

Education Infrastructure Challenges in East & North Ayawaso Sub-Metros

School Facility Survey Findings and Perspectives From Three School Circuits in Accra, Ghana



CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was produced as collaboration between Voice in Community Empowerment (“VOiCE”) and the Millennium Cities Initiative of the Earth Institute, Columbia University.

Voice in Community Empowerment, or “VOiCE,” is non-political, non-religious and non-profit organization dedicated to facilitating the implementation of socio-economic and developmental projects in communities of the Ayawaso Sub-Metros in Accra, through the concerted volunteerism of our very capable and committed youth for the wellbeing of inhabitants. Our focus is also on youth empowerment in these communities.

It is our vision to make a contribution to our communities that extends far beyond our initial actions. We want to involve others, creating a group of caring and concerned citizens that give their time to help others and the community at large.

The **Millennium Cities Initiative**, which operated in Accra between 2010 and 2014, is a project of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, New York. The Millennium Cities Initiative, or “MCI,” was established to help selected, under-resourced municipalities across sub-Saharan Africa engage urban poverty issues and make progress towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). MCI has assisted the “Millennium Cities” in identifying critical gaps in realizing the MDGs, as well as in identifying the financing, programs and partners capable of filling them. Where possible, MCI has connected municipalities with our extensive network of partners around the world – including investors, philanthropists and entrepreneurs; non-profits and corporations; and governmental and multilateral institutions.

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Preface

A message from Voice in Community Empowerment

This report aims to inform and engage national and local government and NGOs on the continuously poor state of the educational infrastructure and learning environment for primary and JHS students in public schools of the so-called Zongo communities of East and North Ayawaso, Accra (Zongo is a Hausa word for migrant quarters). Comprising Nima, Maamobi, Kanda, Kotobabi and New Town, these neighborhoods, among Accra's most underprivileged and underserved, were up until recent years populated mostly by people from Northern Ghana and migrants from other neighboring West African countries who are predominantly Muslims. Generations of students in these communities have had to cope with unacceptable conditions in their schools. Through this report, VOICE intends to identify the challenges facing the schools in the community, make a clear case to Government, NGOs, civil society and parent-teacher groups and donor agencies regarding the need to intervene and to help the communities solve the multiple challenges facing their schools.

Why the focus on Zongo communities?

Poverty is rampant and persistent in many of these communities, leading to many problematic and troubling conditions, including high illiteracy, youth unemployment and crime. While Zongos are not the only communities in Accra that experience these issues, the consensus is that historically, Zongos have experienced development from the outside looking in. These conditions act as barriers to the development of the community and constrain our capacity to fulfill our ambitions and potential as future leaders and productive citizens.

There is consensus among people living in the Zongos and elsewhere that an essential component to changing the status quo and contributing to local and national development is through dramatic improvements in the education of the young people. One of the essential services that the community needs now is quality education from the basic level that will lead us to higher education, give us the chance to learn from one another and prepare us to have successful careers.

VOiCE specifically chose to target education infrastructure because improvements in the quality of infrastructure usually yield improvements in enrollment, completion rates and learning outcomes as well as in

reducing teacher absenteeism. Although improved school facilities are only part of the equation, they are nonetheless an important part. For example, children need a safe and hygienic learning environment; but the lack of such facilities both inside the school and in the wider community impacts more negatively on girls than on boys, and on the disabled, where facilities are not readily accessible. There is clear evidence in many studies that the enrollment and retention of girls increase when they have access to clean, safe, separate and private toilet facilities.

This report, jointly produced with our partners at Columbia University's Millennium Cities Initiative,¹ contains survey findings of 23 schools, including 17 primary- and 14 junior high-level programs (some of which are contained within the same facility; see footnote 2). Data were collected through interviews with the headmaster/mistress of each of the schools and were then entered into a database; descriptive statistics (e.g., cross-tabulation, frequencies, percentages, ratio and means) were used to conduct our analysis. The target audience for this report includes the Mayor of Accra and Chief Executive Officer of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, the Honorable Alfred Obo Vanderpuije; the Accra Metropolitan Education Directorate (AMED); the Ghana Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service; the World Bank Education Donor Group; and a number of other development agencies, NGOs, civil society and parent/teacher organizations. It is our hope that our findings will not only form the foundation for a more detailed and substantive report identifying more conclusively the needs and potential interventions in the study area, but will also and spur momentum toward the kind of systematic improvements in education that the Zongo communities deserve.



George Abagna
Executive Director
Voice in Community Empowerment

¹ A project of Columbia University's Earth Institute from 2005-2015, dedicated to assisting selected sub-Saharan cities attain the Millennium Development Goals; see www.mci.ei.columbia.edu for further information and for all Accra- and education-related studies produced by MCI.

I. Introduction

A snapshot of education issues in Ghana

Despite the reforms and new policies enacted by past and present governments, disparity in educational quality and access has persisted. Ghana has fallen below its own expectations in enabling free quality education for all. In response to this gap, and to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in education, in 1995 the Government committed to providing Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) by 2005. FCUBE introduced a restructured educational system consisting of 11 years of training, in three segments: two years of kindergarten, six years of primary school (Grades 1 - 6) and three years of junior high school (JHS 1 - 3). The ambitious aims of the new policy were: to eliminate school tuition fees on primary education, thereby increasing enrollments; to initiate a broad school feeding program; and to achieve gender parity by increasing girls' enrollment. But because the Government disbursements are made irregularly, parents are required to pay mandatory supplementary fees, in the form of PTA dues used to pay for school repairs, cultural activities and school sports. Because many low-income families could not afford these fees and were therefore unable to send their children to school, as of 2003, 40 percent of children aged 6 - 11 remained out of school (UNICEF, 2007). In 2004, the government produced a white paper on education reform, to correct the shortcomings of the earlier policy.

The 2004 reforms introduced an innovative financing mechanism known as the "capitation grant" that would a) ensure the abolition of all types of school fees; b) expand existing Early Childhood Education services; c) improve gender parity; and d) introduce government-sponsored nutrition and school feeding programs. As a result, general enrollment levels have shown improvement; challenges to education in poor communities persisted, however, due to corruption, poor record-keeping and the misappropriation of resources (World Bank 2009; Centre for Democratic Development (CDD 2008/2009).

Today, schools in impoverished urban communities in Accra face challenges despite the implementation of the capitation grant. These schools are characterized by stark structural decay, overcrowding, the dearth of school materials and insufficient water supply and sanitation facilities. Such a situation has prevailed in Accra's Zongo communities for decades. We undertook a survey of primary and junior high schools in the East and North Ayawaso Submetros, to determine

the condition of the local schools and the availability of learning materials in the so-called Zongo communities there.²

II. Education Services in East & North Ayawaso Submetro Schools

There are a total of 23 public (government-run) schools in the study area, including 17 primary and 14 junior high programs,³ respectively. The Accra Metropolitan Education Directorate is administratively responsible for all of these schools, including a few established by religious organizations. Seven of the primary schools comprise grades K-6, with the remaining seven running from 1st - 6th grades. The 14 junior high school programs cover 7th - 9th grades, but one school, lacking the requisite number of classrooms, offers only seventh grade. All of the schools provide regular formal education approved by the Ministry of Education; two religious schools offer a combined curriculum that includes Arabic/Islamic studies as well as the formal, Ministry-approved curriculum. The schools in the study area provide education for both boys and girls.

School Tuition

Since the implementation of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) in 2005, primary and junior high school tuition fees have been eliminated in Ghana. However, the two schools providing a combined religious and secular curriculum charge a yearly rate of 30-35 Ghana New Cedis (GHC) for Arabic instruction, and most study area schools also charge a PTA fee paid by parents.⁴

Feeding program

The school feeding program, run by the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) with donor support, benefits children at the preschool and primary school levels, in order to provide this age group the necessary nutrition to improve school attendance and learning outcomes. Each school participating in this program is entitled to a hot lunch per student per day. Eleven study area primary schools are benefiting from the school feeding program, and three more reported preparing cooked meals on school premises.

² Some of the East and North Ayawaso Zongo communities are considered among the most challenged in the entire Greater Accra Metropolitan Area.

³ That is, of the 23 school facilities, several offer both primary and JHS levels, explaining the stated 17 and 14 total number of levels, respectively.

⁴ MCI and VOICE were unable to ascertain the cost of the PTA levies for every school.

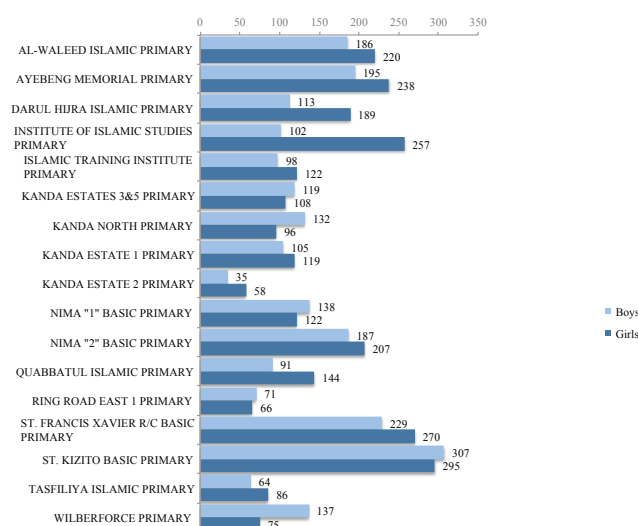


Figure 1a. 2013 Gross student enrollment in study area primary schools.
Source: Schools' administrative records

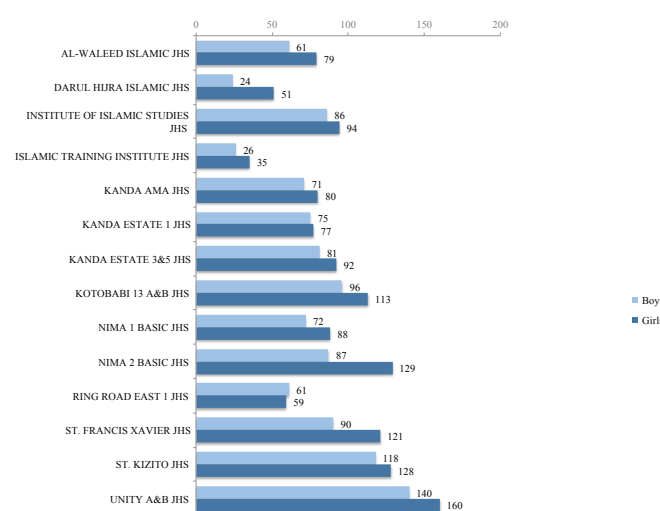


Figure 1b. 2013 Gross student enrollment in study area Junior High schools.
Source: Schools' administrative records

Girls in primary school in that year represented 52 percent of the total enrolled, with those enrolled in JHS representing 55 percent of the total. The difference in percentages of girls-to-boys enrolled in primary and junior high schools are 4 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

III. Student Profile

In 2013 the total number of students enrolled in primary school was 4,888, with 2,394 enrolled in JHS. Figures 1a and 1b shows the 2013 gross enrollment rates for boys and girls in primary and junior high schools in the study area, respectively. Ninety-two percent of students reside in the communities in the study area.⁵

Enrollment by Gender

Figure 2 (next page) shows the gender composition of students enrolled in the study area schools.

⁵ As mentioned above, the study area comprises the communities of Nima, Maamobi, Kanda, Kotobabi and New Town.

Since the enactment of the 1995 reform, considerable progress has been made in Ghana in ensuring equal educational opportunity for girls. Schools in the study area are a good testament to this progress. However, despite the considerable rise in girls' enrollment, much work remains to be done to maintain the quality of education and to improve girls' completion rates.

Performance of JHS Students on the Basic Education Certification Examination (BECE)

Of the 14 JHSs in the study area, 11 were able to provide their students' BECE scores at the time the survey was conducted. In the study area, as indicated on Figure 4, six out of the 11 JHSs surveyed reported a

90+ percent pass rate, whereas only three schools performed poorly, with a pass rate of under 49 percent.

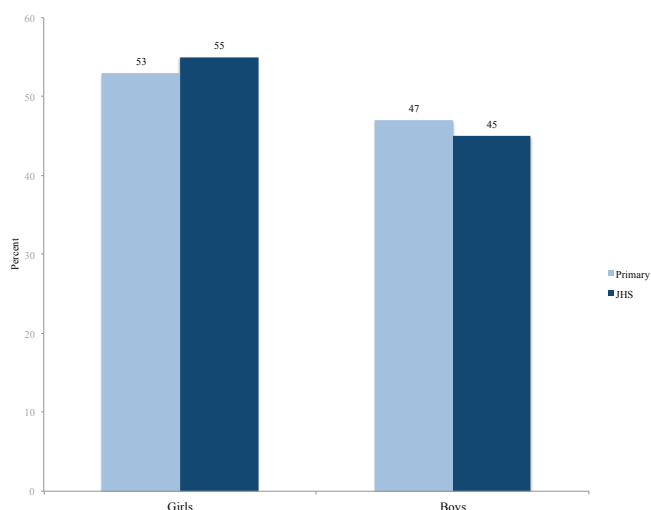


Figure 2. 2013 Student enrollment in study area schools by gender.
Source: Schools' administrative records.

IV. Student Performance and Completion Rate

The study area school administrators declined to give us official data on students' overall completion rates for primary and JHS. When asked how many enrolled students started and finished their curriculum at the same school, they gave general estimates - approximately 70 percent of enrolled boys and girls in the study area completed primary school in the same school in which they began. However, these figures are based on anecdotal estimates given by school administrators, who often lacked records to which they could refer, in answering survey questions. These estimates suggest that 28 percent of children who started their education at their respective schools never completed their primary education.

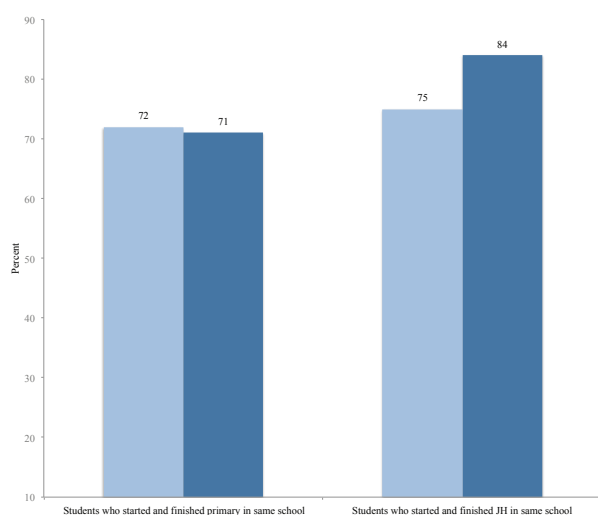


Figure 3. Students' completion at same school in study area.
Source: School administrators' estimates, 2014

We cannot confirm that the 28 percent are due to dropping out, as most schools did not keep detailed records of dropouts. For junior high school, 75 percent of enrolled males and 84 percent of enrolled female students completed the standard three years (grades 7-9).

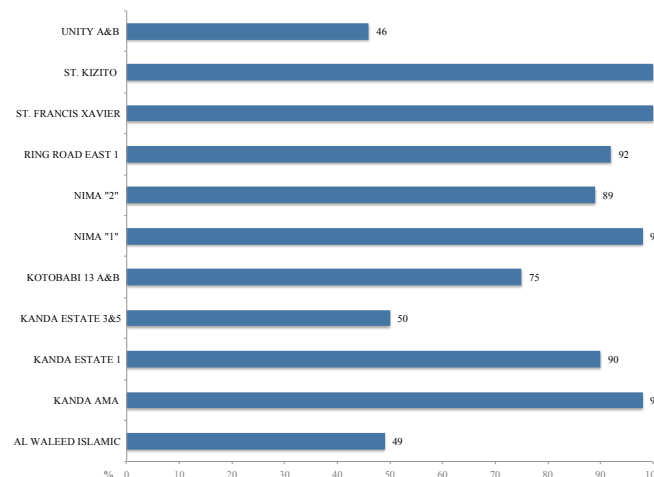


Figure 4. Percentage of students who passed BECE in study area schools.
Source: School administrators' estimates, 2014.

V. Teacher Profile

Teacher-to-Student Ratios

In most schools in Ghana, the teacher-student ratio is well above the recommended level of 1:25. In the study area, the size of some primary schools, as measured by the number of formally enrolled students, is actually lower than what is reported for the national level.

The average primary and secondary school class size is 43 and 42 students, respectively, but with a wide variance, ranging between 19 - 60 students per class. There are a total of 323 teachers in the study area - 32 percent male, 68 percent female. The average teacher-student ratio in the area's primary schools is 1:36 and 1:18 for JHS, suggesting somewhat reduced pressure on school resources in junior high. These data suggest that with this lower ratio, teachers should have the opportunity to get to know and to provide the necessary attention to individual students. But crowded classrooms not only make it difficult for students to concentrate on their lessons; they inevitably limit the amount of time teachers can spend on one-on-one assistance, correcting homework or teaching anything beyond the barest minimum of required material.

Teacher Qualifications

Because teachers' knowledge of both the core subjects and teaching skills is so key to ensuring that

children develop strong foundations in basic literacy and numeracy, teacher recruitment and training are naturally critical. Teachers in Ghana are required to possess a teaching certificate, diploma or degree in basic education. While 38 public and three private Colleges of Education provide a three-year initial teachers' education preparation training for the certificate and diploma programs, and the university of education provides the two-year diploma and four-year degree programs, following the initial teachers' education preparation diploma. The requirement for entering a College of Education is the completion of senior high school.

According to the school administrators in our survey area, 97 percent of the teachers have the required qualification to teach primary school, and 100 percent are qualified to teach junior high. We were unable to confirm their credentials, however. The data also show that 100 percent of teachers are participating in the online Continued Professional Development for Teachers Training program sponsored by the Ministry of Education; we were not able to verify this.

Teacher Attendance and Performance

A number of recent studies indicate that teachers' absenteeism is a pressing issue. According to the report, in Ghana, primary school teacher absenteeism is at 27 percent, and only 80 out of 197 days in a school year are spent teaching (Allsop et al, 2010). The academic success of students depends on teachers' attendance. Our survey findings suggest that teacher attendance in the study area is better than the national average; however, we were unable to confirm teachers' attendance records. Further, when asked the number of teachers absent on the last day the school was open, five schools in the study area reported teacher absenteeism with a rate ranging from 2-21 percent. Al-Waleed Islamic Primary and Junior High Schools reported the highest number of teacher absenteeism at 21 percent, followed by Quabbatul Islamic, at 18 percent. The remaining three schools experienced less than six percent of teachers absent. Again, we were unable to review teacher attendance records and are therefore not able to verify this finding.

VI. Dropout Rates

The main problem in determining study area school dropout rates is that investigators found no uniform consensus among respondent school administrators on what the term "dropout" actually means. Some

administrators considered students who relocate with their families to new neighborhoods (such as Kasoa, on the fringes of Accra) as dropouts, while others did not, considering dropouts rather to be those who simply stopped coming, due either to lack of parental guidance and enforcement, attraction to games and internet fraud and/or pregnancy, which was cited as a key dropout reason for girls. In this survey, marriage and financial constraints (regarding the affordability of schooling) also emerged as reasons for girls to drop out, although these were not considered to be as significant as the other factors mentioned. (For example, three female JHS students became pregnant, and one dropped out because she got married.) The paucity in dropout data highlights the need for better administrative record-keeping, an administrative objective impeded by the lack of modern school management software. Many of the schools surveyed recorded administrative data on notebooks, often not adequately filed.

VII. School Facility Physical Infrastructure

We refer to "school facilities" as buildings, water, sanitation, electricity and waste management logistics, and to "school materials" as libraries, textbooks, desks and chalkboards. The quality of school facilities and materials has the potential to affect greatly the quality of education provided the students. Schools lacking enough desks, textbooks, libraries, science labs and audio-visual aids clearly jeopardize students' future success by undermining teacher effectiveness.

Water and Sanitation

Schools need to have adequate levels of clean water for drinking, hand-washing and cleaning, and to ensure the health and safety of students and staff. Studies have long shown that safe, adequate water and sanitation facilities in schools reduce health-related student absenteeism (UNICEF, 2009). Indeed, international World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines prescribe that each school provide access to sanitation at a ratio of one toilet per 25 girls and one toilet and a urinal per 50 boys (WHO, 2006). In reality, though, it is not uncommon in the study area to find schools with no safe (or with an irregular) drinking water supply and/or sanitation facility.

Approximately 78 percent of the study area schools reported having some kind of water source, with the

remaining 22 percent lacking any clean water supply either for drinking or for general use.

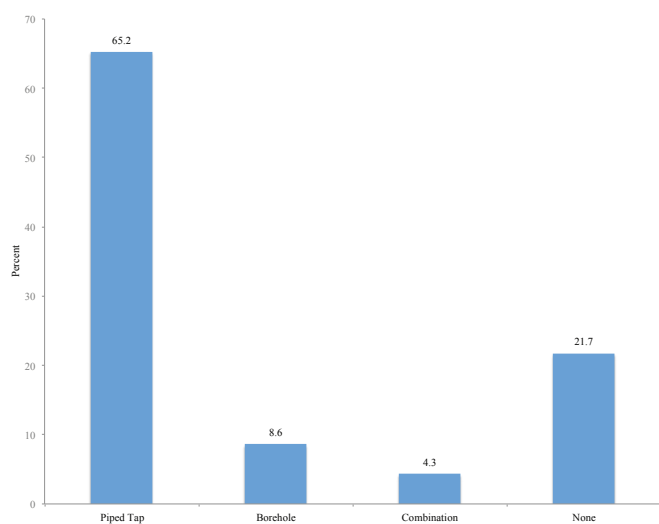


Figure 5. Primary source of water supply at study area schools. Source: Authors' fieldwork, 2014.

As Figure 5 shows, the schools' reported sources of water are water taps, boreholes and water from tanker trucks. All schools reporting access to a water tap get it from external private vendors. Thirty-eight percent of schools with access to water claimed that their source was not located within the facility (inside the school buildings or compounds). Moreover, nine of the 23 schools were unable to report how many days they operated in the past month without water from any source.

This data gap may be due to the fact that all of those schools depended on an external tap or borehole requiring an electric pump; as Accra has a daily load shedding schedule, the electric pump would not work on certain days or during parts of days, leaving the schools' water supply cut off, making it difficult to say exactly how many full days the schools were left without water. Of the remaining schools studied, 36 percent reported not having water at all during the past month.

Sanitation facilities in schools should at least meet the WHO-recommended toilet /pupil ratio (1:25); be clean, in working condition and convenient; and provide students with appropriate privacy. Eleven out of the 23 schools reported having no sanitation facilities at all; one school reported that a flush toilet is under construction, another has one toilet for staff members only and three reported not having any information regarding the number of toilets available at their schools. In total, 14 out of 23 schools reported having some form of sanitation facilities – water-flushing toilets or pit latrines. Our survey also indicates that on average, schools have toilet/student ratios of 1:94,

but with ratios varying from 1:16 to 1:75. The toilet/ student ratios for each school in the study area are listed in Table 1 (see next page). It is important to note that several surveyed schools are part of a cluster of schools, such as the Unity Compound (Kotobabi), where there are no toilet facilities for a combined student body of over 1,200 students.

Eighty-five percent of the toilets in the schools surveyed are shared by boys and girls and, in some instances, staff. Multiple studies by UNICEF and others have demonstrated that the lack of adequate and gender-segregated toilet facilities discourages girls from attending school regularly, particularly during their menses, when, given the lack of privacy and appropriate accommodations, girls tend to miss days and may even drop out.

Figure 6 shows the percentage of schools meeting the WHO minimum acceptable toilet-student ratios for girls.

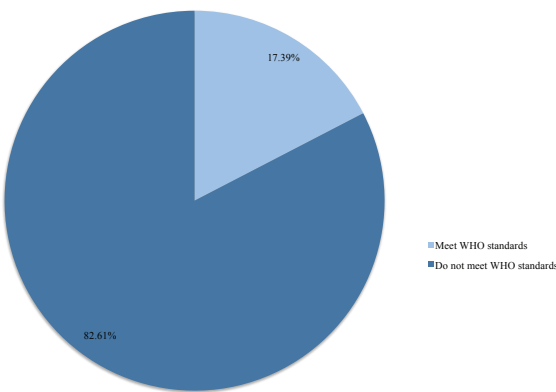


Figure 6. Percentage of schools in study area that meet WHO Toilet-Student Ratio standards for girls (1:25). Source: Authors' fieldwork, 2014

Although the survey instrument did not capture solid waste disposal in the schools, the VOiCE team observed that the schools surveyed had either an inadequate number of large waste disposal containers (known as “skips”) or none at all, resorting regularly to carting waste to a nearby field, where it was burned.

Electricity

All schools are connected to an electrical grid as their power source, with all but one connected to the national grid. Yet all surveyed schools reported experiencing power outages every day of the month because of the load shedding schedule, when they go dark, at unpredictable times, for up to 12 hours a day. Further, due to insufficient funding, only one school in the study area has a generator, thereby compromising

school facilities' ability both to provide lighting and power ventilation in their classrooms and, more critically, to access water from an electrically pumped external tap or borehole.

| Schools | Number of Students | Toilet-to-Student Ratio |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Al-Waleed Islamic Primary & JHS | 546 | 46 |
| Ayebeng Memorial School* | 433 | 0 |
| Darul Hijra Islamic Basic (KG, Primary & JHS) | 377 | 94 |
| Institute of Islamic Studies JHS | 180 | 0 |
| Institute of Islamic Studies Primary | 359 | 0 |
| Islamic Training Institute Primary & JHS | 281 | 0 |
| Kanda AMA JHS | 151 | 17 |
| Kanda Estate 1 | 224 | 75 |
| Kanda Estate 1 JHS | 152 | 0 |
| Kanda Estate 2 | | 0 |
| Kanda Estate 3&5 JHS | 173 | 0 |
| Kanda Estate 3&5 Primary | 227 | 0 |
| Kanda North Primary* | 228 | 0 |
| Kotobabi 13 A&B JHS | 209 | 0 |
| Nima "1" Basic (Primary & JHS) | 420 | 52 |
| Nima 2 Basic | 610 | 61 |
| Quabbatul Islamic | 235 | 0 |
| Ring Road East 1 Primary & JHS | 257 | 64 |
| St Francis Xavier R/X Basic (Primary & JHS) | 710 | 89 |
| St Kizito R/C Basic (KG, Primary, JHS) | 465 | 58 |
| Tasfiliya Islamic School | 150 | 75 |
| Unity JHS A&B* | 300 | 0 |
| Wilberforce Primary* | 212 | 0 |

Table 1. Toilet-to-student ratios⁶

⁶ Asterisks denote those schools comprising the Unity Compound in Kotobabi, where over 1200 students are in attendance.

Desks, Chalkboards, Textbooks and School Libraries

The data gathered here show that study area schools face major challenges in providing adequate facilities and school materials for their students. All public schools surveyed lacked enough desks for their students; in most classrooms, at least two students share a desk.



Chalkboards/blackboards are essential to stimulating students and helping to summarize and remind them by reinforcing teachers' spoken words, especially in primary schools, where students tend to be easily distracted. Only 17 percent of schools lacked usable chalkboards in the classrooms.

Other factors jeopardizing the quality of primary education in the East and North Ayawaso Sub-Metro communities, apart from the availability of desks, is the shortage of textbooks, maps, libraries, etc. In Ghana, textbooks are provided to students free of charge by the schools for the three core subjects, English, Math and Science. All schools in the study area reported having a sufficient number of textbooks for their students. On average, the ratio of textbooks-to-students is 1:2, and 43 percent of schools reported providing their students with workbooks at no cost or with no mark-up.

Only four of the schools have libraries, but the number of books in each library varies significantly. One school claiming to have a library reported that its "library" was in fact an empty room without books or furniture.

Classroom conditions

Many of the schools look as if no repairs have been made since they were built: the wall paint is peeling off, ceilings are leaking and windows and doors are broken and in need of major work. Some of the schools looked particularly unfavorable for learning.

The headmasters for six of the schools reported that their schools require significant renovations for all of their classrooms, and four schools reported requiring renovations for at least a quarter of the space in their buildings. The survey administrators – one from MCI, and a team from VOiCE – recorded observations to the effect that only three of the 23 study area schools had classrooms that appeared to be in good condition and not in need of significant repairs.



VIII. Physical Capacity of School Facilities

For the purpose of this assessment, “capacity” is based on the number of students enrolled at a given school and the number of students the school can reasonably support.

In the study area schools, it is not uncommon for 3 to 4 students to share a desk, and teachers can have more than an expected number of students at a time in a regular-sized classroom. By increasing enrollment as intended, the free primary education policy has at the same time created overcrowding and constrained school facilities. The situation in the study area is consistent with the findings at the national level. Figure 7 (next page) indicates that more than 43 percent of schools in the study area exceed their capacity. The overcapacity level varies between schools ranging from 17 to 199 students. Based on 2013 student enrollment, 10 out of 23 schools in the study area are overcrowded. At the time of the study, Tafsillya Islamic School had 359 students enrolled, even though the school was built to hold only 160. Ten schools, however, also showed under-capacity, by 85 students, on average. Table 2 shows the over/under capacity for each school in the study area.

| School | School built to hold | Number of Students Enrolled | Over/ Under Capacity |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Al-Waleed Islamic Primary & JHS | 600 | 546 | -54 |
| Ayebeng Memorial School | 480 | 433 | -47 |
| Darul Hijra Islamic Basic (KG, Primary & JHS) | 360 | 477 | 117 |
| Institute of Islamic Studies JHS | 180 | 180 | 0 |
| Institute of Islamic Studies Primary | 160 | 359 | 199 |
| Islamic Training Institute Primary & JHS | 270 | 381 | 111 |
| Kanda AMA JHS | 120 | 151 | 31 |
| Kanda Estate 1 | 300 | 224 | -76 |
| Kanda Estate 1 JHS | 135 | 152 | 17 |
| Kanda Estate 2 | 240 | | |
| Kanda Estate 3&5 JHS | 300 | 173 | -127 |
| Kanda Estate 3&5 Primary | 210 | 227 | 17 |
| Kanda North Primary | 210 | 228 | 18 |
| Kotobabi 13 A&B JHS | 360 | 209 | -151 |
| Nima “1” Basic (Primary & JHS) | 495 | 420 | -75 |
| Nima 2 Basic (Primary) | 800 | 610 | -190 |
| Quabbatuln Islamic | 240 | 235 | -5 |
| Ring Road East 1 Primary & JHS | 378 | 257 | -121 |
| St Francis Xavier R/X Basic (Primary & JHS) | 720 | 710 | -10 |
| St Kizito R/C Basic (KG, Primary, JHS) | 760 | 846 | 86 |
| Tasfiliya Islamic School | 150 | 150 | 0 |
| Unity JHS A&B | 240 | 300 | 60 |
| Wilberforce Primary | 175 | 212 | 37 |

Table 2. Over/under capacity of schools in study area (overcapacity in red).

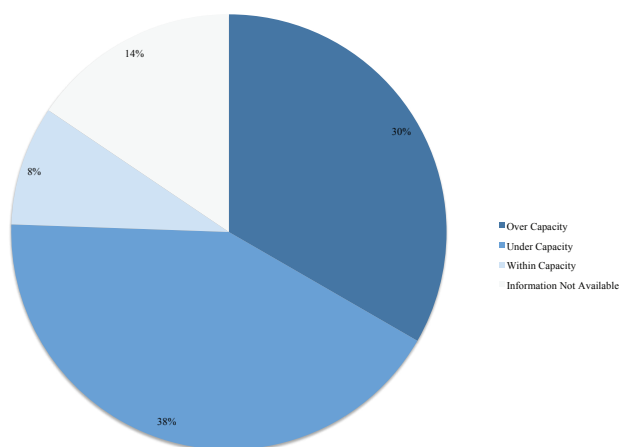


Figure 7. Enrollment capacity of study area schools.
Source: Schools' administrative records



IX. School Financing

As mentioned above, the main source of funding for all Ghanaian public schools comes from the Government capitation grant, which covers tuition fees. Our findings, however, confirm that the capitation grant is received at irregular intervals, as reported by 82 percent of study area schools. Given this pattern of irregular disbursement, to ensure uninterrupted functioning, at the start of each year, schools ask parents to pay PTA levies, as a means of supporting operational costs. Some administrators reported a standard fee levied across the schools, but others claimed that the levies vary by school and by year.

X. PTA Involvement

The survey findings confirm that all schools in the study area have a PTA Committee. That said, 48 percent of respondents rated the PTA members' level of involvement in school activities as "very low" or "below average." Administrators, too, said that parents showed a lack of interest in their children's education

and/or did not attend PTA meetings. But 30 percent of respondents rated PTA members' level of involvement in school activities as "very active" or "vibrant," citing parents' timely payment of levies, donation of office equipment and frequent attendance of PTA meetings as reasons for that positive rating.



XI. Conclusions and Recommendations

While it is clear that there has been significant progress in increasing enrollments of both girls and boys in the low-income communities in Accra's East and North Ayawaso Sub-Metros, this survey's findings confirm that more work remains to be done. The findings presented in this report clearly demonstrate that interventions aimed at reducing the crowded conditions and improving school record-keeping, waste management, access to reliable and good quality water and sanitation (including private, sex-segregated toilets) and learning materials are urgently needed in all of the study area schools.

Although classrooms appear to be somewhat less overcrowded than in many Ghanaian schools and communities, the teacher-to-student ratio remains high, and classroom space remains tight, impeding teachers' ability, school administrators attested, to give individual attention to deserving or needier students, to discipline unruly students or to do more than to present a bare minimum of required information as determined by the national government curriculum. In general, given the lack of record-keeping, the 23 headmasters/headmistresses interviewed were forced to rely on their memories and impressions in order to answer survey questions. Again, this highlights the need to provide better record-keeping logistics and related training.

One first step in a positive direction would be for the Ghana Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service or the Accra Metropolitan Education Directorate to commission a more exhaustive education needs assessment of the East and North Ayawaso Sub-Metro schools,⁷ using the Education Policy and Strategy Simulation model (EPSSim) instrument developed by UNESCO⁸ and utilized by MCI in seven of the Millennium Cities.⁹ This instrument, an updated version of which is accessible through <http://inesm.education.unesco.org/en/esm-library/esm/epssim>, includes a breakdown of the estimated costs of achieving the education MDGs and the associated targets, making it easier to secure donor financing for at least the most critical upgrades. Although the MDG agenda is officially sunsetting in 2015, Ghana's primary and junior high schools remain significantly off-track, and achieving these Goals will improve substantially the quality of both the facilities and the educational offerings, moving them up to par with educational offerings in more privileged Ghanaian communities and in other, better-financed communities worldwide. Without such an effort, students residing in low-income communities in particular will remain far behind those born into greater wealth, in terms of the quality of educational opportunity available to them, thereby prolonging the inequality between rich and poor for at least another generation. Short of undertaking this research, a more extensive school facilities survey, as well as a more detailed and reliable analysis of teacher data (educational level, level of teacher training and professional development, preparedness in the area(s) each is actually teaching, etc.), can be readily undertaken in East and North Ayawaso, to see how far off-track the Sub-Metros' schools are, in relation to the schools in other AMA Sub-Metros and to other communities nationwide.

Given the need for improvements in infrastructure and learning outcomes and the limited resources available, governments and development partners bear a responsibility to work together to develop approaches that will contribute to significant, measurable and sustainable progress toward achieving Ghana's national education goals across the study area. This includes a strong focus on good governance, capacity-building, developing management systems and ensuring school and community participation (through school management committees and parent-teacher associations) in the process. Communities, non-governmental and

parent-teacher organizations, the private sector and religious associations can make valuable contributions, but cannot replace government's responsibility to furnish appropriately equipped facilities for all school-aged children within its jurisdiction.

Of course, the AMA needs to coordinate and complement the efforts of the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, civil society and non-governmental organizations and community members, to add value and to help "snowball" the positive outcomes of multiple interventions. Further, the AMA is in position to enact fundamental improvements in the study area schools by ensuring the adequate provision of such basic services as water and sanitation facilities. Given the deplorable condition of the schools in urban poor communities, including the study area, we respectfully call on the government to improve the culture of maintenance and renovation.



We ask that the Accra Metropolitan Assembly consider, with some urgency, redirecting some of the funds reserved for the construction of new schools toward maintaining some of the older, less safe and improperly outfitted schools, such as Kanda Cluster of Schools and Unity Compound.

The MPs of the target communities need to become more involved in supporting education through the Common Fund, which they receive on behalf of their respective communities. They can use their offices to raise funds, or even to seek support for improving conditions and the quality of education in the schools serving their constituencies. As the study team observed repeatedly during school visits and interviews, MPs' current efforts in this regard have not had sufficient impact to make a noticeable difference in the education of their communities' children. With regard to income poverty as a constraint to educational at-

⁷ As well as of schools in other poor Accra communities or, in the best case, of schools citywide.

⁸ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002147/214778e.pdf>

⁹ These were carried out for entire city school systems; as an example, see MCI's Education Needs Assessment for Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city: http://mci.ei.columbia.edu/files/2014/04/13_Kumasi-Education-NA-Jun2010.pdf; however, the UNESCO instrument, which was actually designed to assess needs at the national level, might be applied as well in specific Sub-Metro areas, yielding useful findings.

tainment for youth, one potential intervention would be to introduce cash transfer programs to households struggling to pay for education-related expenses. Several governments of developing countries, such as Mexico and Nicaragua, have integrated cash transfer projects into their social protection programs.¹⁰ Other interventions to be considered include providing scholarships to encourage girls to enroll in secondary school and providing more preschools, to lighten mother's childcare responsibilities. A program piloted by AMA in partnership with the Government of Israel's Office of international Cooperation (MASHAV) and the Mount Carmel Training Center in Haifa, Israel, could serve as an excellent, broadly tested model for such a preschool expansion.¹¹



The need for more mentorship

Mentorship is the presence of a caring individual who provides a young person with support, advice, friendship, reinforcement and constructive role-modeling over time. Strong mentorship programs will help children develop the confidence, self-esteem and skills they need to be successful in school and in life. Mentoring can help youth in the Zongo communities as they go through challenging life transitions, including dealing with stressful changes at home and transitioning to adulthood. Unfortunately, the schools in the study area cannot boast of having even one mentoring programme in their schools. VOiCE is now actively recruiting mentors for youth, particularly in Nima-Maamobi, and other NGOs, civil society organizations, MPs, churches and PTAs might consider doing the same. VOiCE is also committed to promoting a more substantive and activist role for PTAs in addressing the issues highlighted in this report.

The need to change perceptions of the value of girls' education

Another problem the community faces is the lack of parental support for their children's education, especially for the girls. The parents do not place much val-

ue on their daughters' schooling, believing that girls do not need much of an education because they will soon be married to men who will provide for them anyway. Despite this, a forum on girls' education issues conducted by VOiCE in September 2013 gave girls in the communities a platform where they strongly asserted their interest in receiving a high quality education, stating clearly that they did not believe doing so would stand in the way of their fulfilling their family and religious obligations.

That said, VOiCE recommends that the AMA and NGOs, with the assistance of religious leaders, youth CBOs, PTAs and MPs, create more opportunities to promote the value of girls' education in these communities through well-coordinated sensitization campaigns. As countless studies have shown, changing perceptions of the value of girls' education will be a gradual process, but nonetheless a critical one for improving future women's and families' health, general wellbeing and income-generating capacity.



¹⁰ For the case of Nicaragua, see <http://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/long-term-effects-conditional-cash-transfer-program-nicaragua>

¹¹ See <http://mci.ei.columbia.edu/initiatives/education-and-gender-equality/early-childhood-education/> for more on the introduction of this groundbreaking early childhood development model in Kumasi

XII. References

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NOTE:

The Basic Education Certificate of Education is considered an indicator of realized basic education skills. BECE consists of 4 Core Subjects: English, Mathematics, Integrated Science and Social Studies; and five other subjects: Religious and Mural Education, Agriculture, Pre-technical Skills, French (optional), Ghanaian Language and Vocational Skills. Performance in a subject is graded from Grades 1 (highest) to 9 (lowest). The overall best performance for a student is aggregate 6, that is, a Grade 1 in each of the four core subjects, in addition to a Grade 1 in two other subjects. To be selected and placed in a senior high school, a candidate in the BECE must have a minimum aggregate of 30 in six subjects. Any student scoring lower than 6 in any of the core subjects will not be selected for placement. The best performers in the BECE would have aggregates of between 6-10; the poorest performers would have aggregates of 26-30.

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