

Human Resource Development for Accelerated Growth in Ghana

Statement By H.E. Gordon Wetherell, British High Commissioner to Ghana on behalf of all members of the Donor Group

Honourable Minister, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

We are focusing this afternoon on human resource development. Some prefer to call it human capital formation. But, whichever term we prefer, people are at the heart of development and they must be our top priority.

Progress in this area is recorded in the Ghana Joint Assistance Strategy which was signed in February by 16 of Ghana's Development Partners, on whose behalf I speak today.

The current situation is captured by the following 'headlines':

- Progress in education has meant increasing numbers of children are entering school and progressing through the system, but improving access and quality in basic education remains a persistent challenge.
- Gradual improvements in the delivery of a number of critical health outputs have taken place, but infant and child health indicators and maternal mortality rates appear stalled at high levels, and the achievement of these MDGs is in serious doubt unless there are substantial additional efforts and resources.
- Access to water and sanitation services is progressing, but not as rapidly as needed ...
- Urbanisation in Ghana is accelerating, and the needs of the urban poor becoming more pressing
- Gender disparities are steadily declining but, as the APRM records, more effort is needed in some areas such as the legislature. Mary Robinson underlined yesterday the importance of achieving equity in education, health care and employment opportunity for a country like Ghana which rightly prides itself on its governance record.
- Jobs in the formal sector remain scarce, presenting a challenge which must be overcome.
- the Living Standards Survey published this year shows an impressive overall reduction in the incidence of poverty from 52% to 28% in the last 15 years; but also striking variations in incidence throughout the country, with some regions registering an increase; and growth in inequality.

In recognising the twin goals of the GPRS Pillar 2: "expanding services to meet the MDGs and developing a healthy and skilled labour force to support

higher growth and structural change" we need to approach these issues in a holistic manner and accept the challenges they present.

There are signs of good progress in the education sector and positive developments to record. Last year, we congratulated the Government of Ghana on extending capitation grants to all public schools and making basic education entirely free of fees and levies. This led to a surge in enrolments and a reported increase from 59% to 69% in primary Net Enrolment Rates. This year, Ministry data shows a further increase of ten percentage points from 69% to 79%. But there are reported to be around a million children of primary school age still not attending school. While accepting the needs of the rest of the sector, these children need to be brought into the education system, and Primary Education needs to be properly resourced, with a balance achieved between the needs of all parts of the education sector. While we note, therefore, the increase in absolute terms of expenditure on primary education, there remains an urgent need to reverse the downward trend in primary education's share of the overall education budget.

The massive increase in enrolments and expenditures in public tertiary education in recent years cannot continue at the current rate. We therefore welcome the moves to develop a new strategy for the long-term sustainable financing of tertiary education, including the re-launch of the student loan scheme. We also welcome moves to restore the quality of teaching and learning to the levels for which Ghana was famous throughout Africa. This includes the re-introduction of reliable testing of student achievement in primary schools, giving a new base from which to measure improvement. But we still have some way to go in the education sector to provide all the young people of Ghana with the quality education they crave and the nation needs.

I would like to emphasise that the Development Partners are not solely concerned, as some think, with the MDG targets of universal primary education and gender parity in schools. These are their top priorities; but not their only goals. We know, from our own experience, and that of other countries, that the key thing is to get the balance right, and sequence investments over time. Countries like Malaysia and South Korea invested heavily in both the quantity and quality of primary education, before shifting the balance towards investment in secondary education and then tertiary education. It is the timing and level of these shifts that are crucial.

The new 'education reforms' to be introduced with effect from September have not yet been fully costed. Most important are the plans for more emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning, including the relevance of the curriculum. 'Quality', however defined, is very low in the current system. And there is a need to focus on learning, rather than teaching, and on skills, not just on knowledge.

'Skills development' is the current burning issue, and not without reason. The existing system is not a good basis on which to build a new approach to this issue. The best way of learning how to do most jobs is by doing them,

and the best form of skill training is on-the-job training. The best place to provide this is in the workplace rather than solely in formal institutions. This would suggest that efforts should be more focused on getting a sound modern apprenticeship system in place, in partnership with public and private sector employers, rather than simply revitalising formal Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

The health sector is not doing so well.

Since we met here a year ago, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey has reported that 18% of under 5s are underweight and 23% are 'stunted' as a result of poor nutrition. This also means that nearly one-quarter of Ghana's children will be unable to reach their full potential, because this will affect their capacity to learn and to think. Human capital formation begins at conception and investment in early childhood care and nutrition has a very high rate of return.

Ghana cannot yet provide the level and standard of health service provision that it desires. It is still unable to train enough doctors and nurses to meet its needs. Although increased salaries help stop them leaving the country as soon as they are sufficiently well qualified, it is not simply a matter of paying more, but also of improving the overall efficiency of the use of resources around the provision of medical services throughout the country, but especially in the rural areas. We endorse the calls for a shift in focus from medical services to health promotion and disease prevention, and we welcome the new national health policy, moving the emphasis from curative services and teaching hospitals to public health and primary health care, as well as increased collaboration with other sectors with a view, notably, to improving access to safe water and appropriate sanitation. This is particularly true in the area of HIV/AIDS where the recent reversal in the downward trend of prevalence rates has worried us all and where greater efforts and resources are needed in the areas of behavioural change, education (targeting high risk groups) and condoms to prevent the spread of AIDS. We would also be better off putting greater effort into preventing diseases such as malaria, polio, and guinea worm than treating them. And, as for smallpox a generation ago, we could eliminate both polio and guinea worm altogether.

Many of the problems in both the education and the health sectors have more to do with the efficient and effective use of resources, budget allocations, funding levels and financial management than with technical issues. We urge the Government to continue to work on improving the working relationships between the Ministry of Finance and the Planning Commission and the Ministries concerned, as well as District assemblies, particularly in the areas of planning, budgeting and targeting of resources. Using resources more efficiently and more equitably will not only deliver services to poor people, but also, by improving the vitality, strength and skill of all Ghanaians, contribute directly to labour productivity and economic growth. This will reinforce the vision of Human Resource Development as a driving force for poverty reduction and for taking Ghana to 'middle income' status.

The loss of its skilled workforce threatens to become a more serious issue unless steps are taken to develop a holistic migration policy which looks at all aspects, including internal and external migration; and both supply and demand for skilled workers. We are willing to work with the Government in tackling the problem.

We cannot solve the problem of unemployment among young people and school-leavers by concentrating on 'employable skills' and 'skill development' in the education system alone, or by improving their health care access. The creation of more jobs and productive work opportunities will depend more on the level of investment and the overall growth of the economy. We need to address key issues such as the climate for private sector development; where new job opportunities are going to arise; and what skills will be required to fill them. Only then can we shape the services that are needed to provide the skilled, healthy workforce which the economy requires, while ensuring that the benefits of Ghana's impressive growth are equitably shared by all.

Thank you.