

Dear Friends,

The purpose of these 'Back to Basics' articles, beginning in May 2018, is to engage my readers in the conditions and circumstances under which the people of Akrapma and their immediate neighbors live and function. Last month I explained that the Ghana Education system has in place tools that prepare the students for the conditions prevailing generally in the country.

Over the past decades there have been some changes in the Ghanaian education system. In the 1960's to 1980's the curriculum that began in the primary school (Kindergarten to 6th grade) continued into what was then known as 'technical schools', but were eventually upgraded into what became known as 'polytechnics'. The government of the the first President, Kwame Nkrumah, set up a curriculum that was designed for students like that all over the country. In the school I attended, like all similar schools in the country that used the Education Curriculum provided by the Ministry of Education, from 1961 through 1987, grades 7th through 10th, were known as the 'Middle School'.

There, in the 7th to 10th grades, 'vocation classes' were made available to ALL students. Subjects in farming, fishing, tailoring, cooking, carpentry, etc. were taught. Class topics were determined in relation to the location of the school and villages. Thus, for a school in the northern part of the country not close to the sea, 'fishing' would not be part of the subjects taught. The students of Akrapma would be in the category of schools where farming would be one of the main subjects taught. The 'technical' schools and subsequently the 'polytechnics', as you would presume, focused on more 'scientific' approaches in farming, tailoring, cooking, etc., to maximize the gains from the 'primary' school education. The technical schools awarded certificates while the polytechnic, diplomas.

At that time in history the universities were thought to be set up for high academic work. So for those students who could not gain admission into secondary schools or universities, upon completing the 'Middle School' - 10th grade - were able to set up trade shops for themselves to make a living.

From 1987 going forward, with the introduction of the Junior Secondary School (JSS) system patterned after the American System, there was a paradigm shift. It concentrated on providing children, irrespective of their location and origin in the country, to be taught a little bit of each of the subjects. So, should they relocate and encounter the economy and circumstances prevailing, they could hopefully fit in and function. This led to the setting up of small shops for sewing (seamstresses and tailors), carpentry, mechanics (fitting shops as are still called and known), small restaurants (known as chop-bars), by the graduates of the middle and technical/polytechnic schools.

The universities were left for those who chose to learn medicine and law, etc. Unfortunately, the JSS system appears not to have produced the required result. The consequence of this is the phenomenon on our streets known as 'Street Children', many, many of whom are graduates of the JSS system. Several NGOs are all over the place set up ostensibly to provide facilities and logistics to any child who wants to be helped. If you want to read more about the 'Street Children', please see the Ghana Archive on the FLC website and look for my February 2017 article (Going to the Market - part 4).

It is my hope that the School Garden will help the children who graduate from Akrapma and are unable to continue education in the tertiary institutions, to see that 'going back to the land' is not a last resort, but the best alternative, to provide for themselves. The God-given land is available, so the children only need to be taught the 'technique' and to have a little resolve to make things happen.

The School Garden will be the 'laboratory' on the ground, so they can be taught to 'free themselves' from the frustrations of eking out a living from the already depleted soil. In this effort practical as well as 'scientific' methods will be introduced as tools for the children to apply themselves to this project. Practical in the sense that they will be taught to appreciate that it is still productive and profitable to use ordinary tools (cutlasses, hoes, axes, etc.) in working on the land while employing improved methods (manuring, fertilization, simple irrigation, etc.) as the science of farming.

I believe fervently that the 'raised' gardens will work, that it will be an exciting and productive adventure with the school and the children. Our 'raised' gardens do not have wheels but do have very high fencing on all four sides to keep out animals. My only concern is the cost of the wood needed to raise additional 'boxes' to make the project viable and sustainable. My hope is to add 3 more to the one we just built. The sawn timber boards sold on the market are expensive, particularly the kind that will last, in spite of being in constant touch with water and the harsh manure. If you would like to help support this special project please talk to Pastor Rosy or the Ghana Committee.

In closing, I'd like to send a special "Thank You" to Brian Wentzell! Brian has created and kept the Ghana Archive up-to-date on the FLC website. The fact that he has ALL of my articles posted online allows me the freedom to refer to old articles and send our readers there as reference material when needed, or to catch up on articles they have missed. It is a great help to me and to our congregation and readers! You can access the archive on the FLC website; click on Outreach, scroll down to Ghana Mission, and to the direct left of that you will see Ghana Archive. Thank you Brian, for your help with the Ghana Mission!

Shalom,
Pastor Ben