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ABURAMAN SECONDARY

Situated at the end of a lengthy dirt path, amidst a number of cocoa farms and cassava plantations in Abura-Dunkwa, Aburaman Secondary School offers itself as an example of the difficulty affecting village schools across the country. The schoolhouses, four in number, are newly built yet still follow the notion of 'open-concept' classrooms, more by decay than by design. The masters must then compete against the elements, the torrential rainfall in July and August, or the exhaustive heat in the remaining months.

The brilliant faces of the young students suggest an element of hope in the future of this proud nation. Yet, Ghanaian born and Ghanaian raised, these students know no other way of life but that of struggle.

Just barely recovering from years of oppressive imperial rule, Ghana, situated along the south-western coast of the African continent, is struggling to free itself from the powerful grip of economic strife. Irrespective of its rich natural resources, Ghana is still labeled a developing country by the United Nations.

Implicit in this description is an awareness of the need for more adequate social and educational systems to administer the number of stools or desks. The students pile on top of each other, a few crowding a single stool. The textbooks are even more scarce. Students are compelled to share the tattered and humidity-soaked books, unable to complete assignments owing to this deficit.

Worse yet, than the insufficiency of material supplies, is the need for qualified teachers to instruct the students. Many classes sit half-empty, with a class proctor or merely a concerned student leading the independent study, lacking a master to teach the subject. In other cases, the classes are fortunate to have an instructor but gain little understanding from him or her. Many of the teachers at the village schools were educated in the same system, and so the cycle continues. Lacking the opportunity awarded to the city schools, the institutions in the remote areas of the country fall far behind the standards demanded from schools in other countries.

The statistics provide evidence of the seriousness of this phenomenon. Just last November, 1993, the SS3 classes (graduating year of the senior secondary school system), completed exams set by the West African Exam council. An alarming 100 percent of the graduating class failed in the areas of math and science. An only slightly less intolerable percentage surfaced for the subject of English, with six percent of the class passing. The only subject that seemingly did well, was Fante, the mother tongue of the region.

This last number suggests that if the students were taught in their own language then they might fare better. This is the current topic of great discourse and controversy in Ghana. Although English is the official language of the country, despite the predominance of the thirty or so native languages, students in the village schools are not instructed in it until junior secondary school. Unable to comprehend what the instructors are saying at this stage, the students begin their struggle.

CITY SCHOOLS

As noted previously, the educational systems in the larger, more commercial areas of the country fair far better than those in rural West Africa. In Cape Coast, for example, a city just south of Abura-Dunkwa, in the central region, there are a number of schools which are highly acclaimed. Adisadel College, one of these such institutions, offers a broad range of disciplines for the students to choose from. The campus is well kept up, the teachers are highly qualified and the materials necessary for conducting the classes are present. The school even has a new computer lab, with ten hardware systems donated by one of the graduating years.

Therein lies the difference. Students graduating from schools such as Adisadel, have pride in the institution where they gained their education. Also, having had greater opportunities than might be given a student from the more remote areas, the alumni obtain high employment positions in the cities. They are then sufficiently able to aid their alma mater. "Old Boys" organizations form according to the graduating year and work together to improve the institution that they attended. Unfortunately, the "Old Boys and Girls" from Aburaman and the like lack both the desire and the means to do the same.

THE GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

The government of Ghana, under the leadership of Lieutenant Gen. J.J. Rawlings, addresses the issue of the failing educational systems often. Its actions, however, in respect to the issue are less impressive. Rawlings, himself, who is not educated past the level of Form 5 (grade 13 equivalent), fails to provide a solution to the growing problem. In response to the country-wide ill report from the November 1993 exams, Rawlings attempted to implement supplementary classes for re-instruction and later re-sitting of exams. This too was a dismal failure as many of the students either could not afford the extra tuition fees or were needed to aid their parents at the farm or otherwise at work. Also a severe lack of interest on the part of many instructors, caused a deficiency in teaching masters.

Without funding from the government or concern for the implementation of programs addressing the needs of the students, the primary and secondary schools in rural Ghana are not likely to escape the cycle of poverty that they encourage.
Photographs taken by Karolee Stevens
during her stay in Ghana