

GHANA'S POVERTY SITUATION IN FOCUS: COCOA360'S SOLUTION AT HAND!

Ghana is the second largest producer of cocoa in the world with an estimate of about 1.6 million cocoa farmers. It is however sad to note that no cocoa producing community has been able to show anything concrete for its efforts. Most cocoa growing communities are impoverished – they are riddled with bad road networks, poor health delivery system and weak educational systems.

Cocoa360 formerly known as Tarkwa Breman Community Alliance (TBCA) is a 501c3 non-profit that has been giving the people of Tarkwa- Breman and its seven neighboring communities quality health care services and education since 2016. We use cocoa plantations to provide and sustain educational and healthcare services in rural Ghana. We have pioneered the "sweat-for-impact" model where in exchange for tuition-free education and subsidized medical care, community members provide labor on Cocoa360's community-run cocoa farm. The profits from cocoa sales are then used to self-sustain the operations of Cocoa360's Tarkwa Breman Girls school and Community Clinic.

At Cocoa360, we believe that education fundamentally shapes a child's lifelong health and impacts their ability to make sound health decisions. We therefore go beyond medical treatment – focusing on education for the most vulnerable target of risky health behaviors and infections – young girls. Our "Health Equity Campus" – a tuition-free girls' school and community clinic situated amid our 40-acre cocoa plantation, combines prevention programs and treatment measures to form an innovative approach to health equity.

According to Edgar Cooke, Sarah Hague and Andy McKay (2016), Western Region is one of the 4 regions that saw their poverty depth rise since 2006. This means that not enough efforts are being made to improve the lives of the poor in the region. Glewwe and Twum- Baah (1991) provide a thorough analysis in the third Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS3). In that report, they showed that the incidence of poverty varies across employment categories with agricultural workers being among the poorest. Other GLSS reports also point to the fact that inequality in Ghana is increasing at an alarming rate. In general, these conclusions about welfare in Ghana do not only apply to GLSS3 but to the later GLSS results as well. For instance, GSS (2007) reports a higher incidence of poverty among rural residents compared to urban residents during the 1992 to 2006 period for GLSS3 – GLSS5. This has made many experts like Adjasi and Osei (2007) to conclude that poverty in Ghana is a rural phenomenon

Rural poverty is a very serious phenomenon especially among rural farmers or agricultural workers. Tarkwa- Breman and its surrounding communities though major cocoa growing communities, are no exception when it comes to the level of poverty in rural Ghana.

At Cocoa360, we think that it is unpardonable for cocoa farmers to be living in poverty while their “sweat and toil” make it possible for the Ghanaian economy to thrive. This made us take it upon ourselves to dedicate our activities toward educating young girls who are mostly victims of the poverty situation since they are mostly pulled out of the classroom while their brothers are left to have at least basic education. The result of that action is teenage parenthood by most of these young girls who cannot first of all take care of themselves thereby putting their lives and that of their wards in risk. The final outcome is that the vicious cycle of poverty continues in such families and ultimately the community.

We have currently enrolled about 90 girls in our school, with our aim to increase the number to 120 by the end of September, 2018. In less than six months of operation, we have seen over 800 patients and delivered about 30 babies at our community clinic. Annually, we envision attending to over 1000 malaria cases, immunizing about 500 babies and directly serving over 2500 people within the 8 communities we serve.

Thus far, we have acquired a 12-acre cocoa farm with matured crops which we began harvesting in fall 2017. The acquired farm was used as a demo farm for our sustainability model ahead of the gestation period of our intended 35-acre cocoa farm in 2022. While Researchers from Google and The Wharton School estimated that our 35-acre cocoa farm can generate \$68,919 in revenue per annum to sustain our operating budget of \$48,683, it will interest you to note that we currently have about 50 acres of land to set up a cocoa farm which means with the needed support we are sure on schedule to wean ourselves completely off donor support by 2023.

It will be a great privilege to have your outfit visit our project site and see for yourself how we are putting into practice our unique model in rural Ghana.

Your visit to this community will give you a first-hand information on the ground about our pioneering model of self-sustainability while encouraging NGOs like ours who have decided to help fight this canker the hope that their works are being noticed and appreciated.

References.

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