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UNINTENDED BENEFIT OF MiDA PROGRAMME

EDUCATION OF GIRLS FROM KUNKWAK AND CULTIVATION OF RICE

By

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Introduction

Commercial training of selected Farmer Based Organizations (FBO) in the West Mamprusi District of the Northern region of Ghana under the Millenium Challenge Account (MCA) Programme otherwise known as the Ghana Compact commenced in 2008 when the Food Research Institute of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR-FRI) was enlisted as one of the Technical Training Service Providers (TTSPs). Consequently, participating TTSPs undertook an orientation programme at NODA Hotel in Kumasi in 2008 to educate and train them for the task ahead. The CSIR-FRI team headed by a Team Manager was therefore assigned to the West Mamprusi District (WMD) of the Northern region of Ghana. This included the so called *Overseas* area of the district.

Following the exemplary work carried out by Training Service Providers (TSPs) of CSIR-FRI in the assigned enclaves of the district, a second training programme in 2009 involved newly trained TSPs who had also undergone orientation at the Savannah Agricultural Research Institute (CSIR-SARI) at Nyankpala in the Northern region. As a member of the TSPs of 2009, I was assigned to a community called Kunkwak in the *Overseas* area of the West Mamprusi District to train a Farmer Based Organization called Kunkwak Ajusiwon.

Members of Kunkwak Ajusiwon FBO numbering 33 persons and comprised of 19 males and 14 females were trained to view farming as a business in order to reduce poverty and subsequently bring about economic growth in the selected community and also Ghana. The duration of the training was six weeks and involved Business Capacity Building that required information on land accessibility for the cultivation of major crops such as maize, rice, millet, cowpea, bambara beans, groundnuts, guinea corn and watermelon. It became apparent that land was easily available for crop cultivation and the maize crop identified from the crop budget analysis would have no hindrances with respect to land availability. Members of Kunkwak Ajusiwon FBO were elated about the depth of knowledge imparted to them and the opportunity availed them to participate in the MiDA Capacity Building Programme.

In Kunkwak however, I realised the immense lack of facilities and basic necessities of life such as transport services, electricity, shops, workable clinics, to mention a few. I therefore decided to educate four girls selected by the FBO executives who are either daughters or nieces of members of the FBO. These girls were therefore interviewed together with their parents/guardians for

approval and consent as to their relocation to Accra to further their education up to the university level. During the interaction, it was realised that teachers assigned to the community were not committed and did not attend to their duties; most of the time not available in the classrooms. Pupils therefore refused attending school and took to farming and house chores. Girls are therefore married off at an early age to seemingly rich farmers in the area who can cater for them. Due to lack of amenities for entertainment and socialization in the communities, activities centre around marriage and childbearing, such that most families have a minimum of two wives with each having about six children; and some as much as ten children per wife. It was therefore realised that these large family sizes are being encouraged because of the use of these children as farm hands.

Intended output of the selection procedure for education of girls in Accra

A luminary scholar and educator from Ghana by name Dr. James Emmanuel Kwegyri Aggrey (1875-1927), once said that ***if you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family or a nation***. Women who bare forth children, feed them and are mostly with them; and therefore implies that women will impart more knowledge to their offsprings than men who do not mostly confine themselves to the house/homes as do the women. It is believed that a physically abused and psychologically hurt child is likely to project his or her anger on society in later life. Alternatively, a child that is surrounded by the warm embrace of loving women caregivers will reciprocally spread that love in his or her future dealings with others as the child grows up. The truthfulness of this saying can be best exemplified in the life of George Washington (1732-1799), the first President of the United States, who said this about his mother: ***All I am I owe to my mother...I attribute all my success in life to the moral, intellectual and physical education I received from her***. A biblical parallel is *Exodus 2:9*: "Pharaoh's daughter said to a woman concerning Moses, ***Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages***. So the woman (his mother) took the child and nursed it. This story shows the importance of women in raising a child. The mother of Moses protected her child from hostility by hiding him in a basket and asking the infant's sister to watch from afar. The Princess saved and adopted him. These three women were epitomes of the various women that ensure the growth of any child in society. When one in the chain fails her duty, society loses the opportunity to have another Moses, another deliverer, another reformer (Nyamidie, J.K.E., 1999).

The four girls from Kunkwak were therefore selected to achieve maximum impact in the short term. In the long term, some boys will be educated in order not to brew discrimination in the

community. The selected girls will be educated up to the University level depending on their abilities and will be taught to help their community to improve through whatever skills they have acquired be it in agriculture, medicine, food science, engineering or others.



Arrival of the girls to Accra

The girls arrived in Accra from Kunkwak on 2nd September, 2009 in the company of two parents/wards (Mr. Paul Azongo and Mr. Atolkame Atorikama) of two of the girls. They were picked up at the transport station to the house at No 22, Rangoon Close at Cantonments, Accra by the host (Dr. Margaret Ottah Atikpo). The names of the girls are Jennifer Azong (aged 13 years), Mary Atorikama (aged 12.5 years), Teni Bawa (aged 12 years) and Portia Azongo (aged 8 years). After spending three weeks with the host family and after being satisfied that the children were comfortably accommodated and fed, the two parents/wards returned to Kunkwak.

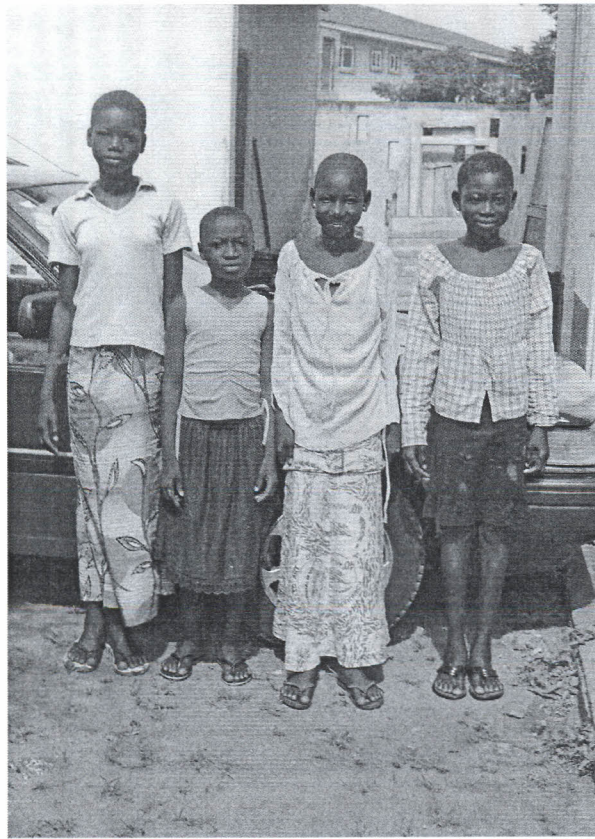


Fig. 1. Picture of girls a week after arrival in Accra



Fig. 2. Picture of girls on their way to school



Fig. 3. Picture of girls dancing to television music

Education and its challenges encountered by girls in Accra

Presently the girls are attending Rangoon Camp 1 Primary School, near the Prison's Head Office at Cantonments in Accra.

The lack of adequate educational facilities in the *Overseas* area of the West Mamprusi District of the Northern region from which the girls hail had impacted on their ability to speak English and effectively either understand their lessons or communicate with both the host family and the teachers and classmates. In the home, sign language was used to describe issues. They responded in their *Buli* language. With time they were told to speak only English and this has helped tremendously since they have forced themselves to speak and be corrected.

At school there were many challenges faced by the girls in comprehending the change in instructions, the teaching etc. Some of the girls have therefore found it difficult to catch up with classwork. It is however believed that with time the situation will improve for the better. To address the issue further, I went to the school to discuss with the teachers the possibility of training the girls in sports like table tennis, football, basket ball etc. in which they may excel and live by in future. It is my fervent wish that such exposure to sports will bring them to the limelight.

Religious Upbringing

The girls attend Christian Church Services every Sunday and watch Christian channels on the television. They have also been taught to always pray; and even pray over their meals to thank God for his supply before eating. This they do religiously.

Christmas in Accra

The girls attended church service on Christmas day on Friday 25th December, 2009 and thereafter participated in a Christmas party celebration organized at the church premises. Back at home they were treated to lunch comprising jollof rice, chicken, biscuits, cake and drinks.



Fig. 4. Picture of girls on their way to church at Christmas 2009

Success

Tutoring of the girls and encouragement to study paid off as one of the girls, Portia Azongo, chalked the second position in her class. For a girl from a deprived area to obtain this position was commendable. To encourage her to continue in this feat, Portia was promised a holiday treat with her parents and siblings when the host was returning to train another Farmer Based Organization later the following year (2010). This was duly executed. The joy of Portia reuniting with her family on 8th August 2010 for six weeks holidays was unimaginable. She promised to do even better at school so as to have another opportunity to visit home in Kunkwak.

February 2010 MIDA Training

During the second MIDA Technical training, I was posted to the same town Kunkwak, in the West Mamprusi District . This time the FBO assigned me was Kunkwak Asiatechaab and comprised of 47 members, made up of 27 men and 20 women. Word having spread by the parents of two of the four girls in the village after their return from Accra resulted in some parents of the Kunkwak Asiatechaab FBO showing interest in their children also being sent to Accra for education. As such six girls were presented to the trainer who eventually contended with training four of the girls so as not to overburden resources in the house. The four girls from deprived families were therefore requested to complete the academic year 2009/2010 before coming over to Accra to begin the 2010/2011 school year.



Fig. 5 Picture of the second batch of four girls from Kunkwak

August 2010 MiDA Training

The third FBO allocated to me during the MiDA Training Programme for Farmer Based Organizations was a few miles away from Kunkwak where I now consider as a second home. This village was Kpasenkpe. The FBO in Kpasenkpe is called Tinin Kanya Women Group, although it comprised of 2 men and 38 women. It is my hope that as a member of Rotary Club of Osu RE, Accra and which is a member of Rotary International, I will intensify and solicit help for the education of more girls from the communities in Kunkwak and Kpasenkpe. Surprisingly, word had spread from neighbouring Kunkwak to Kpasenkpe about me educating girls from their community. Some members of Tinin Kanya Women Group therefore requested that some of their children should also be trained. Regrettably however I declined as I have to use all available resources to give quality education to the 8 girls. Therefore using the humanitarian activities of Rotary International would serve this purpose in later years.

Rice Cultivation in Kunkwak

The assembly man who deputizes for the chief of Kunkwak and also a member/secretary of Kunkwak Asiatechaab FBO was contacted for 20 acres of land for rice cultivation. The FBO was asked to use this farm to practice all what had been taught them in the course to increase productivity. I therefore provided the financial support in cash, the seeds/inputs including fertilizer, sacs etc. An Agricultural Extension Officer for the area was also contacted to supervise the farming activity and ensure Good Agricultural Practices. Monies were given to the Assembly man (Secretary of Kunkwak Asiatechhab FBO) to pay for services of all members who work on the farm, as well as stipend and fuel cost of the Agricultural Extension Officer. The intension is to expand the acreage each year and use the proceeds to educate more of the girls in the community.

The land was cleared with a tractor and the improved seeds (*Jasmine*) were sown in early July 2010. Inspection of the farm showed good growth.



Fig. 6 Picture of part of 20 acre rice farm at Kunkwak.

Conclusion

Experiences at Kunkwak has been satisfying although it was observed to be a different world from the southern part of the country from where I come from. It is believed that as more and more individuals and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) come to the aid of the girl child from the Northern part of Ghana for the purpose of educating them, less numbers of these children would

run to do menial jobs such as carriage of goods (as *kayaye*) in the capital cities of the south, especially Accra and Kumasi. It would consequently reduce the high level of teenage pregnancies and high illiteracy among such girls. It is hoped that commercial farming of other major crops will be attempted in Kunkwak and also Kpasenkpe so as to raise money from sales to cater for the education of more girls from both communities and surrounding villages that have MiDA selected FBOs.

References

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