

Wesleyan University

Young Achievers Project: Expanding access to higher education in Northern Ghana

Project Dates: May 28-August 24, 2019

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Project Country: Ghana



Background

Northern Ghana has some of the brightest students in the country but years of economic stagnation and a systemic lack of opportunities has seen many students from the region struggle to transition from high school into tertiary institutions. Many northerners work as subsistence farmers or government workers but can barely make ends meet. A 2016 report by UNICEF on poverty and inequality in Ghana revealed that the Northern Region alone makes up the largest number of poor people (1.3 million) of any of Ghana's ten regions ([Source: UNICEF 03/2016](#)). A drive beyond the bustling Tamale Central (the capital of Northern Region) reveals a grim reality of poverty, deprivation, and a sense of insecurity that result from the general lack of opportunities, particularly for youth in the region. As of August 2014, Upper East, Upper West, and the Northern Region (the three regions that make up Northern Ghana) accounted for more than 50 percent of those living in extreme poverty (i.e. people living on less than ¼ of a dollar per day) in Ghana ([Source: GLSS 6 Report 08/2014](#)).

The impact of the economic situation in the region has greatly affected the rate of college enrollment among student in the region. Although around 80% of children of school going ages (6 -14yrs) are enrolled in the free education program at the various public schools in the region, many do not go beyond high school because of the financial barriers they face ([Source: UNESCO 07/2016](#)). The most recent report from the Ghana Statistical Service shows that only 6% of high school graduates in the region are able to enroll in college after high school ([Source: GLSS 6 Report 08/2014](#)). Some of the unfortunate students who do not have the means to further their education find themselves migrating to the south for better economic opportunities. Most of these high school graduates, particularly the girls, find themselves living in urban informal settlements and working as *Kayayei* (head porters) for eleven or so hours in the sweltering heat, barely making a dollar per day. It is estimated that there are over 160,000 young girls from Northern Ghana working as *Kayayei* in Accra (the capital of Ghana) alone ([Sources: CSIS 2017](#)).

We believe that increasing access to higher education in Northern Ghana can break barriers to economic development and help ameliorate conditions that lead to conflict. For this reason, my team and I created the Young Achievers project, an initiative to provide a platform for students, particularly those in deprived communities in Northern Ghana, to explore the numerous scholarship and funding opportunities that are available to them within Ghana and beyond to help them pursue higher education. We firmly believe that this project will help increase students' participation in higher education in the region, which will help reduce poverty rates, mass migration, and help move the region towards a more sustainable peace.

Project Summary

The aim of the Young Achievers project is to expose disadvantaged students in Northern Ghana to available scholarship opportunities and provide them with the free resources they need to be successful applicants. This project will enable students to learn the rudiments of scholarship application and receive one-on-one mentorship to help them navigate the rigorous processes involve in scholarship application.

Objective

- To increase student participation in higher education in Northern Ghana by providing high school students with the resources and mentorship they need to access the numerous scholarship opportunities available to them within Ghana and beyond.

Project Details

For the past two summers, the Young Achievers team has worked on a pilot project in Northern Ghana. The pilot scholarship workshops have drawn over 6,000 participants from ten different high schools in the region. The success of the program has enabled us to form partnerships with the Ghana Ministry of Education, the Scholarship Secretariat, and EducationUSA. These partnerships have granted us access to the information we need as well as the schools we hope to work with this summer. For this project, we will organize scholarship workshops and student-led panel discussions on scholarships and college applications in 20 high schools in Tamale, Wa, and Bolgatanga, the three main cities that makeup Northern Ghana. These workshops will explore topics such as government and corporate scholarships, college scholarships and applications, online funding platforms, as well as scholarship opportunities from foreign embassies, religious-based organizations, Trusts, NGOs, and Foundations. In addition, we will hold information sessions to train students on how to research and apply for scholarships online. Integral to this workshops is a printed Scholarship Guide which we collaborated with the Ghana Scholarship Directory to create. This guide contains 150+ scholarships available to Ghanaian students across Africa and beyond. The information contained in this guide will form the basis of our scholarship workshops and seminars.

The entire project will be in three phases. The first phase (from June 11 - 22) will be a student-led panel discussions on scholarship application. We will have students who are on various scholarships in universities across Africa and beyond share their experiences within the scholarship application process. The aim of this panel is to break the pessimistic view that many students hold when it comes to seeking and applying for scholarships. We believe that by hearing success stories from fellow students, our participants will be inspired to look forward to our scholarship workshops with optimism. We will group the 20 schools into four main groups and have each group gather at one venue for the student panel event. We already have over 20 students in universities here in the U.S and in Ghana who have signed up to be on the panel.

The second phase (from June 25 - July 6) will be a general scholarship seminar where students will learn and explore the various scholarship opportunities available. We will have representatives from the Ghana Scholarship Secretariat, and the Ghana Scholarship Directory take students through their various scholarship programs. We also have Nancy Keteku, the Regional Educational Advising Coordinator of EducationUSA Ghana who will share with students the various scholarship opportunities available to Ghanaian students in the United States. My team and I will also take the students through the other scholarship opportunities we have researched on our own. These seminars will not only expose students to the numerous financial support and scholarship opportunities available but, will also provide them with relevant information about eligibility, required testing, timelines, and other qualifications.

The third and final phase (from July 9 - August 10) will be our scholarship and college application workshops. In these workshops, my team and our trained mentors will take students through the scholarship and college application process for both domestic and foreign colleges. The students will try their hands on scholarship application under the supervision of our mentors. They will receive advice on scholarship essay writing, personal statements, recommendations, extracurricular activities and other relevant information which are key to a successful application. During the final phase our sustainability measures will culminate: We will train 30 volunteers who are also students on various scholarships in universities across the country to run scholarship workshops and offer mentorship to students in our partner schools; we will establish Young Achievers Clubs at our partner schools; and we will create a Scholarship Center where students from all corners of the region can come in and get help on their college and scholarship application, with resource materials and a trained, volunteer resource person.