

SAVE-Ghana On-Going Project Assessment

CSO Name: SAVE-Ghana

Project Title: Promoting Accountability and Responsiveness for Improved Basic Education in Ghana

Grant Amount: \$26,500

Dates of Implementation: October 2011 – October 2012 (Expected)

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Site Visits/Meetings: *August 20, 2012:* Lixilia site visit (w/ Village Chief, SMC Chair, SMC Vice Chair, PTA Chair, Women's Leader, Head Teacher, Classroom Teachers, Students, Other Community Members), Pulima sit visit (w/ village chief, PTA Chair, Female Leader, District Assemblyman, some parents and students); *August 21, 2012:* GES Municipal Office – Gwollu (w/Assistant GES director, task leader), Gwollu site visit (w/ Village Chief, SMC Chair, PTA Chair, Head Teacher, Classroom Teacher, Students, District Assemblyman)

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 riddle the education system. Despite the government's efforts of constructing 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) per student per year for funding of all classroom activities, salaries and administration costs.

Communities now must supervise and manage their own education systems. Without monitoring, the process is prone to corruption, particularly in remote areas where lines of accountability are unknown or non-existent. Such is the case in Sissala West where codes of conduct and regulations may be in place but are similarly unfamiliar to village populations and other stakeholders. Public sector oversight is constrained by travel; roads are poorly maintained and largely not passable during storms throughout the long rainy season. The cost of fuel and vehicle maintenance and lack of adequate infrastructure also constrains the efforts of the Ghana Education Service (GES)'s Sissala West municipal office.

Organization Background

SAVE-Ghana was founded as a youth action club in 2004 with a vision to foster community development by empowering youths to contribute to development processes within their communities in Sissala East and West Districts. The group formalized and was legally incorporated by the registrar generals department in 2008.

The organization works with rural and deprived communities in the Upper West Region of the country and focuses on quality delivery of basic social services. SAVE's strategic plan focuses on 5 specific areas: improving income returns on agriculture toward sustained food security; minimizing illiteracy and protecting the safety of children; health and HIV; environmental conservation; and empowering women.

SAVE has 8 full time staff members, 7 board members (community leaders from throughout Sissala West), and 10 student interns. The organization also has 300 community volunteers who act as mobilizers and trainers of trainers.

PTF had previously funded SAVE-Ghana for a 2008 election monitoring project.

Approach & Project Design:

The overall goal of the project was to reduce corruption in the education sector in Ghana and thereby improve the delivery of education services. This was an overly ambitious goal given the area of operation for the project (one district in Upper West Ghana) and the small size of the grant (just over \$25,000). But the proposed actions did not reflect such a sweeping scope and were adequately targeted to the area at hand.

Initially the project planned to target 15 school communities but due to the costs associated with monitoring (fuel, etc.) and given the limited amount of the grant, the PTF adviser suggested decreasing the number of target schools to seven. SAVE-Ghana then selected schools in: Pulima, Sorbelle, Kupulima, Jawia, Lilixia, Wiljor, Jeffisi.

The project aimed to target four main problems associated with the delivery of education services:

- Teacher Absenteeism – Ensuring that teachers show up to school daily, actually work the hours they are paid for, and do not leave the school early.
- “Ghost Teachers” – Names on pay registers of people who do not actually teach.
- Misuse of the Capitation Grant – Leakages at all levels.
- Use of School Children as Farm Hands – An endemic problem in Sissala West.

These objectives are a solid foundation for a project that seeks to make sure that teachers are in classrooms and equipped with the necessary materials and skills to provide students with an adequate education. As the project has been implemented, the project activities have been heavily focused on the problems of teacher absenteeism and the use of pupils as farm hands. Instances of ghost teachers and issues surrounding the misuse of the capitation grant have received comparably less attention to date. However, this project is working to build from the ground up an effective network of engaged School Monitoring Committees (SMCs), Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), and parents and community members. As this is the first time many parents and community members have been introduced to various structures and as SAVE works hard to instill the importance of education within communities perhaps the amount of effort needed to achieve all four objectives was underestimated. With the resource constraints of the grant amount, the scope of the project should have been narrowed. In fact the project could have been split into two concurrent efforts, one targeting teacher absenteeism and the use of students as farm laborers and another focused on “Ghost Teachers” and misuse of the Capitation Grant. Both efforts would have worked to build the capacity of SMCs and PTAs as well as advocating the importance of education.

This was an oversight shared by both SAVE-Ghana and PTF at the design and approval phase. It should have been recognized that the \$26,500 grant would not be adequate to successfully address all four target areas when this is the first time that such a program has been introduced to a critically underserved community.

The plan of activities for the project included a policy review, community stakeholder meetings, capacity building trainings, radio programs and monitoring activities. SAVE would also work in consultation and collaboration with the GES Sissala West municipal office.

The predicted outputs were measurable, including set numbers of stakeholders such as village chiefs and local government representatives pledging support and cooperation to the endeavor, action plans to be adopted by each community, number of performance review meetings and the expected target audience, number of panel discussions and radio programs, and numbers of SMC and PTA members trained. SAVE also built quantifiable indicators for success into the design of the project, some of which seemed overly ambitious such as reducing the instances of collection of unapproved fees from school pupils from 90% to 10%. However, the goal of decreasing the use of school pupils as farm laborers from 70% of students down to 10% seemed a tall order but progress on this issue has shown that this could be achievable.

Missing from the project design were details of the nature of the collaboration between SAVE and the GES office as well as further insight into the monitoring process.

Implementation:

SAVE-Ghana is a highly visible local NGO. Through past projects and initiatives, community members within Sissala West have grown to identify the work of the organization. Beneficiary communities from past efforts have a very favorable view of the organization as a result of tangible deliverables and direct impacts on their lives. Such trust and respect has been vital in initiating and advancing the aims of this education project. SAVE's position has greatly facilitated the buy-in process from target communities.

As the project was first gaining traction and more community members began to hear word of the roles that they could play in implementing education policy, SAVE's efforts were recognized for catalyzing positive change. As the word of the program spread, community members residing outside of the 7 focus areas began to question why their villages had not been chosen for incorporation into the project. Questions of favoritism began to arise. SAVE, seeking to address these concerns produced a radio show with a call-in line to address these concerns. The organization was understanding and competently handled the situation, relaying the resource constraints for their efforts, highlighting the work that they had begun, and suggesting ways for communities to begin addressing education problems without their assistance.

In addressing the problem of students being used as laborers on teachers' farms, SAVE has leveraged their relationship with the municipal GES. Following a request from SAVE, an official letter was drafted from the GES stating that no student should be subjected to mandatory farm labor. SAVE then distributed the letter to its target communities. In one instance, a copy of the letter was physically brought to a teachers' farm by an SMC member where students were found working the fields. The SMC

member brandishing the document was able to draw the youths from the fields and relay to the teacher that such an act would no longer be tolerated.

Additionally, SAVE has employed a technique that they refer to as “picture-based advocacy”. In tracking students who have been forced to work in the fields, SAVE team members and volunteers have taken photos to document the instances. The evidence clearly illuminates the problem, the organization has captured photos of young men leaving fields still in their school uniforms, covered in dirt and hauling farming tools. Other photos have shown girls in their school shirts and skirts carrying bundles of chopped wood upon their heads. All documented individuals were briefly questioned by SAVE team members and all eagerly relayed that they had in fact been told to farm. Armed with the photographic evidence, SAVE has relayed their findings to the communities where anecdotal evidence suggests that villages have then rallied behind eliminating the practice. Additionally, as word has spread that this tactic has been employed, the hope is that knowing a person could be watching actions and ready to document abuse can help to curb corrupt practices.

This example exposes one weakness in the project implementation however; to date little hard evidence has been gathered. Anecdotal evidence has suggested that progress is moving steadily forward. However, there have not been statistics presented to back up these claims or to track the project’s progress toward the indicators of success. Similarly, community meetings and trainings have reportedly had positive impacts on community thought and action, but hard examples and quantifiable evidence to back this up is lacking. Additionally, only one quarterly report has been submitted at this time. Though another progress report is nearing completion, there should have been at least two submitted to date. The second tranche release was disbursed in late April after the provision of additional information from SAVE. However, the second quarterly report should have been delivered by May at the latest. This was an oversight by both PTF and SAVE.

The lack of documented progress notwithstanding, the efforts of SAVE have been efficient. Working with a small budget, the organization has competently carried out its stated activities.

Lessons Learned to Date:

Numerous lessons can be pulled from the activities to date. The overriding fact that has emerged is that there are many problems hampering the delivery of effective education services. A common problem across communities is the availability and retention of teachers. In remote areas, it can be hard for teachers to commute to the schoolhouses; roads can quickly become impassable or the burden of fuel prices can impose limitations on travel. Most schools do not provide even the most basic housing for teachers and a lack of electricity or potable water makes it very hard to recruit or retain teachers. GES resources are also severely constrained. The current GES Sissala West municipal office is temporarily lodged in a small dilapidated building. The office is in the process of requesting additional resources from the central GES office to cover fuel and vehicle costs to step up monitoring, but the funds may not be approved. There is also a severe lack of teachers. Approximately 500 teachers are needed to cover public schools in Sissala West. As of the writing of this report there are only 200 documented teachers available, with the central GES commitment of only 18 additional trained teachers for the upcoming school year.

On the other side of the issue, SAVE has realized that parental supervision is much worse than it had originally thought. Many parents still do not see the value of an education and would rather have their

children assisting them with the planting and harvesting of their crops. And in learning more about the capitation grant, parents are routinely wondering why they should pay money to send their children to school if the government is providing funds; in the process not comprehending the inadequacy of capitation grant funds. Many students do not have enough funds to buy the most basic of school supplies such as pens, pencils and paper. Students with old torn uniforms, no backpacks or school supplies may show up at school but soon realize that they do not have the proper tools necessary to learn and therefore leave the school. In Gwollu for example, many students want to work on farms to make money in order to be able to afford basic clothing such as belts, shoes, and socks. Though SAVE has made substantial efforts to incorporate students into decision making processes, many students still feel that they have no voice when it comes to the policies that affect them most.

Add to this the fact that the Ghanaian government requires all students to be tested on ICTs (basic computer literacy) but the majority of rural schools in Sissala West lack electricity, let alone the most basic of computer labs.

However, there has been progress through the efforts of SAVE-Ghana. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many parents are beginning to see the importance of education in improving their children's future. Empowered SMCs and PTAs have become emboldened, rallying communities behind the elimination of forced child labor on farms. With the implementation of further SMC and PTA trainings, head teachers no longer manage the capitation grants unilaterally and instead collaborate with the local SMC. But pressed to recount their last school purchase, many SMCs are unable to relay the item, much less its cost.

Additionally, the inclusion of the Women's Leader in various SMCs has led to unintended positive outcomes such as the formation of women's issue advocacy groups that teach female students about family planning, women's health, and empowerment.

Sissala West is a challenging environment. With its lack of reliable internet connection, poor roads and routine power outages even the most basic project activities are sometimes rendered impossible. Moving forward, SAVE will need continued outside support for its efforts. The organization has essentially been working from the ground up and drastic results cannot be expected within the constraints of a one year grant. SAVE should leverage its proven competency as community mobilizers to seek on-going funding. The organization should also make efforts to work more closely with the Sissala West GES to share scarce resources and plan further ahead to mobilize mutually beneficial networks to support the project, for example including the Tumu office of Plan Ghana to help publicize their radio programs.

Above all else, SAVE should be looking to better track their results. The organization clearly has a wealth of knowledge and its share of success stories, but pausing to analyze what they've accomplished and how they've succeeded and where they can improve could improve their efficiency and impact. A positive indicator of the organization's pursuit of this is that SAVE is seeking to analyze the penetration of its radio programs to see which communities their messages are reaching and how they can better target their information.