

Speech: Effective solutions to gender issues should be sustained: speech by Philip Smith

Honourable Minister of Education, madam moderator, Executive Secretary of the National Council on Tertiary Education (NCTE), President of PRINCOFF, Vice-Chancellors and Heads of colleges of education, representatives of civil society and the media, development partners, all invited guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to be here today to speak on behalf of the UK's Department for International Development at this important summit on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Teacher Education.

Who teachers are, and how teachers are educated, has a direct impact on how children access education, and what they learn in school.

To ensure inclusive learning and to address social inequalities, teachers need to be able to treat all children equitably and effectively, regardless of gender, age, socio-economic background and disability.

For the education sector, this means addressing teachers' ideas of gender and social inclusion, so that teachers view all young people as capable, and do not perpetuate restrictive gender and social stereotype norms or violence.

As the government of Ghana improves standards of teaching and schools through education reforms, the teaching profession also needs to become ever more diverse and inclusive to meet all children's needs. There are gender and social disparities in teacher education in Ghana, which both reflect and impact on wider inequalities in society.

Women and people with disabilities are significantly underrepresented as teachers, tutors, lecturers and senior education managers.

In the 46 public colleges of education, only 38% of student teachers, 25% of tutors and 12 Principals are female. We don't have the data on disability prevalence yet, but NCTE's inclusive education study will provide valuable insights into this.

Many women and people from poorer families do not have funds to study to become a teacher in the first place. And many women and people with disabilities within teacher education also experience harassment, lack of safety, and discrimination within colleges of education and face challenges of getting the support they need to complete their course and progress in their career.

Teaching in basic schools is also gendered and male-dominated – while 83% of kindergarten teachers are female, only 42% of primary teachers are women, and this drops to only a quarter of teachers at JHS and a fifth of teachers at

SHS. Female teachers are also underrepresented in higher-status subjects like Science, Maths and English. There are few female head teachers. And we need more demographic data on people with disabilities or from less advantaged backgrounds within teaching.

These disparities have an impact on school access and progression for children who are female, have disabilities, are in deprived districts and rural areas, and from the poorest families. While gender parity in access to basic education has been achieved nationally, gender and social inequalities persist in the northern regions, and in children's learning outcomes.

Girls perform worse than boys across all regions and at all levels for Maths, Science, and Social Studies, and in English in the northern regions. Children in rural deprived districts perform the lowest on national primary-level assessments.

Only 1 in 5 girls qualifies for tertiary compared to 1 in 4 boys.

However, evidence shows that having more teachers who are female, and are from similar backgrounds to their pupils, can have a significant positive impact on the enrollment, retention, safety and performance of girls and more less privileged children in schools.

DFID is proud to support the important work of the National College for Tertiary Education (NCTE) to reform – and transform – teacher education in Ghana, with support from T-TEL. It is vital that teachers are selected, educated and assessed differently, to address persistent gender and social inequalities, and promote learning for all children in the basic education system.

Over the past few years, we have seen solid improvements in the gender-responsiveness of colleges of education in terms of facilities, policies, safety and teaching approaches, which have been driven through gender-responsive improvement plans and gender champions. This should be celebrated.

We now need to ensure that this progress continues, and that we understand the impact of changes in colleges of education on the attitudes and teaching practices of student teachers and newly-qualified teachers in the classroom.

It is important that this progress is sustained, built on, and made even more strategic so it can improve gender and social equality throughout the education system. This is vital if we are to enable more girls, children with disabilities, and people in rural and deprived areas to complete secondary education and move into tertiary education, teaching and education leadership.

The government of Ghana's ambitious education reform agenda provides a real opportunity to drive progress on gender equality, diversity, social inclusion and better safeguarding across all aspects of education.

The UK works around the world to uphold the rights of women and people with disabilities and help to improve their lives.

Here in Ghana, DFID prioritises gender equality and inclusion throughout our programmes. The UK is pleased to have also supported Ghana to improve gender equality in education through the Girls-PASS programme, Girls' Education Challenge (GEC), and Complementary Basic Education.

We encourage lessons from these programmes to be shared widely, so effective solutions to gender issues can be sustained.

For example, at this year's Education World Forum in London in January, DFID's Secretary of State highlighted how the Varkey Foundation GEC project in Ghana has used technology to run distance interactive lessons to tackle challenges of poor teacher quality and learning outcomes, and lack of safe spaces and role models for girls. This has shown positive changes in literacy and numeracy, as well as engagement of girls who had dropped out of school.

We encourage the Ministry of Education to support policies and budget allocations which will enable real improvements in gender equality and social inclusion in education.

Under the leadership of the Ghana Education Service's Girls Education Unit, the Girls' Education Network have already been doing excellent work to maintain focus on gender issues within the education sector, such as developing guidance on how to support girls who become pregnant to continue in and re-enter school.

We are also proud that Ghana's Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs is a member of the global Girls' Education Platform, co-chaired by the UK Foreign Secretary (who was in Ghana last week). We also thank the Hon. Deputy Minister of Education Gifty Twum for her participation in the platform. We are keen for Ghana to use the platform to showcase its progress on gender equality in education.

At the last Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2018, the government of Ghana made important commitments around gender equality in education. We encourage the government of Ghana to demonstrate strong progress and action on these in advance of the next CHOGM 2020.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As development partners we welcome the government's focus on achieving the SDGs, and applaud His Excellency the President's vision for a self-reliant Ghana.

Today we are at a point of decision and opportunity, where in the 11 remaining years of the Sustainable Development Goals, we still have time to realise their full ambition to address the root causes of poverty and inequality, and achieve development that works for all people.

Gender equality and social inclusion is key to that ambition. Ghana Beyond Aid will not be realised without it. When over half the population is unable to achieve their potential, when they are prevented from being productive, or when their voices are simply not heard, there can be no sustainable path to development.

I wish you fruitful discussions today as you consider how to bring about ever greater gender and social equality within – and through – the education system.

As we continue the strong Ghana-UK partnership in education beyond aid, DFID is with you every step of the way.

Thank you.