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MISSION STATEMENT

The Africa Faith and Justice Network, inspired by the Gospel and informed by Catholic Social Teaching, educates and advocates for just relations with Africa.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Moved to action by their personal experiences in Africa, three Catholic missionary congregations namely the Missionaries of Africa, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritains), and the Society of African Missions, founded the Africa Faith and Justice Network (AFJN) in 1983 to transform United States policy towards Africa and her people. Since that time, membership has grown and remains committed in faith to advocate in Washington, DC for U.S. relations with Africa that foster justice and peace, and to educate the public across the United States on the truth about Africa.

A Government's Band-aid Solution to Education

By: Marian Amonoo-Afari; intern

In June 2014 Ghana was granted a \$156 million loan by the World Bank on top of previous unpaid loans from the same institution. The loan was for improving the education sector mainly secondary education. The way the loan was to be distributed according the World Bank was that \$125.1 million would go towards the students themselves and \$15 million will go to improving the education system and school projects. By July 2014 many of the citizens had questions about the loan distribution, and when asked about it the President of Ghana, John Dramani Mahama declared that he had used the money to buy sanitary pads for senior high school girls. Certainly there is more to what the government is telling the public.

According to the World Bank's brief on the agreement 60% of the loan should be devoted towards granting scholarships to female students. The rest of the loan was meant for the construction of secondary schools in areas that school facilities are inaccessible. In addition, the loan was to be used to re-evaluate the education system to provide students and teachers with updated materials especially for math and science classes. Since the only condition attached to the loan was for the government to ensure effective results the government had room for flexibility yet they chose to spend the money on sanitary pads.

President Mahama's decision to spend \$100,000 annually for 3 years on sanitary pads, have stirred up many controversial issues yet his major support comes from the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition, who believe that the sanitary pads will boost the rate of female school enrollment. The truth of the matter is that the female population faces much serious issues that prevent them from going to school than just the need of sanitary pads. In 2013 the Journal of Education Practices did a research on the causes of female school dropout in Africa. The article asserts that female schools dropout is due in part to lack of female teachers that students can look up to as role models, teen pregnancy, and also the role of parents. The government on the other hand is focusing on buying pencils for students as one citizen pointed out and buying pads for girls.

Education in Ghana faces more serious problems that affect the rate of enrollment. One of them is the delay of teachers' salaries sometimes for two to three months. Teachers often take time off especially in the rural areas because the government failed to pay them. Some students and their parents view going to a classroom with no teacher as a waste of time and would rather spend their time with their parents working to earn money for the family.

Women have been fighting for the right to education for decades and their grievances have never included asking the government to buy them sanitary pads. The need for clean sanitary facility in any given school is a necessity for both men and women. Good sanitary conditions in schools have many benefits among them public health.

Another way that the allocation of the loan can be looked at is whether the government is in the position to take on the role of providing sanitary pads for students. Many female students tend to miss class 5 times a month on average because of their menstrual cycle alone, and this argument is supported by many countries in Africa. From a female student's point of view this argument holds true but I still do not believe that it is the national government's role to provide sanitary pads for students especially when their economy is not in a good shape.

Unlike Ghana, many Sub-Saharan Africa and Middle East and North African (MENA) countries have taken the initiative to provide alternative sanitary items for females. In East Africa, many countries are teaching students how to make their own sanitary pads. Projects like these cost less since all the materials are found around their own homes and all their efforts are based solely on the community. The pads that students make are sometimes reusable so it saves money rather than buying disposable sanitary pads from the store.

The issue of education was one of the political talking points of the presidential election campaign in 2008 and 2012. Although primary education is compulsory and free, parents still tend to withdraw their children from school and put them to work since they cannot afford secondary school education anyway. In general secondary school enrollment depends on primary school enrollment. Likewise, if female students are not enrolling in primary school in the first place, the chances are that there will be less female students enrollment in secondary school.

This band-aid solution that the government has adopted is far from an investment. It is a waste of money. Spending \$300,000 on sanitary pads is not an effective way for the government to spend its funds. To increase female students enrollment the government must create a gender friendly environment, provide a serious awareness on cultural discrimination when it come girls' education, sexual harassment, more employment opportunities for teachers who will become role models for girls. Sanitary pads are definitely a short term and band –aid to female secondary school enrollment.