

ARE-PAGE (Ghana) Project Completion Assessment

CSO Name: Action for Rural Education (ARE)

Project Title: Promoting Accountable Governance in Education (PAGE)

Grant Amount: \$34,500

Dates of Implementation: August 25, 2010 – August 2011 with the PCR Completed December 2011

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Date of PCA: August 2012

Site Visits/Meetings: *August 16, 2012:* Meeting at ARE office in Accra (with Executive Director); *August 17, 2012:* Edumadze Community (with SMC chair, PTA chair, PTA Vice Chair); Saltpond-Mfantisman Municipal Office of Ghana Education Service

Overview:

Problem Background

Education is currently a major development priority for Ghana. The country has taken seriously the Millennium Development Goal of providing universal primary education for all citizens by 2015 but many problems still dog the education system. Despite the government's efforts to construct over 1,500 public schoolhouses since 2009, more than 2,000 classrooms nationwide are still held "under trees". Additionally, there remain over 900,000 children not enrolled in any form of primary school.

The Ghanaian government's response to this problem was the introduction of the capitation grant program in 2005. The program is a form of devolved authority common in many countries within Sub-Saharan Africa and across the developing world. Under the Capitation Grant model, the Ghanaian government has abolished all school fees for public primary (basic) schools and committed 4.5 Ghanaian Cedis (GHC) – approximately \$2.25 (USD) – per student per year for funding of all classroom activities, salaries and administration costs.

The capitation grant is passed down to Ghana Education System Municipal Offices where it is then disbursed to schools. The grants are to be used to cover classroom materials (paper, pencils, chalk, etc.), teacher salaries, water and other sanitary necessities, and minor infrastructure repairs. District Assemblies are responsible for covering the costs of major repairs to schools. Grants are spent according to local school budgets, known as School Performance Improvement Plans (SPIP).

By and large the grants are extremely inadequate for funding the entire budget of any given school. Small rural schools are hurt most by the system as capitation grant amounts are small based on the estimated size of enrollment but are not adjusted to reflect the comparative monetary burden of mobilizing resources such as potable drinking water, transportation, and other supplies to rural or remote areas. There is also no consideration given to special circumstances such as additional costs associated with children with special needs. Some schools within the scope of the project have claimed that the annual capitation grant covers only 40% of vital costs. There is no appeal process to lobby for larger capitation grants; it would require an act of legislation to modify the current system.

The process for managing and coordinating finances for capitation grants lacks transparency, civil society and community involvement. Additionally the process often has confusing time tables and lacks

definitive lines of authority which creates a large opportunity for corrupt practices. Previous to this project, common practice throughout Ghana, and particularly in rural areas, was to have the SPIP set by the Head Teacher (lead administrator of a school) without the input from School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). SMCs are formal school oversight committees authorized under article 504 of the Education Act and composed of 9 to 11 “traditional community authorities” such as the village chief, religious official, Head Teacher, the local assemblyman, etc. PTAs are associations open to all parents within a given school system. A lack of knowledge of rights and responsibilities within communities allowed Head Teachers to make decisions and handle all capitation finances unchecked by those served by the grant.

ARE Background

Action for Rural Education (ARE) is a registered Ghanaian NGO founded in 2001 by Kofi Asare, currently the organization’s Executive Director. ARE’s objectives center on strengthening grassroots participation in education and development decision making in rural areas of southern Ghana. Transparency and accountability are major issue areas for the group.

ARE is a lean but competent organization with a good ability to maneuvering within the development field. The organization was originally based in Twifo Praso, a small rural town approximately 40 miles north of the Gulf of Guinea and 75 miles West of Accra. Last year, ARE established a second office in Accra. The Twifo Praso office is staffed by 3 full time employees and concentrates on community mobilization – essentially the continuation of its mission. The Accra office, where the Executive Director spends the majority of his time now, is also staffed by 3 full time employees and handles advocacy, campaigning, and government and donor relations. In addition to the six full-time staff, ARE draws on a host of consultants to help carry out projects and programs. The organization has also taken to consulting to solidify its financial position, implementing programs for DfID, planning for the World Bank, and carrying out research on the impact of the global financial crisis on Ghana’s education financing for UNESCO and on girls education for CAMFED.

Project Background

ARE’s project aimed to eliminate opportunities for corruption within the implementation of the capitation grant and the distribution of school textbooks. ARE planned to train and support existing SMCs and PTAs and formalize ad-hoc committees to monitor textbook distribution and participate in the budgeting and planning processes for use of the capitation grant. The project sought to monitor 10 schools within the Mfantisman Municipality:

- Saltpond Catholic Girls Basic School
- Mankessim Methodist “b” Basic School
- Akwakrom Municipal Authority Basic School
- Edumafa Methodist Basic School
- Abekah Methodist Basic School
- Waakrom Catholic Basic School
- Engow Methodist Basic School
- Asaafa Methodist Basic School
- Edumadze Catholic Basic School
- Biriwa Methodist Basic School

The project was also to be an exercise in advocating participatory democracy. Before the implementation of the project, in some school jurisdictions within the region SMCs and PTAs were seen by the majority of Mfantisman villagers as largely assuming communal labor roles such as repairing school houses and cleaning refuse from the grounds. ARE saw the need for SMC/PTAs to assume coordination roles as oversight by committee would curb corruption and eliminate waste.

The primary objectives of the project were to:

- Reduce corruption in Capitation Grant Management
- Reduce corruption in Exercise and Textbook allocation and distribution

Project Strategies included enforcing record keeping guidelines at the district education office (GES of Mfantisman) and the 10 schools, participatory budget advocacy and monitoring fund and textbook distribution. ARE envisioned pre-implementation stakeholder consultations, training workshops, monthly community meetings and ongoing, quarterly monitoring trainings.

Approach and Design:

ARE's initial proposal was very ambitious; they sought to create a critical force that would change national policy on the ways in which capitation grants are managed and textbooks tracked. After consultations on the design with the PTF project adviser these expectations were tempered and a more realistic approach to replication and scaling up was agreed upon. It should be noted that though ambitious in its overarching mission, the project design did not suffer from this overreach, the detailed activities of the proposal remained rooted in Mfantisman district with the results leading to national change a secondary goal.

Unlike the voluntary SMCs seen in other regions of Africa (such as those trained by UENO through PTF funding in Uganda), the SMCs in Ghana are formal structures that carry institutionalized legitimacy. In essence they are boards of directors consisting of village leaders. However, in practice most SMCs are symbolic entities unaware of their roles and responsibilities and ill equipped to take action.

ARE clearly understood the situation in Mfantisman. The project activities sought to build critical understanding of all dimensions of the Capitation Grant and its budgeting as well as textbook tracking among the SMC members. On paper the activities appear to be building SMCs from the ground up, but what ARE shrewdly planned was to move slow, build community buy-in, and legitimize and empower SMCs and PTAs that were already in existence.

The overarching goal of creating systemic change aside, the PAGE project goals were calibrated and realistically achievable. However, hard data or quantitative outputs were largely ignored. In a project proposal that was so rich in detail about the percentages of textbook leakages and data on children not enrolled in school, there was an expectation that ARE would build in quantitative indicators to track their progress. There was mention of baseline data collection but the only quantitative outputs from the project appear to be numbers of individuals (SMC/PTA members) trained in textbook tracking or participatory budgeting. The project succeeded in providing good evidence of results both anecdotal and observed, but better planning to track project outcomes would have been useful.

Project risks were by and large mitigated. The biggest variables to take into account were enthusiasm from communities to adapt monitoring and the willingness of government entities to buy-in to the process. Concentrating on a select number of similar schools in a single district ensured that ARE's efforts would be consolidated and have a larger potential for success. And the Ghana Education System (GES) Mfantseman office compliance and collaboration had already been procured.

Overall, the project was well conceived despite the lack of built in quantitative indicators.

Project Implementation:

Project activities were carried out within the 12 month period as planned. The final project completion report was submitted two and half months after the cessation of activities and final use of funds due to efforts made to collect more material and answer questions posed by the project adviser.

The finances were effectively and efficiently used for the project. The total of administrative costs was not too high and line items such as fuel and vehicle maintenance and project facilitator salaries were under spent freeing up ARE to spend more funds to cover additional monitoring and evaluation and monthly budget and text book monitoring trainings. As evidence of ARE's efficient use of project funds, 159 USD was left over after all activities had been completed and was returned to PTF.

Throughout the project ARE maintained a training, capacity building and trouble-shooting role. The organization did not actually participate in any of the tracking and monitoring activities, observing the process without intervening while conducting monthly visits to communities. They received reports from the SMCs, confirming facts and analyzing output but allowed the communities to retain ownership of the process. This ended up being a critical aspect of the project. Had ARE taken a larger role in the actual monitoring it is doubtful that as many communities would have rallied behind the initiative, seeing their role as secondary to that of the NGO.

Red flags and unanticipated events were minimal throughout the duration of the project. However, within the Abekah Methodist Basic School community a corrupt practice was exposed. In February 2011, five months after the preliminary capitation grant tracking workshop, a committee tracking exercise was organized by the SMC chair. This was one of the first times that the SMC had been able to analyze the management of the capitation grant for the school. Inspection of the way in which the money was procured and authorized showed that the Head Teacher of the school appeared to have forged the SMC chair's signature on the legal documents required to withdraw capitation funds and that there was an absence of documented items of expenditure. The head teacher denied the forgery claim so the Abekah SMC and PTA reported the incident to the Municipal Education Director (head of the GES) who ordered an investigation into the allegations. The investigation found the Head Teacher to be guilty of financial mismanagement of the capitation grant and that he had brought an imposter to the bank to pose as the SMC Chair so that he could receive the money. As punishment, his salary was frozen and would be used to repay the unaccounted for funds. He was also demoted, from Head Teacher to Classroom Teacher and transferred to an underserved district that was short of teachers. He would report to the Head Teacher of the new district and his old position of head teacher for Abekah was filled immediately by the GES with someone with a record of good practice.

The project was implemented in an efficient and effective manner, complications and problems were minimal and activities carried out smoothly.

Outcomes, Impact & Sustainability:

The overarching achievement of the project is the sustained buy-in from communities and the newly found understanding of SMCs and PTAs of the transformative role transparency can play in enhancing the delivery of quality education. The SMCs and PTAs latched onto the idea that everything in the process needed to be transparent after seeing instant corrections to poor or corrupt practices and the benefits to school communities that came with these changes. Instilling transparency into their procedures and thereby showing their communities the way in which the budgeting process worked communities began to see SMCs and PTAs as agents of change.

ARE's work to bolster SMCs led to an understanding of the roles that the Ghanaian government mandates for them within the education system. Rather than allowing the Head Teacher to control the budget making process, the Councils pushed to open the process and allow for participation in SPIP planning for the first time in Mfantisman. Reducing the power of a single actor (the Head Teacher) and opening decision making to a more representative cross section of the community has led to more effective delivery of capitation money. SMCs and PTAs now make weekly visits to each school to ensure compliance to the agreed upon SPIP.

Additionally, once the budget has been agreed upon and school materials are ready to be delivered to schools, leakages in supplies have diminished. Formerly, the Head Teacher would unilaterally go to the Municipal GES office to collect materials, but as a result of the interactions between ARE and the Mfantisman GES, materials are now sent directly to the SMC.

The role of the GES has been critical to the continued success of the project. The GES has embraced the approach of ARE and now ensures that services are transparent on their end. As the GES has seen the improved performance and engagement of SMCs, they have less community level problems to address and can better focus on their mandate. Illustrative of the fact that GES has internalized and retained ARE's approach is the instance of a member of the Mfantisman GES transferred to the Cape Coast GES. She has brought with her the lessons of change in Mfantisman to Cape Coast and has interacted with SMCs and Head Teachers within the new community to adopt best practices.

Other observed indicators of success include the continued involvement of the Municipal Education Director and the implementation and continuation of a school feeding program in the Abekah community. Parents observing the newly improved performance of SMCs and now understanding how their money for schooling is used, implemented a daily lunch program through the local PTA. Confident that they could track the usage of funds and knowing that money would not be wasted, they were eager to contribute small amounts to feed students and thereby eliminate one of the factors of student absenteeism.

In the project completion report, ARE documents the monitoring and evaluation indicators for the PAGE project. Indicators directly relate to project activities and demonstrate associated outcomes. The findings further bolster evidence that the project was implemented efficiently and as planned. However, numbers of SMC or PTA members trained are not very illustrative of project impact as this information does not convey what these individuals have done with their training in practice. Other indicators such

as number of community inputs made to the school budget better indicate that participation is occurring, but still lack demonstration of deeper impacts.

The tracking of textbooks has been another activity that has built on collaboration and community involvement. ARE notes that out of 34,758 textbooks destined for the 10 schools, 34,745 have been documented and accounted for. Only 13 textbooks are no longer at their designated school.

Previously, community members and parents were unaware of the workings of the capitation grant process. They became very active when invited to join school budget hearings and have showed enthusiasm to continue the process. After the project was completed, ARE continued to follow up with SMCs and PTAs to make sure they were continuing to use the training and further engaging parents in the process. SMC and PTA members have claimed that this sustained collaboration is vital to sustaining the impact of the project. Further training and on-going support from ARE is critical, they claim, if the efforts are to continue. Therefore the sustainability of the project’s impact is tenuous. Transportation and fuel costs to continue monitoring activities are high. ARE also does not have direct financial support to continue their efforts to provide on-going trainings to SMCs and PTAs. The endemic inadequacy of capitation grants is also a barrier to sustainability as the continued lack of necessary resources may stifle participation from community members in the education planning process.

ARE is keenly aware of these issues and the need to contribute ongoing support to project communities. The organization is currently examining an approach to link their activities to a larger project, for example USAID’s Partnership for Accountable Governance in Education (PAGE) program which is ongoing in 46 districts throughout Ghana. This type of strategic thinking demonstrates ARE’s commitment to furthering the process.

Project Score (1-5 Scale)

Category	Value	Score	Weighted Score
Approach & Project Design	15%	3.5	0.5
Project Implementation	20%	4	0.8
Outcomes, Impact & Sustainability	45%	3.5	1.6
Replicability	20%	4	0.8
Overall Score	100%		3.7