors. They are corrupt”*.



## • **Future of Ghana's Education**

The future of education in Ghana is both bright and bleak as espoused by the participants. 17 participants projected that school fees will go up to the extent that most parents, especially those from low-income homes, will not be able to afford. 19 participants envisaged quality private schools more than public schools because many people in the foreseeable future will lose trust and confidence in the public school system. 21 participants projected that enrolment will increase dramatically in technical and vocational training institutions at the secondary school level compared to grammar/general secondary schools. For four participants, the circumstance of Ghana's educational system will depend on prioritization and reforms. Finally, eight participants were of the opinion that wholesale financing of education, for both the rich and the poor, will cease.

## • **Education Finance**

The Education Commission, on whose behalf this consultation exercise was conducted, seeks to develop a renewed and compelling investment case and financing pathway for achieving equal educational opportunity for children and young people, and to a large extent, this formed the basis for the consultation. Exploring new sources of finance for global education for the next ten years and harnessing these sources are indeed imperative, ambitious moves to improve education to deliver on its expected outcomes.

For some participants (12 in number), government should concentrate on infrastructure; parents should pay fees. Others (17 in number) are of the view that across board financing of education has proven expensive over the years, thus government should cross-subsidize and develop a special programme for orphans from low income homes to get education. 14 participants think that government should pay private sector people to manage public basic schools. The underlying factors emerging from the responses were the fact that, governments cannot leave the educational sector in the hands of the private sector. Therefore, there is that critical role that government needs to play in ensuring that each child in the country benefits from education. This is because education is a right and not a privilege and government should champion this while the private sector complements the efforts of the government.

## Conclusion

Education finance remains a vexed and contentious matter. The discussion on the extent to which government, the private sector and parents should be financially involved is useful for building consensus and deploying much needed reforms. Just as important is the involvement of those at the bottom of the pyramid which comprises consumers of public education, in the discussion.

From interactions with participants, we observed that parents and guardians are very much interested in the education of their children. For some, it is an issue of giving their children a privilege they never had. For others, it is about preparing their children for future demands and opportunities. Their interest is however constrained by economic and socio-cultural factors.

Unemployment, poor family planning, broken homes as a result of divorce, among others are some reasons parents find it difficult to educate their children. A more dangerous constraint is skepticism in the importance of education due to the prevailing condition of graduate unemployment. This however is an expression of frustration than outright devaluation of education.

According to the participants, poor community involvement, backward socio-cultural norms, outdated curriculum, bad economy, poor parental supervision, to mention a few, are obstacles to raising educational quality in Ghana.

Fourteen years from now, they project school fees will skyrocket beyond the reach of parents, confidence in public schools will plummet, private schools would outnumber public ones, technical and vocational education will gain momentum, and wholesale education finance for both the rich and the poor will cease. The skepticism and negativity can however be put to rest if requisite reforms and financially viable alternatives for the funding of public schools are developed and implemented.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Discussion Questions

1. Given that there are clear benefits of education, why do you think people have not acted and invested in education at the level needed?
2. What do you think has been the biggest single obstacle to raising educational quality in developing countries? How can we overcome this obstacle?
3. For those countries which have made the greatest improvements in education in recent years, what do you think have been the critical factors in their success?
4. How do you think education/school will look different in 2030? What implications does this have on the Commission's recommendations?
5. What will be the most important (new) sources of finance for global education over the next decades? How could these sources be harnessed?

## Appendix 2: Consultation Report Sent to the Education Commission, UN

21-22 April, 2016

### Consultation Report

Over 50 people participated in this exercise. Consultation sessions were held at three different locations; first two sessions in the afternoon and the last session in the evening. These locations were of close proximity to the settlement of participants. Each session began with an overview of the Commission's work as required, after which discussions around key questions began. Owing to differences in literacy among participants, some of the discussion questions had to be rephrased in a language semi-literate and illiterate participants can understand. Questions were also translated into the main local dialects for some participants to understand (Ga, Twi, and Ewe). Responses received were quite huge and transcribing everything will result in a voluminous report, so they were aggregated according to similarities in responses and relevance to the discussion questions.

*Moderator: What is your main reason for sending your children to school?*

*Participants:*

- To broaden his/her worldview, learn new languages and things about the world.
- Things are fast changing in the world and my children have to keep up with these changes.
- To be a great person in future.
- I didn't get that privilege, I want my children to have that.
- To prepare my children for opportunities.
- For upward mobility.
- To help me with day to day transactions like banking, paying utility bills, so that I won't be cheated.

*Moderator: Given that there are clear benefits of education (some of which you have alluded to), why do you think people have not acted and invested in education at the level needed?*

*Participants:*

- Some parents did not receive any education so they don't understand the importance of educating their children.
- In the absence of a law to compel parents to send their children to school, some parents won't care about their children's education. Without this mechanism in place, government interventions won't yield much.
- The problem also has to do with rising unemployment resulting in low income, poor family planning (too many children), increase in teenage pregnancy in low income homes.
- Broken homes.
- Divorce.
- Economic factors.
- People don't see the point because people who are even educated are jobless and not useful/productive in society. Our system is not ready to accommodate the graduates who are churned out every year. The benefits of education are seen over a long period of time and not all parents can see that.



- Greed on the part of duty bearers; we have a sub-standard way of dealing with things relating to education in this country.
- There are various sectors competing for the available limited resources. The more you push for one sector, the more another one suffers. It is an assumption that education is beneficial but people at the grass root don't see the relevance of education.
- There is still gender bias when it comes to education because some parents think their daughters should get married. It is a societal problem.

**Moderator:** *What do you think has been the biggest single obstacle to raising educational quality in developing countries? How can we overcome this obstacle?*

**Participants:**

- Poor community involvement.
- Backward socio-cultural norms.
- Outdated curriculum.
- Bad economy so there are no funds to improve the educational system.
- Our school libraries are gone, we don't even know what the authorities (school administrators, school heads) are doing about it.
- Poor parental supervision. Some parents don't even bother to visit their children at school to check how they are doing, talk to the teachers, ask questions about outrageous fees. They just complain at home and refuse to do anything about it.
- The teachers (in public basic schools) are not good. Some are really annoying. They are always asking money for extra classes. Some are also not paid well by government and so refuse to teach the children. So our children go to school and come home without learning anything. District Inspectors from the Ministry of Education are also not serious. They don't report the true state of affairs to their superiors. They are corrupt.

**Moderator:** *For those countries which have made the greatest improvements in education in recent years, what do you think have been the critical factors in their success?*

**Participants:**

- They have money.
- Most of them are educated.
- Government makes sure parents educate their children.
- Good curriculum and finance. Example, the Singapore curriculum gives students the feeling of self-belief after completing school. The Ghanaian curriculum is bad and it should be changed otherwise whatever intervention that is introduced will backfire.

**Moderator:** *How do you think education/school will look different in 2030? What implications does this have on the Commission's recommendations?*

**Participants:**

- School fees will go up and most parents (from low income homes) won't be able to afford.
- There will be more private schools than public schools as people will lose confidence in public schools.
- Some people will put their children into technical and vocational training programs. They won't waste time sending their children to school (grammar) for them to end up jobless.
- The education system will be worse if reforms are not made.
- We can make head way in 14 years. It all depends on how best we can prioritize and change the current system.
- Wholesale financing of education, for both the rich and the poor, will cease.

**Moderator:** *What will be the most important (new) sources of finance for global education over the next decades? How could these sources be harnessed?*

**Participants:**

- Government should concentrate on infrastructure. Parents especially should pay fees. There is no confidence in the government to manage education in this country. Our leaders had the best education in public schools but see what they are doing to our children?
- Government should have a special program for orphans from low income homes to get education. Government should pay private sector people to manage public basic schools (current administrators are not serious).



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