

# **IMPROVING KINDERGARTEN EDUCATION IN GHANA: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE 2012 CIVIL SOCIETY EDUCATION MANIFESTO**

**BY KOFI ASARE, September 2012**

Ghana's attainment of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of Universal Primary Enrolment (UPE) and the Education Strategic Plan (ESP 2010-2020) target of 100% Net Enrolment at the Kindergarten (KG) level is at the heart of her ability to produce quality manpower for national development. This is because the quality of KG education determines to a high extent, the literacy and numeracy level of pupils in basic schools and their learning outcomes, especially at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) level and beyond.

Ghana's BECE past rate has remained at an average 60% in the past decade whereas proficiency and numeracy levels in primary schools continues to linger between 30% and 40% during the same period (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2012). The low numeracy, literacy and BECE performance levels have often been hurriedly attributed to immediate and intermediate factors which include: low quality of teachers, lack of quality school infrastructure and classroom environment, lack of adequate pupils' preparation for BECE examinations and low quality of supervision in basic schools. One relegated major cause of low literacy, numeracy and BECE performances in Ghana is the quality of, and access to KG education.

## **Relevance of KG education in literacy, numeracy and child development**

Scientific research has established that the early years (1-6) are crucial for the development of the individual, both in the areas of physical development, and psychological development – cognitive, psychosocial and personality building. This position flows from the achievements of science over recent decades, from discoveries on the evolution of the brain (70 per cent of which is formed before birth) and on the evolution of the individual from sensor motor stage to pre-operational stage before the age of 7 (Arnold, 2003). The Global Education Report (EFA Report, 2007) confirms: children's success in life begins in early childhood years, and investment in ECD and ECCE has a direct and positive impact on primary school enrolments, retention and completion. However, the attention given to KG education by successive governments in Ghana has led to a decline in the quality of KG education.

## **State of KG education in Ghana**

The sanctioned age for enrolment in KG 1 is age 4. In terms of access, only 62% of children aged 4 are in KG 1. This implies that some 300,000 children, representing 38% of children aged 4 in Ghana are denied KG education each year due to the absence of KGs in 1,168 public basic schools, especially in rural areas, a situation that compels children to enrol directly in primary 1 at age 6. This consequently denies children of the opportunities for cognitive and psychosocial development, two vital building blocks for literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills. On the quality front, a whopping 62% of the inadequate (31,500) KG teachers remain untrained (MoE, 2011). A mix of the quality

and access deficits at the KG level is hugely responsible for the poor quality of literacy, numeracy and learning outcomes (especially in the BECE) in basic education during the past decade.

### **Moving forward-Recommendations for the next political administration**

The extension of the capitation grant to cover KGs and the school feeding program, currently running in less than 10% of KGs, alone is not a panacea to improving access and the quality of KG education. The following recommendations are hereby made by civil society for consideration by the next political administration:

**Build more KGs:** The next political administration should build 1,168 more KGs to make up for the gap between the number of primary schools and KGs. This would ensure every public basic school has a KG, and every child in Ghana that enrolls in primary 1 enjoys the full course of KG education. With the current cost of a fully furnished two unit KG standing at GHC 80,000, the next political administration should commit GHC 93 Million out of the GETFund towards the building of 1,168 KGs within the next four years.

**Train KG teachers:** On-going discussions between the Ghana Education Service and the Universities of Cape Coast and Education to roll-out a one-year certificate programme to train existing untrained KG teachers through distance learning should be prioritised. This proposal is great and should be fast tracked to commence this year. In the long term, however, the next political administration should commit 50% of the slots available under the much awaited phase II of the Untrained Teacher Training Diploma in Basic Education (UTTDBE) program to KG teachers. The four year programme, which has been delayed since 2010, has the potential of training about 10,000 KG teachers within a four-year period using distance learning methods.

**Recruit more KG teachers:** With the expectant increase of about 1,168 more KGs in the next four years, the next political administration should recruit at least 2,600 more KG teachers by expanding admissions into Colleges of Education (CoE). This is because CoEs are currently operating at 50% capacity due to admission quotas imposed by government to limit government spending on teacher trainee allowances. With the recent upgrading of CoEs into tertiary institutions now operating under the National Council for Tertiary Education, and the subsequent removal of allowance paid to teacher trainees (to be replaced with student loans), admission quotas for CoEs will no longer be necessary.

#### *References:*

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