



PAMBE GHANA

Partnership for Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education in Ghana

A project to improve primary education quality and access in rural communities

PAMBE Ghana, a registered non-profit organisation in the US and Ghana, is providing an innovative education program to over 100 children in a remote rural area of northern Ghana (where no school existed before). Rainbow of Hope plans to provide \$9,100 CAD a year for 2 years, representing 15% of the PAMBE model school budget. We encourage and thank you for your support.



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1. Background and Context: Why is support needed?

Northern rural Ghana remains far less developed than the south and has very few education resources. Enrolment is low and the dropout rate is high. Children, especially girls, are still kept at home to help with the household work.

Most children in rural northern Ghana speak only their mother tongue when they start school. From kindergarten to grade 3 the official medium of instruction is the local mother tongue. In reality no local language learning materials for pre-kindergarten up to Grade 3 exist, nor have teachers been trained in how to teach in the mother tongue. This means that children are tested almost exclusively in English, in both oral and written forms. They must learn to speak, read and write using a foreign, unfamiliar language (English) to be successful in school. "Learning" is, mostly rote, with little real understanding; children often acquire just enough to get through the tests.

The consequences are indicated in an evaluation of pilot projects by USAID/Ghana and the Ghanaian Ministry of Education. The report revealed a crisis in reading comprehension in public schools - less than 10% of sixth graders can read with grade level understanding.

The situation is particularly dire for the Mamprusi ethnic group who live in one of the most underserved areas. The Mamprusi have one of the lowest literacy rates. According to Ghana Education Service, statistics indicate the literacy rate in the Mampruli language is below 1%, and in English, it is below 10%. School enrolment is less than 69% of eligible children. In more remote areas, there are even no schools or teachers. Where there are schools, dropout rates are about 10% and grade repeat rates are very high. Only 60% of the teachers are trained, and the pupil-teacher ratio is 55:1. The results published in September 2011 for the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) for East Mamprusi District indicated that only 40.3% of the 1,406 students who wrote the exam passed (and were eligible for senior high school).

The weak foundation of the early school years places children of poor rural families at a serious disadvantage. Only a minority of children passing primary school manage to get into high school. This very low pass rate means that many students drop out; a few struggle on to get into high school but often without success. Their education level is too poor to enable them to continue formal education or find jobs. Yet they no longer fit in their communities. This has created a vicious cycle which further discourages parents from sending their children to school.

2. How did PAMBE Ghana get started?

PAMBE Ghana came into being in 2007, founded by Alice Azumi Iddi-Gubbels and the strong support of many fellow teachers, and parents of her students in Oklahoma City, where she served as a teacher for a number of years. Alice has dual nationality, Canadian and Ghanaian. In 2000, she moved to Oklahoma City, following her Canadian husband who had obtained a job there. Following her passion, she went back to university to complete a Masters degree in Early Childhood education (her second Masters). Thereafter, she began teaching at a local school.

Alice's interest in promoting bi-lingual education, starting with mother tongue education, was sparked by her studies at university, but was rooted in her own primary school experience. Alice was born and grew up in a rural village, Bongbini, in the East Mamprusi district of northern Ghana. When she started school, the use of the local language (Mampruli) was prohibited. Alice and her fellow pupils were instructed entirely in English, a completely foreign language. Pupils were punished if they used their own language in school.

This made school a misery for most of the young students, and they dropped out as soon as they could. This was especially the case for girls, who were needed at home to help with labour necessary to sustain livelihoods. For Alice, she continued school only because of her father's insistence. She initially disliked school so much that she skipped classes for two months in the fourth grade preferring to help her aunts in their domestic chores. But when Alice's father learned of her truancy, he admonished her and sent her back to school.

Of over 100 children that first started going to school in her village, Alice was only one of three who completed high school, and continued to university. Today, she is one of the very few in her native district in Ghana with a university education.

Based on what she had learned in North America, Alice became convinced that she had a special role to play back in Ghana. She developed a vision and a strategy for reforming and improving primary education in her native district. Encouraged by her former university professors, as well as the parents of her students and fellow teachers, family and friends in Canada and the US, Alice created the Partnership for Mother Tongue-based Bilingual Education (PAMBE Ghana). She resigned her teaching job, and moved back to the small village in Ghana, where she was born.

3. PAMBE Ghana Program Model and Strategy

Beginning with the Mamprusi districts, one of the poorest areas in Ghana, PAMBE Ghana has started to develop a quality basic education model that is accessible and culturally relevant to underserved local communities. This model, developed by PAMBE Ghana, integrates three key components:

1. mother-tongue as the initial language of instruction to which English is added
2. Montessori-based principles and child-centred learning methods and approach
3. community involvement and cultural relevance

PAMBE Ghana's education model links culture, language, literacy, and experiential learning methods, adapted to the Ghanaian rural context, to achieve superior educational outcomes.

Following the principle of “starting small, starting well”, PAMBE Ghana launched its bilingual model school in a remote rural area of 2 villages in East Mamprusi district. The 1st pre-kindergarten class began in October 2008 with 40 children. Every year since, PAMBE Ghana has added a new grade to the school, preparing the next level of innovative learning materials and training local teachers through intensive workshops and in-class mentoring.

The objective is to have a proven model of high quality primary school education covering all classes from pre-kindergarten to Grade 6 over 8 years. In September 2011, PAMBE initiated year 4 of its longer term eight year strategy. For each new school year, almost all learning materials for the national curriculum have to be developed from scratch, since very little exists in the local language.

PAMBE Ghana has based its model on the extensive research which shows that children learn more effectively when learning and teaching begin with and build on what they already know (i.e. their own language). Studies show that children who start school where their mother tongue is the language of instruction (L1) learn more quickly, demonstrate more self-confidence and continue to perform better than those who start in an unfamiliar language (L2). Students who build on their L1 learn a second language faster than those who start school in an unfamiliar language, as they are able to apply their language learning skills from their first language to learning a new language. More importantly, a child’s identity and sense of self is intimately tied to their language and culture.

Furthermore, children learn more effectively when they are actively involved in the learning process: in a nurturing environment that encourages exploration and learning through and from experience. This “child-centred”, culturally relevant approach is much more effective than the current “learning by rote” approach that is widely applied in northern Ghana.

It also makes the experience of going to school much more enjoyable for children, thereby reducing dropout rates. Half way through the development of its innovative approach to learning, the PAMBE Ghana model school has 101 pupils. Not a single pupil has dropped out in 4 years. PAMBE Ghana’s experience indicates that using L1 has built trust, initiative, creativity, active student interest and involvement. It has contributed to creating synergy among families, community, and school, partly because the curricula are based on the local language and knowledge. This enables non-literate parents to participate and deepens students’ appreciation for their linguistic and cultural heritage.

PAMBE Ghana has been working very closely with the Ghana Education Service (GES), which has recognized the model school. PAMBE’s longer term strategy, after fully developing its educational model, is to expand its impact by supporting interested public schools throughout the Mamprusi district to apply and adapt its methodology.

4. Objectives and Activities for the school year 2011-12

PAMBE Ghana is seeking support for 5 key objectives and related activities:

4.1 Achieve high quality educational results:

The overarching objective for the year is to enable all 101 pupils in the different grades from pre-kindergarten to Grade 2 achieve a high level of performance in their learning, without any drop outs. These specific objectives and activities for each grade are identified and presented visually below.

Pre-Kindergarten (KG1).

There was a wide age difference among the 30 KG1 students in the 2010-11 school year. About ten pupils were between 3 - 4 years old, ten were 5 years, and the remaining were six years old at the beginning of the year.



As depicted here, PAMBE Ghana is using a child-centred approach which entails hands-on experiential learning. The classroom environment is set up in a way that activities are accessible to the children. After presentation by the teacher, students are free to choose work in which they are most interested and to work independently or with a friend.



In the pictures above, pre-kindergarten children are engaged in various self-directed exercises that help them develop logical thinking, coordination and independence of thought and decision-making.

Kindergarten (KG2)



In KG level 2, children continue to do self directed learning within an environment designed to enable them to make free choices, under the guidance of the class teacher.

These exercises are located on shelves and involve different “pathways” for learning including drawing, and practical activities in daily living, logical-mathematical thinking and literacy and language development (in mother-tongue).

Grades 1 and 2



The photo above is one of the “pioneers” of the PAMBE Ghana model school, the pupils who started in pre-kindergarten on October 8, 2008! They are going home after their very first day of school, guided by their teacher, Mary Azure. They are now in Primary 2, as seen in the photos below, and writing in their mother tongue about what they have drawn.



In the primary class one and two, the children build on their experiences over the previous two years. They eagerly exercise their emerging literacy and numeracy skills. Social relationships also begin to assume some importance.



In the photo to the left, Haruna and Daniel are playing a game with two dice that help them learn simple addition skills. For example, if the total value of the two dice he has rolled is ten, he must decide which of his playing cards add up to ten. In the photo to the right, three students and teacher Robert Issahaku are playing the “exchange game” which enhances the students’ understanding of the decimal system (exchanging 10 units for one ten, 10 ten bars to hundred, and 10 one hundreds for 1,000).

Finally, in 2011-12, PAMBE Ghana has started, with the help of qualified resource persons, to develop and integrate cultural activities into social studies as part of its innovative model. This entailed including music and dance and creative arts, linked to educational outcomes specified in the national curriculum.

4.2 Foster Community Involvement and Ownership

As in previous years, PAMBE Ghana enabled community leaders to lead the process of selecting the new students by reaching consensus on the number and fair distribution among the different sections and groups in the villages of Bantambari and Bumboazio.

Home-grown School Feeding Program:

Another aspect of community involvement is the school feeding program. Led by the PTA, Executive, parents reach agreement on the kind and amount of locally grown food items to contribute for each child.

Currently, parents contribute one “bowl” (a local measure of about 4lbs) of corn, peanuts,



beans, soya beans and millet per child to provide lunch at school for all the children. Food items are collected by community leaders at the time of harvest of each crop.

Parents set criteria for managing their contributions and sanctions for defaulters.



Parents in Bantambaari, a participating village farther in the interior, provide fuel wood throughout the year, bringing firewood on a donkey cart.



As illustrated in these two photos, women volunteers from the village of Bumboazio take turns preparing lunch for the children.



PAMBE Ghana supplements the communities’ efforts with non locally-grown items like rice, gari (roasted cassava grits), and cooking oil, dried fish and other ingredients, as well as fruits in season

Lunch for the children and by the children



The primary grade 1 and 2 students are being given responsibility for serving the food, making sure that everyone gets a fair share. They take turns getting lunch ready as well as cleaning up afterwards. This is one of their responsibilities they take seriously and currently enjoy.



4.3 Ensure School based Preventive and basic Health Care

PAMBE Ghana will negotiate with the Langbinsi Health Clinic to provide health screening and treatment of ringworm and intestinal worms as well as provide immunization against measles, meningitis and other communicable diseases at the school site.

PAMBE Ghana will again pay the national Health Insurance premium for all students, and staff and their uninsured dependents. This covered the basic cost of health care services available in this part of Ghana.



4.4 Improve School Infrastructure

PAMBE Ghana needs support to complete a classroom addition and to purchase additional furniture and playground equipment to absorb the new enrolment. Other planned expenses include completing the newly installed water system (harvesting rainwater from the roof) and installing a solar system and computer (there is no electricity in this area).

4.5 Improve Teacher professional skills and performance

Alice will continue to provide in-service training workshops and in-classroom support and mentoring, especially to Primary 1 & 2 teachers. Because of the remoteness, PAMBE Ghana recruited locally based high school leavers as teachers. While PAMBE's teachers have potential and commitment, they need considerable guidance and support in the classroom since they have not had previous formal teacher training nor experience in innovative approaches in this model school.

PAMBE Ghana is also supporting three of the teachers and an administrator to undertake university level distance learning courses to improve their knowledge and skills, and professional development.

Another objective of professional development of teaching staff is to upgrade computer skills. This year, PAMBE will change the current office in the new building into a computer room and provide opportunity for teachers to learn basic computer skills.

5. Who will benefit from this Program?

The 101 children currently enrolled in the PAMBE Ghana model school and their families and community are the main beneficiaries of the current program. In fact, the benefits go beyond the present, and reaches far into the future.

6. How will the Program be Monitored and Evaluated?

Alice Azumi Iddi-Gubbels, as the Executive Director, has the primary responsibility to ensure proper monitoring of the educational program and assessment of learning outcomes. Last year, with assistance from highly qualified members of her board, Alice developed and applied a process of continuous observation and assessment of child learning outcomes, based on multiple criteria, and trained the teachers in its use.

PAMBE Ghana will provide narrative and financial reports to Rainbow of Hope for Children as part of its project agreement, and it is hoped someday Rainbow of Hope delegates will be able to visit the project and meet the teachers and students.



Here, using simple assessment instruments, Alice is making an informal assessment of a child's level of understanding different concepts such as quantity-numeral association, phonemic awareness, ability to write words, simple phrases, and complete sentences and a full meaningful paragraph in the first language.

PAMBE Ghana also has plans to seek academic assistance to establish the basis for rigorous evidence-based research and documentation system, to assess and track four key components of its innovative model:

- Educational outcomes, children's performance;
- Portfolios for continued assessment of students' progress, as well as teachers themselves;
- school – community relations and local attitudes to education in general and mother tongue instruction in particular;
- organisational development/local capacity building for an improved education system.

7. Qualifications and Experience of PAMBE Ghana leadership

Alice Azumi Iddi-Gubbels is the founder and Executive Director of PAMBE Ghana. She brings a unique combination of personal and professional experiences, commitment and passion to PAMBE Ghana. She has lived, and continues to experience through her extended family in northern Ghana, the impact of the current education system on poor families and communities. Alice Azumi Iddi-Gubbels was born in the small village of Bongbini in a rural area of north eastern Ghana; she is the first of 17 children in her family. She grew up in a traditional, tightly knit subsistence farming community where relationships and solidarity were paramount.



Alice was among the first in her village to go to school, and is one of the fortunate few from her area to receive university education. She has a diploma in Home Science and Nutrition from the University of Ghana, Masters in Social Development Planning and Management from the University of Wales – United Kingdom. She also has a B.A. and a Masters in Early Childhood Education from Oklahoma City University, as well as Montessori Teaching Certification in preschool and lower elementary education.

Alice is based full time in northern Ghana to directly lead the program, oversee the development of learning materials in the mother tongue, and train and mentor local teachers in child centred principles and practical methods.

8. Governance of PAMBE Ghana

PAMBE Ghana is registered as a non-profit (501©3) in the US. PAMBE Ghana is fortunate to have an “all volunteer” board of committed and qualified individuals from various fields, including non profit management, the legal field, academia, the teaching profession, fundraising, and a CPA charter certified accountant who reviews the accounts. The board provides fiduciary oversight, and policy direction to the Executive Director. It approves the annual budget and raises most of the funds from individual donors, using photos, stories and reports sent from the school. Once a year, Alice goes to the US to help with fundraising.

In Ghana, Alice also registered PAMBE Ghana and established an Advisory Council of well placed and qualified Ghanaians, who are local stakeholders who share PAMBE’s vision of reforming basic education. The members come from the fields of education, language development, culture and district level government. The Advisory Council provides local guidance, support, and legitimacy to the PAMBE Ghana program.

9. Budget and Proposed Use of Funds

PAMBE Ghana’s budget for Sept 2011to August 2012 is the equivalent of \$ 60,585 USD. Office administration is only 5% of the total program. Local costs for public relations and fundraising is 4%. The rest of the budget consists entirely of program expenses for the running of the model school, development of learning materials, teacher professional development and training, teacher salaries and benefits, and school infrastructure.

10. Conclusion

Support for PAMBE Ghana’s innovative program will enable over 100 children in a remote, underserved area in northern Ghana get access to high quality education. Beyond this, support will enable PAMBE Ghana continue to develop its model of quality and accessible primary education for widespread expansion in the Mamprusi district in future years.

Rainbow of Hope for Children and PAMBE encourage people in Canada and United States, as well as Ghana to help fund this exceptional program to improve the education of these children in Ghana. Donations to PAMBE Ghana through Rainbow of Hope are eligible for an income tax deductible receipt. Please send your gift to: Rainbow of Hope, PO. Box 2883, Wainwright, AB, Canada T9W 1S7. Donations can be made on line through www.CanadaHelps.org. You may also use the donation form provided. Thank you for your support.