



Child Rights International

PRESS RELEASE
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ALIGNING ANY COST TO FREE SHS WILL MAKE IT A FAILED POLICY

Why Free SHS was introduced

The Free Senior High School (SHS) policy is a Government of Ghana programme introduced by the Presidential Administration of Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo in September 2017. Per the policy, every child in Ghana who qualifies for, and is placed in a public Senior High School for his secondary education will have his/her fees absorbed by the government.

The policy's core themes of access, equity and equality fulfil the United Nations modified Sustainable Development Goals, where member countries amalgamate those themes in their educational systems to certify adequate learning experiences for students towards long life learning.

Goal 4 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) states: “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.” It has therefore been a priority of the government and the Ministry of Education to ensure that education is made free from basic to secondary to afford more children in Ghana the opportunity to access quality education.

The intervention under the policy, absorbed tuition, meals for both boarders and day students, textbooks, library fee, boarding, science laboratory, examination and utility fees. Essentially, the Free SHS was instituted to ensure that no child was denied access to education.

Benefit/ Enrolment

According to statistics from the Ghana Education Service (GES), 1.6 million young people have so far benefited from the Free SHS programme since its introduction in 2017.

Most of the beneficiaries of the programme are children from deprived communities who before the implementation of the policy were idling at homes because of lack of finances.

At the 2021 mid-year review in Parliament, the Finance of Minister, Ken Ofori-Atta, also stated that since the introduction of the policy, student enrolment at the SHS level had increased from 881,600 in 2016 to 1,261,125 in 2021.

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“An Adult Is A Child Who Has Survived”

According to him, five years after the implementation of the policy, 411 out of the 465 candidates who scored grade A in all subjects at the 2020 WASSCE were beneficiaries of the Free SHS.

The policy has increased enrolment massively especially in rural communities of Ghana, he added.

Judging from the various figures given by the government, there is no doubt that the policy has brought so much gains to the young people and therefore, the government's decision to protect it has a strong reason.

Socially and economically, the policy has lifted the financial burden of most parents, who can now be more supportive in their child's academia without feeling dependent on scholarships or private benefits. The Free SHS policy covers the primary and secondary expenditure that caregivers were burdened to provide despite their economic incapability to do so. It has removed social hindrance of choosing some children over others to be educated.

These are few of the many benefits the implementation of the Free SHS has brought to Ghana.

Cost and funding

Over the past 5 years of its implementation, the government announced that it has allocated a total amount of GH¢7.62 billion for the implementation of the Free SHS programme.

The Minister of Finance said GH¢4.18 billion out of the amount representing 54.76 per cent, was sourced from the Government of Ghana (GoG), while the remaining GH¢3.44 billion, representing 45.24 per cent, came from Annual Budget Funding Amount (ABFA).

According to the government, no loan has been taken to specifically finance the Free SHS policy which has since its inception been financed from the ABFA and the GoG funding sources.

As a result of the policy, the government has shown great commitment in addressing infrastructure in majority of secondary schools in the country.

The National Food Buffer Stock Company has also demonstrated their readiness and capacity to supply foods to schools when given the needed support.

Future Review concerns

Although the government has come out on countless times to rubbish report of a possible review of the policy, Child Rights International, wants to draw attention to the fact that “Any future plans to review the policy to allocate cost to parents will defeat the universality of the policy. Once cost is assigned to the policy, it will become a failed policy.”

This is because the Free SHS policy is not a pro-poor policy but general policy that benefits both the underprivileged and privileged children. The universality of the policy was advanced on the

basis that the poor and the rich pay tax and therefore social policies must benefit them all. Already there are policies that are meant mainly for the poor as 80% of them strictly target the underprivileged. Programmes such as The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP), School feeding programme at the primary level, free uniform, free shoes, capitation grants, etc. The only policy that is universal in nature is the Free SHS. Even though the policy design does not take cost from parents, an average parent is likely to spend 600 to 1200 in preparation towards enrolling his/her child to school. Further allocation will burden parental preparedness towards their wards in accessing free education in Ghana.

Major challenges

Though the Nation is getting its dividend in investing in young people through the Free SHS, there are some issues that must be addressed in ensuring that the policy is sustained and driven in the right direction.

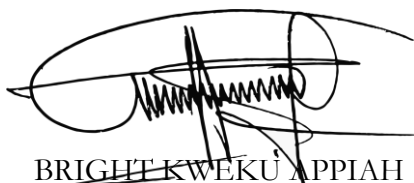
There is the need for government to address supply of perishable and nonperishable goods to schools and availability of text books. Also, the policy in its implementation have not carried out any major evaluation to measure progress of work to determine how service delivery must be coordinated.

Recommendation

- Government as a matter of agency must elevate all social intervention programmes aiding education in Ghana into a statutory body to ensure sustainability, free flow of social policies, transparency and accountability.
- Government communication in relation to social policies must be done in a manner that describes the policy as a social investment policy for better appreciation by stakeholders and beneficiaries.
- Timely release of resources to services providers.

Conclusion

As a child-centered organization, CRI believes that Ghana has passed the stage of allocation of cost in the delivery of Free SHS and reached the stage where attention should be mainly on efficiency and quality



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