

STATEMENT DELIVERED BY THE GHANA NATIONAL EDUCATION CAMPAIGN COALITION AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE ON THE 2009 BUDGET STATEMENT

On behalf of the Executive Council of GNECC, I welcome you ladies and gentlemen of the press to this important forum.

This press conference, as may have been indicated, is to indicate GNECC's position on the programmes and provision for the education sector as per the 2009 Budget Statement.

GNECC is a network of civil society organizations, professional groupings, education and research institutions, and committed individuals interested in promoting quality basic education for all. Our elementary philosophy is that education is a basic human right and the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and therefore we advocate the provision of free quality basic education for all Ghanaian children.

GNECC is of the view that some key issues relating to the provision of quality education as provided by Government in the budget is commendable. These include the abolishing of all extra fees, provision of school uniforms for children in basic schools, particularly those in deprived communities. In spite of that, the Coalition still has concerns on aspects of these policies and others.

Abolishing of All Extra Fees and provision of Free Uniforms.

While the Coalition applauds Government on its intention to abolish all extra fees, we call on Government to abolish exam fees as well. This call is in the spirit of fulfilling the constitutional target of providing Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education for all children in Ghana. Such a measure will no doubt reduce the drop out levels in among basic school pupils, especially in the transition from JHS to SHS.

The provision of free school uniforms must be consciously linked with the principle of encouraging the production and consumption of local goods. The Coalition urges Government to localize the production of the school uniforms to promote local industry and create jobs for Ghanaians.

While we support any policy that will lessen the burden of parents in the provision of learning materials, we are of the view that the policy to provide free exercise books for every pupil in public basic schools is limited and discriminatory. In the spirit of our Constitution, which has enshrined education as a right for all Ghanaian children, the Coalition is calling on Government to expand the policy to include pupils in private schools as well. This would also give true meaning to the public/private sector partnership to basic education in Ghana.

Capitation Grant

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We applaud Government for the increment in the capitation grant from 3 GHc to 4.5 GHc per child per term. GNECC has advocated an increment of the Capitation grant from 3 to a minimum of 5 Gh c which in our opinion will be a little realistic. We however applaud Government for the increment 4.5 GHc per child per term and urge that further increments in the grant at least to 5 Gh C before the end of the year. GNECC demands that the Ministry of Education creates a threshold to ensure equity in the distribution and disbursement of the grant. On the management of the fund it would be appropriate for Government and its responsible agencies to come out with a clear, time-bound plan for effective decentralization of the capitation grant.

Improvement of Quality of Teaching and Learning

To ensure that teachers are well motivated, the Coalition would rather that Government comes out clearly with specific measures through which this will be improved. We want to reiterate our position that teachers who accept postings to deprived areas should be given full tax reliefs to ensure that more teachers are attracted to rural and deprived areas and thereby help in addressing the geographical disparity in teacher distribution.

Secondly Government must remove admission quotas in teacher training colleges as a necessary measure to ensure adequate teacher supply.

Achieving Gender Parity

Another key concern of the Coalition is the target of achieving the MDG gender parity index of 1:1. We appreciate the enormous challenge that achieving this target poses in view of numerous in-built social norms that are discriminatory of girls in particular. It is therefore quiet discouraging to note that the budget did not specify areas of financial/material support to needy girls as proposed. It is our strong view that the drive to encourage improvements in enrollment and retention will be achievable, only if the following measures are seriously considered;

- All basic schools should be provided with separate changing rooms for girls.
- MOE should ensure that school building plans are redesigned to include other girl-child friendly facilities as well as proper fencing of all public schools.
- Government should collaborate more with CSOs at the grassroots to conduct girls enrollment drives
- Conditions of service of teachers should be improved with particular consideration of the interests and needs of female teachers, to ensure their availability in rural and deprived areas as a measure for sustaining enrollments for girls.

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The Coalition also calls on Government to ensure effective collaboration between the MOE and Min of Youth and Employment to ensure that Community Education Teaching Assistants under the NYEP are given adequate training prior to their deployment.

Finally, the Coalition welcomes Government's proposal for an all party conference on education reform and calls for adequate space and appropriate for civil society representation at this all important national conference.

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