

Quality Education Delivery In Ghana : - Rethinking Our Perceptions And Attitudes

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The National Education Sector Annual Review (NESAR) has come and gone but the coming of The National Teachers' Forum (NATEF) (<http://www.ole.org.gh /natef/natef.html>) gives me the opportunity to reflect over education delivery in the country and I can't help but go back to some of the issues raised at the review so many months ago. The theme for the review was apt though: 'Action for a difference – Quality Education for Quality Life'. I have always believed that the NESAR in itself is a very good exercise as it triggers reflections such as this. However if the rationale for the review is to learn from the past year and strategize for the new year then may I suggest we look at the timing of the event.

But what has really set me thinking is the current health of our education system, especially at the pre-tertiary level as was presented at this year's NESAR. It was not a clean bill of health and the statistics were worrying. One in ten schools (10%) within Ghana does not produce any student who qualifies for SHS. Less than 50 % of those who sat for the BECE in 2010 had access to SHS. The National Education Assessment (NEA) test scores for 2009/2010 shows proficiency levels for P6 and P3 in math as 13.8% and 25.2% respectively while for English P6 and P3 it is 35.6% and 20% respectively. These are far below the expected national averages. With the exception of the GER for KG and SHS all the other key socio-humanistic (access, equity & welfare) and educational (quality, skills & development) activities indicators as well as set targets for the year under review were not achieved.

What is clear though is that a lot of effort has been, and is still being, put into making the country's educational system respond positively and we need to commend all those involved. But Education seems to be acting like that big huge sponge, absorbing and absorbing and giving back very little. Lots of initiatives and one reform after the other has been undertaken but the net value seems to be the same.

This raises a lot of questions I will want us all to think about? Have we for 50 years plus after our independence been doing the same old things only under new names? Do we really know what is wrong with our educational system or we think that we know what is wrong with the system? I think we do. Don't we? But are we applying the right 'medicine' in the right quantities at the right times? For that I am not sure. Are we looking for the obvious answer(s) and neglecting the hidden which may rather trigger off the successes we all want?

Does the solution really lie with just implementing pro-poor interventions and providing educational facilities and more money? It is all well and good that we provide free school uniforms and free exercise books and free food and free everything. It is a vital necessity that educational facilities are provided. But is it really about how much freebies we give out that will improve the quality of the country's pre-tertiary education? What do we collectively do with the very little we all put in, and how do we collectively monitor this? That is if we all do put in something anyway.



It is true that education provision, especially at the basic level is the responsibility of the government. No argument about that. But who are the first line beneficiaries of the education our children receive? It is obvious isn't it? The individual, the immediate family, the larger family then the community. The question then is what are we as first line beneficiaries bringing to the table? How involved are we in the education delivery in our community? Why do we have to wait for schools to crumble and fall on us? Do we really need government to convert our school under trees into permanent structures? What happened to self-help? Do we place our expertise and skills at the disposal of schools in our communities for free? Shouldn't our traditional and opinion leaders rather be galvanizing the locals to undertake such self-help developmental projects? Can we fathom how much we will be saving the government to be used for other social services? Are we prepared to make teachers who are posted to our rural areas a little bit more comfortable within our limited resources as a community so that they would want to stay a little much longer? This goes beyond mere cost sharing to a true shared responsibility in education delivery in our communities to begin with and then the country at large.

I have long held the opinion that private schools do well regardless of where they may be situated because parents sacrifice to pay so much and by default demand accountability from their children and the school authorities. This translates into increased seriousness by the child and better supervision by school authorities. How often do we demand accountability from the schools our children attend and even from our children?. Do we see school management as being the preserve of the School Management Committees? Do we follow the learning progression of our kids or we are busy with our own worries? Do we see the school as an extension of our homes or a place that help us 'get rid' of our children albeit for a while?

We need to drum home the fact that the greatest investment one can make, and the only way to break the cycle of poverty in ones family, is to invest in our children's education. That no matter how poor we are the first penny we spend from any money that come to us should be on the education of our children, even if it means forgoing new clothes for the funeral next month, or the out-dooring next week, forgoing our usual evening drink or even if it means going without food as a parent for a couple of days. It is such sacrifices that will intuitively make us demand more from the education sector, from the government, from the teachers and from our children. My personal conviction is that no amount of freebies and provision of educational facilities, though necessary, will really do the trick quality wise. The bottom line is we need to change our attitude and thinking towards education delivery and provision in this country. We need to see education delivery as a shared responsibility and every individual in the country as a stakeholder.

It is my hope that NATEF will give opportunities for us to look at how we can come up with strategies to ensure this shared responsibility, particularly strategies for preparing and continuously developing our teachers professionally so that they can help deliver the quality education we all wish for.