

# Editorial

## QUALITY EDUCATION: THE ESSENTIAL CATALYST FOR NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**I**n January 2010, Bob Tortora of the Gallup poll organisation reported that sub-Saharan Africans were struggling financially even as their GDP was growing. He noted that: "across the countries Gallup surveyed, median GDP per capita increased from \$1,315 in 2007 to \$1,610 in 2010. However, even in some of the countries with healthy economic growth, such as Ghana, the percentage 'finding it very difficult' to live on present household income continued to increase. Ghanaians were three times more likely to report struggling this much in 2010 (34%) than they were in 2007(11%)". Ghana is indeed in need of significant economic growth.

How can this situation be explained, especially in a cocoa-rich and gold-rich developing country like Ghana, with its newly-found rich oil deposit?

What immediately comes to mind is that the country does not have the human capital that could compete successfully in a globalised world where so much depends on a nation's ability to operate in the current knowledge-based economy. The relevance of the question

stems from the fact that competitiveness in the global economy is about how a nation manages the totality of its resources and competences. Thus, attention is naturally drawn to a number of factors that might be responsible for the nation's weak economy.

In the absence of adequate or conclusive data from research, we can be excused to assume, with some reasonable degree of certainty, that education – and for that matter, quality education – is a key factor in any equation that could be proposed to explain our nation's meagre or declining economic prosperity. The growth of the economy of the West, from the industrial age until now and more recently the experience of the Asian tigers, give us a measure of confidence to make such an assertion. This is further strengthened when one refers to the policy initiatives outlined in the country's 2010 education budget. The content of that budget notes that despite improvements in access and participation at all levels of the educational system, "the biggest challenge is the quality of education and the widening disparity in the provision of public education, specifically basic education, across

the various districts in Ghana. A major concern with respect to basic education is the inadequacy of infrastructure as well as qualified teachers especially in the deprived schools”.

Like many, if not most of the other nations in Africa south of the Sahara, Ghana's educational system can boast of an education sector that includes basic education – that is, pre-school, primary, and junior high - and secondary and tertiary education institutions. All forms of education and training are provided, some formal and others non-formal, but in poorly resourced physical facilities. Books that deal with scientific and technological studies are hard to come by in the country. The content of the curriculum lacks innovations and approaches to creative ways of teaching and learning. Classrooms and physical science laboratories are poorly designed, resourced, and maintained. Student-teacher ratios in the classrooms are too high to allow for meaningful teaching and learning to be practised. Above all, adequately trained teachers in the education system as a whole are woefully inadequate. Even in the tertiary institutions, which demand teachers with high qualifications and research skills, Ghanaian institutions generally fall below the level needed to impact Ghana's economy.

How then can the Ghana Government claim to spend a large percentage of its budget on education year after year? In fact, according to available data, “actual education spending as a percentage of the total GDP has been on the rise since 2006. The 2008 figure is about 9.9%, which is in excess of three percentage points over the Education for All Initiative minimum”.

However, “education expenditure as a share of total payments as well as the total discretionary

payment has been on the decline since 2006, and the budgeted figures for 2009 and 2010 show a further decline” (Ghana's Education Sector Annual Review 2009, and National budgets, 2009 and 2010). In 2010, in particular, it was foreseen that 95% of the budget would be channelled to wages and salaries, service and administration would cost 2% and 2.6 % respectively, leaving only 0.3% for investment. Bearing in mind that in 2008, over 28% of all basic schools in the country were in need of repairs”, and “a total of 5,230 basic schools in the country have classes under trees, the above level of investment in “real” education makes it difficult for anyone to feel optimistic about the chances that Ghana might have to hope to realise in the improvement of the quality of education required to impact the economy significantly.

It is said that “quality in education is a concept which is rapidly evolving over time, but also has different emphasis according to different national, education sectors, cultures, and different players in the education system – students, teachers, policymakers, the business community, unions, etc”. Thus, education should not be regarded as a process of consumption, but as a larger process of interaction and collaboration that aims to give learners (including adults in continuing education) opportunities for personal development and the confidence to adapt to new situations as well as change them, whenever necessary.

It is easy for us to think that Ghana is so far behind its economic targets that we should make improvements in the quality of education by addressing such issues as the following:

- Which sector of education requires the highest injection of funding to make an

impact on the economy, if education requires substantial government subsidy?

- How much funding really goes into the materials required for teaching and learning at every level of the educational system?
- How much funding is being invested into the training of the teachers?
- What calibre of teachers are required for the various levels of the formal educational system?
- How much funding is being put into research activities at various levels of the educational system?
- What type of education and teaching methodology are needed to help develop the economy?
- What strategies should be put in place to achieve the right level of collaboration required between industry and educational institutions?

However, while the above challenges require immediate consideration, focusing mainly on them could be tantamount to making minor, incremental changes and improvements only. In reality we are so far behind our competitors in the economic race that we need to frog leap; we need to hack, "not at the branches, but at the root" of the weak economy. Together with the rest of the world, we have, whether we like it or not, arrived from the hunter and gatherer age to an era where an illiterate person is no longer the man who cannot read or write. We are all supposed to be in the knowledge worker epoch where the illiterate person is now the "person who cannot learn, relearn, or unlearn"! Hence, as the futurists tell us, there should be a new educational paradigm to train future leaders in all fields. This paradigm compels us to develop five minds for the future: disciplined, synthesising, creative, respectful, and ethical

minds. Howard Gardner explains the five minds thus: Apart from the need to be an expert in at least one area and being recognised as such, an educated and, or trained person needs to be able to gather information from disparate sources to put together in ways that can be communicated to other persons. Also, because of the role computers are playing in every human endeavour these days, there is need for a nation to produce leaders who are able to think, as it were, "outside the box". Moreover, because the world has become diverse, every person must learn to respect those who differ from him or her. Further, as citizens and as workers, everyone has to think beyond his/her own self-interest and do what is right under all circumstances.

Additionally, it should be underscored that since it is the human factor that will play the pivotal role in national competitiveness, the training of leaders who would shoulder responsibility for running educational institutions merits great attention. Indeed, the gurus of leadership/management are constantly reminding us that everything rises or falls with leadership. Thus every effort should be made to train and retain leaders of integrity and discipline, who are creative, able to synthesise ideas and facts from piles of information, human capital who respect diversity in a globalised world, and who are at the same time, ethical. Quality education must provide learners with this knowledge, skill, and attitude. Equally important, Ghana's education requires for its competitiveness leaders who, in the line of thinking of Robert Greenleaf, would promote Servant leadership as a business model. This should be the paradigm shift Ghana would need if quality education is to catalyse and sustain the country's economic development.