Welcome to the August 2014 edition of the ‘Edu’ newsletter. Hope the second part of the year is going well for you. In this edition we have the latest information from the ongoing projects/activities in the Education programme, interesting thoughts, upcoming events, and of course the hot topic: to re-open or not to re-open school – the threat of Ebola. Hope this newsletter finds you well. Enjoy the read, Mama Laryea 😊.

Hot topic: To re-open or not to re-open school – the threat of Ebola *

The threat of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) cannot be over emphasized; neither can it be brushed or prayed away. It is a reality that needs to be accepted by all. The EVD is having an impact on most spheres of live, affecting how we greet each other, cross border traveling in the region and now possibly education.

The debate as to whether schools should be re-opened after vacation in the wake of the epidemic in other countries is crucial. There is an urgent need to curb the spread of the disease. In Ghana however, not a single case of the EVD has been reported. Yet, there are speculations on whether schools should re-open or not as scheduled due to the threat posed by the possible spreading of EVD in educational institutions. Initially, the education authorities, after a meeting with the heads of both private and public tertiary institutions advised against the re-opening fearing widespread infection by foreign students coming from Ebola affected countries.

My own take on the issue then was that this position was not helpful. To start with, what is the percentage of foreign students in the institutions to warrant holding back what I perceive to be the majority of the local students? At best such a stance would only derail the academic calendar of the universities. Postponing reopening for two weeks or even one year is not a panacea to the crisis. I also believe when these public universities bow to government pressure, it would be the genesis of government interference. I had also heard child rights organisations, urging the postponement of the re-opening of basic schools citing the same Ebola mantra. Could we remind ourselves that Ghana has not yet recorded a single Ebola case? Life should therefore go on. It is welcoming to now hear the Ghana Education Service (GES) with the support of UNICEF is
training Basic and Senior High School Teachers on mechanisms that can be put in place to prevent any outbreak of the Ebola, and, schools will re-open as scheduled. We hope this kind of training will be extended to the tertiary institutions. In addition, perhaps this is an opportune time to relook at the provision of tertiary education via distance learning especially to students from distant locations, to reduce the need for students gathering at physical campuses. Public education about the disease also needs to intensify and foreign students screened at all points of entry into the country. This is my take. What is yours? *Written by a guest writer, who is also related to JICA activities.

The school construction project comes to an end, hurray!!!

We are pleased to give you the final report on the project for Improvement of Access to Basic Education in Deprived Areas. To recap: in 2010 the Government of Japan, using a 605 million Japanese Yen grant (approx. US$ 6 million) started the project, school construction project for short, in response to the Government of Ghana (GoG)’s request to construct schools for the most deprived areas. The project aimed to improve educational environment and access to basic education by constructing classrooms for primary and Junior High Schools, teachers’ accommodation, toilet facilities and providing educational furniture in 33 schools. This was made up of 16 schools in the Central Region and 17 schools in the Northern Region.

The project was implemented under Japan’s Grant Aid for Community Empowerment Scheme, which aims to empower local communities by utilising local design, local contractors, and local material suppliers. Over the implementation period a number of challenges arose, including at intervals the unavailability of adequate materials such as cement, sand and aggregates for construction. The lack of machinery by some contractors although on paper they claimed they had and some contractors not having enough workers on site were also issues. These factors contributed to delays in the construction period. Nevertheless, finally all 33 schools were completed in June 2014 and a grand handing over ceremony held on 20th June 2014 at Mesomagor in the Central Region; the village people, teachers, students, the Ministry of Education and GES, the Embassy of Japan, JICA and Japan International Cooperation Systems cerebrated on the day.
Update on the teacher development policy support project

Since the launch of the Project for Supporting Institutionalization of the Pre-Tertiary Teacher Professional Development and Management (PTPDM) policy, termed PTPDM project for short, a number of activities have taken place, chief amongst them the policy review workshop.

The policy review workshop, which took place from 29th to 31st July, 2014 in Koforidua in the Eastern Region aimed to review the policy in order to bridge some identified gaps in the framework, which needed to be addressed before the implementation of the policy. Participants present were from the University of Cape Coast, the Ghana Education Service, the National Conference of Principals of Teacher Training Colleges (PRINCOF), the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRT), the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), the Coalition of Concerned Teachers (CCT), the National Teaching Council (NTC), and the National Board for Professional and Technician Examinations (NABPTEX). The output of the workshop was an extensively reviewed career development framework, to be presented at the upcoming first Joint Coordinating Committee (JCC) meeting of the project on 28th August 2014 at M Plaza hotel. At the inaugural JCC, the plan of operation of the project, the progress of the project and major issues arising will also be presented and deliberated on. For those of you invited, hope to see you there.

Nationwide INSET programme progress report

In addition to being counterparts to the Japanese Expert team for the PTPDM project, the National INSET Unit (NIU), building on the achievements of the JICA supported GES teacher In-Service Education and Training (INSET) project, has been continuing to implement the INSET nationwide. Below is one such activity recently undertaken by the NIU.

Orientation and sourcebook training workshop for the 18 newly created deprived districts under the Ghana Partnership for Education Grant (GPEG) support: The workshop took place in two locations, at St. Louise College of Education in Kumasi, Ashanti Region and at the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) hall in Tamale, Northern Region. The objectives of the workshop were to establish the District INSET Committee (DIC) structure in the districts for them to take full control over INSET activities in their districts, and to orient the DIC members to know their roles and responsibilities. A total of 108 District INSET Committee (DIC) members from these districts were trained. The NIU intends to follow up with these districts to ascertain they are taking full control of INSET activities in their districts.
Mr. Hayato Kagiyama, a JICA volunteer, on his experiences in Ghana

Mr. Hayato Kagiyama is a JICA volunteer attached to the Peki College of Education as an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) teacher. He writes about his experience as follows.

I teach at Peki College of Education (CoE) as an ICT department teacher. Before I came to Ghana, I had planned to help the department colleagues to grow in their teaching skills. But actually, once I arrived I found the tutors in my department have good quality teaching skills beyond my expectation. So the main tasks I have been focusing are to have ICT classes and to maintain the ICT laboratory with my colleagues.

I teach first year students practical lessons. At the CoE we have a little course outline for ICT for the first year of teacher training. This course outline is almost only on learning Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. Therefore, I prepare lesson plan myself before each semester. Alongside the semester plan, I also make lesson contents, assignments, and slides to show students. In my class, I always try to give students much time to operate computers themselves. I think practical training is very important to learn ICT. However, since students have to work for examinations, they also need to make a point on learning the theories of ICT.

Some students already know about ICT well. Sometimes they can do what I am supposed to teach before I teach them while some students cannot even double-click. This gap makes it difficult to have lessons. At the beginning of my activity, I decided to care about the students who cannot use computers well during my class. Since they often have difficulty to understand what I teach, I need to go to their desk and help them one by one. Therefore, I sometimes ask the advanced students to help me with supporting the slow students as my assistant tutors. I think it is good experience for them too because they are training to be teachers. Of course, it also helps the progress of the class.

I have also tried to teach touch-typing. Since the students do not have much opportunity to touch computers, some of the students cannot type at all and this can even disturb their learning of ICT in the school. On the other hand, if they can type well, it encourages their eagerness to learn ICT. In Japan, we have enough computers and good internet environment; children can have ICT experiences easily through games or the internet. But in Ghana, the situation is quite different from that. Therefore, to grow the students’ eagerness is one of the most important tasks of ICT teachers I think.
An upcoming project: expert for decentralised education management

As reported in the May 2014 edition of this newsletter, one more exciting project forthcoming in 2014 is the expert for decentralised education management. The predecessor project was the Advisory Unit on Decentralised Education Management (AUDEM), which was supported by Mr. Daisuke Kanazawa, a JICA Expert who completed his assignment period at the end of September 2013. At the request of the GES, a proposed follow up, now approved, is to have another expert for Decentralised Education Management attached to the Basic Education Division of the GES, but this time focused on strengthening the capacity of the GES on decentralized education management between the school and district level. The assignment period is yet to be determined. More details will be published in the next edition but in the interim, outputs of the AUDEM’s work are available at https://sites.google.com/site/audembed/

Some more interesting thought(s) / fact(s)


- The exams results are in; the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) in Ghana and the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Some students will be smiling having received good results whilst others will not. Ever thought of the best and worst excuses for doing badly in exams? Well, someone has. Read the details from www.bbc.com/news/education-28591189 (last accessed: 22/08/2014).

Upcoming event(s) in the Education sector

- Three new education related JICA volunteers would be arriving in September 2014; two will be for youth activities and one for science and mathematics.

Useful websites

- Shaping a new development agenda from the MDG Experience, read the full story in JICA’s World publication at www.jica.go.jp/english/publications/j-world/1407.html

- Checkout the JICA Ghana website for information on JICA’s activities in Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia: www.jica.go.jp/ghana/english/index.html

- Don’t forget we are online, old/new copies of this newsletter are available via the JICA Ghana English website: www.jica.go.jp/ghana/english/office/others/newsletter.html

Have your say: and finally thank you for your reports, views and comments which make up this newsletter. Keep them coming including your feedback on the hot topic in this issue, the address to use is: gn_osu_rep@jica.go.jp Thank you.