

CITIZENS' WATCH

QUARTER 4



AMEND PNDC LAW 81 TO REDUCE POLITICAL INFLUENCE IN GHANA COCOBOD LEADERSHIP - GCCP

By Edmond Gyebi (Member, GCCP)

Members of the Ghana Civil-Society Cocoa Platform (GCCP) are calling on the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) and the Parliament of Ghana to amend the laws governing the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD). The group believes that the current arrangement, which places the full authority of appointment in the hands of the President, exposes

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the cocoa sector to unnecessary political influence and undermines continuity and efficiency in the management of the industry.

Under the existing legal framework, the appointment of the COCOBOD CEO is guided by Article 195(1) of the 1992 Constitution, which vests the power to appoint persons to public service offices in the President, acting on the advice of the governing council of the institution and in consultation with the Public Services Commission. In addition, the Ghana Cocoa Board Act, 1984 (PNDCL 81), specifically Section 12(2), states that the Chief Executive of the Board shall be appointed by the President on the advice of the Board and in consultation with the Public Services Commission.

This makes the position a political appointment tied to changes in government.

A recent example is the appointment of the current Acting CEO, Dr. Ransford Anertey Abbey – journalist and administrator, by President John Dramani Mahama in January 2025, which remains subject to the required advice of the Board and the Public Services Commission.

For GCCP members, this underscores the urgent need to review the law and establish an appointment system driven by proven competence, experience, and independence rather than political considerations.

At the 2nd Annual General Meeting of the GCCP held in Kumasi, members expressed



concern that COCOBOD's performance and the welfare of cocoa farmers continue to be affected by shifts in political priorities.

They argued that the leadership of such a sensitive and economically critical institution should not be vulnerable to political changes.

The group is proposing that appointments to the office of CEO and the governing board be made by an independent, non-partisan body. It further recommends that appointees should be individuals who have risen through the ranks of the cocoa sector or who have demonstrated the capacity, experience, and competence to manage effectively.

The Platform announced its intention to petition the Constitutional Review Committee and the Parliament of Ghana to review PNDC Law 81 and related constitutional provisions to ensure that COCOBOD can operate with the independence required to serve the best interests of farmers and the industry at large. They emphasised that Ghana's cocoa sector deserves leadership that is stable, technically competent, and free from political interference.

Madam Harriet Nuamah Agyemang, Country Director for SEND GHANA a encouraged the participants to come out with the best of ideas that will contribute to the growth of the cocoa sector in Ghana and most importantly, local cocoa farmers.



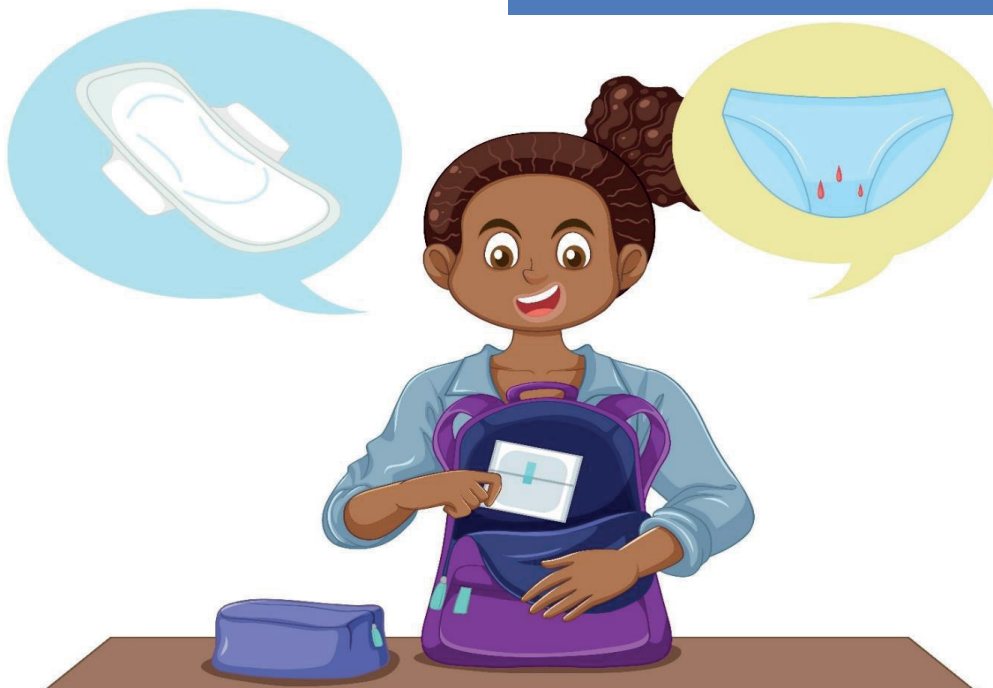
2 YEARS AFTER GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED TAX EXEMPTIONS...SANITARY PADS STILL BEING TAXED

Nana Yaa Acheampong (Intern)

When the Government of Ghana, in November 2023, announced the removal of Value Added Tax (VAT) on locally produced sanitary pads and granted import duty waivers on the raw ma-

terials, civil society celebrated. This was a big win for girls and women; a win for gender equity; and a win for every Ghanaian household.

It was a recognition that menstrual health is a rights, dignity, and equity issue - one that disproportionately affects girls and women,





particularly those in low-income and rural communities.

The announcement followed sustained advocacy by 111 civil society organisations (CSOs) through the Ghana CSOs Platform on the SDGs for the removal of taxes on sanitary pads. Under the 'Don't Tax My Pad' campaign, the CSOs petitioned Parliament and key ministries and picketed Parliament during the reading of the budget.

Two years on, some sanitary pads are still being sold at higher prices, inclusive of taxes. Yes! Quite unfortunate, right?

Since the tax exemptions were put into effect, the Ghana CSOs Platform on the SDGs, with support from youth groups working on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), has been conducting market surveillance to assess whether the tax exemptions are translating into lower prices of sanitary pads. The monitoring was conducted across six regions: Greater Accra, Ashanti, Central, Western, Volta, and Northern.

The average prices of sanitary pads as at 2023 for foreign pads were about GHS 27 to 30 while the locally manufactured pads (Softcare) were averagely GHS 17. The September–October 2024 survey showed that Softcare sanitary pads were still being sold with VAT in many retail outlets. VAT-inclusive packs averaged GHS 16.49, while non-VAT versions sold at an average of GHS 14.86, with prices ranging between GHS 13 and GHS 16.99. Faytex pads, largely used for maternity care, averaged GHS 18.27, while imported brands such as Yazz sold for about GHS 16.



In 2025, the average price of Softcare pads sold with VAT was GHS 13.99, while non-VAT pads averaged GHS 14.89, with some outlets selling packs as high as GHS 17.99. These findings suggest that the tax exemptions are not being applied uniformly in practice.

Again, many retail outlets, particularly mother care shops, do not issue calibrated receipts, making it difficult to verify whether VAT is charged at the point of sale. This lack of transparency weakens enforcement and undermines consumer confidence.

What is also of concern is the continued price advantage of imported sanitary pad brands. Despite import duties, some imported products are sold at lower prices than locally manufactured pads, raising questions about pricing structures, market dynamics, and the effectiveness of incentives meant to support local manufacturers.

The removal of taxes on sanitary pads remains a necessary and commendable step. However, strong enforcement, regular monitoring, and clear accountability mechanisms are needed to ensure that such progressive policies are fully implemented and yield the intended benefits.

For many girls, the cost of sanitary pads still determines whether they attend school during menstruation. For women, it affects health, productivity, and dignity. Ensuring that tax exemptions translate into real affordability is therefore not just a regulatory issue, it is a social justice imperative.



IMPLEMENT FOOD WARNING LABELS NOW TO SAVE LIVES!

Baaba Sam (Field Officer)

Ghanaians are backing calls for the government to implement a mandatory Front-of-Pack Warning Food Labelling (FoPWL) policy in Ghana.

An FoPWL policy would require food manufacturers to put warning labels on the front of their products cautioning consumers about high levels of sugar, salt and fats in the foods.



Speaking at zonal consultative workshops on FoPWL held across the country, participants were unanimous that the time is ripe for the country to have such a policy due to

the rising incidence of overweight, obesity, and diet-related non-communicable diseases, such as hypertension and diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

According to the World Health Organization and other bodies, NCDs account for up to 43% of all deaths in Ghana, a situation that is alarming and needs to be tackled head on. Lifestyle changes, including the transition from the consumption of unprocessed and wholesome meals to the consumption of ultra-processed and packaged foods that are often high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats, have been identified as a major contributing factor to the rise in NCDs.

Participants admitted that the consumption of unhealthy diets was due to the poor food environment and aggressive marketing by industry, as these negatively influence food choices among individuals and families.

“Everywhere around us is bad food. Every store is selling carbonated drinks, biscuits, noodles, candies, name them.



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It's in our neighborhoods, on the streets, in our schools," one participant lamented.

"You come home and, on your TV, it is those foods being advertised over and over again," another participant intimated.

religious bodies, and health experts to discuss what an effective FoPWL policy for Ghana should look like and why the country needs such a policy.

SEND GHANA and GAND collaborated to organize these workshops as part of



Rev. Prince Baidoo, President of the Ghana Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (GAND), emphasized that Ghana's current food environment is fuelling a health crisis and that warning labels were a public health necessity. "With front-of-pack warning labels in place, consumers would be better informed of the dangers of these foods and are more likely to avoid buying unhealthy food products," he noted.

The workshops, which took place in Accra, Hohoe, Tamale, and Kumasi, brought together community members, regulators,

the advocacy for mandatory FoPWL in Ghana.

Participants supported the policy, describing it as timely and essential in tackling the rising trend of unhealthy food consumption across the country. They called on the advocacy team to draw on existing evidence, including recent reports from the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital highlighting the increase in diabetes cases, as reported by Joy FM, to step up pressure for immediate government action.





USING GENDER-RESPONSIVE APPROACHES TO TACKLE CHILD LABOUR IN COCOA COMMUNITIES

Nana Kwesi Barning (Programme Officer)



WORLD DAY AGAINST CHILD LABOR

Image Source: Freepik



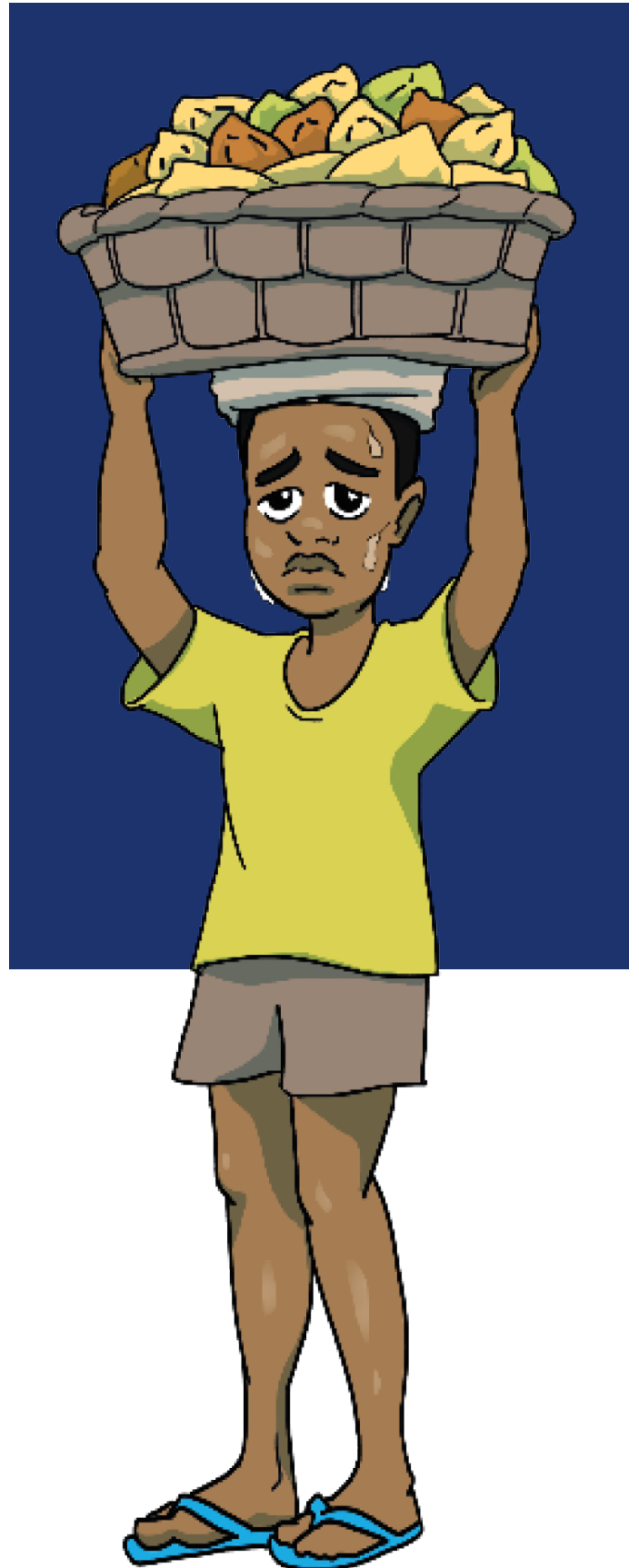
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In the last five years, child labour has remained a persistent national concern, with many Ghanaian children working in mining sites, cocoa farms, on fishing boats, or surviving through street hawking. UNICEF estimates that 21% of Ghanaian children aged 5-17 engage in child labour and 14% are involved in hazardous forms of work. The situation is more pronounced in rural communities, where poverty, traditional expectations, and limited social support systems make children more vulnerable. Although the Children's Act (1998), Act 560, prohibits employing children below the legal age and imposes penalties for hazardous work involving minors, many children continue to be engaged in tasks that place their safety, education, and future at risk.

Addressing this challenge requires more than enforcing laws; it demands a deeper look at how household dynamics shape children's daily realities. This became evident when SEND GHANA, in partnership with DKA Austria, began working in cocoa-growing communities in 2023. What started as a study to understand community perceptions of child labour revealed a bigger issue: many homes were overburdened. In some households, women carried heavy workloads, managing both family care and income-generating activities with very little support. As a result, children often stepped in to fill the labour gaps to ease the financial burden on their families.

The project's community sensitisation activities created the space for families to





Activity Profiling Exercise

reflect on these patterns. Through activity profile exercises, men, women, and children mapped out their daily routines, revealing, sometimes for the first time, how unequal workloads shape family decisions. This process opened the door for discussions

on practical alternatives, encouraging families to reorganise their routines in ways that naturally reduce reliance on children's labour. Without framing it as a strict directive, the conversations introduced the Gender Model Family approach: a concept



that promotes shared responsibility, mutual support, and conscious protection of children's time and wellbeing.

In the two project districts, Twifo Praso and Jukwa, families gradually began adopting these principles. As they identified tasks that could be shared more fairly, many realised that reducing the pressure on children was not only possible but beneficial for the entire household. Twenty-eight families volunteered to set a good example for others by becoming champions of the GMF approach, putting its principles into practice in their homes and developing simple action plans to guide their new routines. These plans were not imposed—they emerged from the families' own reflections and priorities.

Early signs of progress have been quietly encouraging. Social welfare officers supporting the initiative observed that men who previously played limited roles in household care were beginning to take on tasks they had never considered. This shift has created a positive domino effect: as more men contribute to household chores, the burden on women decreases, allowing them to focus on their economic activities and also rest. In turn, this reduces the pressure on children to step in and support their parents, giving them the freedom to remain in school and focus on their education.

As families adjust their routines, children are gradually being relieved from tasks that once consumed their time. When household burdens are shared fairly, children no longer become the default labour source. They can attend school more regularly, rest adequately, and engage in age-appropriate activities.

As these community-level shifts continue to take root, one thing is becoming clear: preventing child labour is not only a policy challenge but a family and social structure issue. The experience from the DKA-supported intervention shows that when households embrace more balanced roles and consciously protect children's time, the pressure that drives children into labour naturally reduces. These early results offer a valuable lesson for the broader fight against child labour. Government agencies, district assemblies, cocoa sector actors, and child protection stakeholders may find it worthwhile to explore and integrate gender-responsive family models like the GMF into their existing frameworks. Strengthening families from within while sustaining policy and enforcement efforts can provide a more grounded, realistic, and sustainable pathway to keeping children safe, in school, and free from labour.



FAIR FUTURES IN PRACTICE: FIVE YEARS OF TRANSFORMING GHANA'S COCOA VALUE CHAIN

Joseph Otchere Osei (Project Officer)

When the FAIR for ALL project was introduced five years ago, it was anchored on a simple but ambitious question: *what would fairness look like if cocoa value chains truly worked for the people who sustain them?* In Ghana, where cocoa farming communities have long faced rights abuses, environmental degradation, weak fiscal accountability, and gender exclusion, the project set out to demonstrate practical pathways toward equity and sustainability.

From the outset, SEND GHANA positioned itself as a bridge between global ambitions and local realities. Working closely with cocoa farmers, women, youth, finan-

cial institutions, private sector actors, regulators, and policymakers, the organisation helped translate the ideals of FAIR for ALL into lived change across cocoa-growing communities.

At its core, FAIR for ALL was structured around four pathways. The first pathway sought to establish sustainable and inclusive business practices. Through co-creation forums, SEND GHANA convened farmers, Licensed Cocoa Buying Companies (LBCs), rural banks, civil society organisations, and district assemblies to design Community Development Agreements. These agreements addressed pressing issues such as child labour, women's empowerment, environmental protection, and youth empowerment.



Alternative Business Practices (ABPs) were introduced, including pod spreading, mechanical weeding, bio-control methods, and agroforestry. Over ninety percent of farmers in project districts adopted these practices, signalling a profound shift toward environmentally conscious farming.

The second pathway focused on building a more responsible private and financial sector. SEND GHANA's partnership with Twifo and South Birim Rural Banks transformed access to credit. Loan thresholds, once limited to GHS 2,000–3,000, were raised to GHS 15,000 per farmer. By 2025, GHS 7.3 million had been disbursed to 1,291 farmers, including 535 women who collectively received GHS 2.69 million. This financial empowerment enabled farmers to expand production, invest in sustainability, and

strengthen household incomes. Women cooperatives were onboarded, and youth were deliberately included in all twenty-five farmer groups, embedding inclusivity into the fabric of rural financing.

At the same time, SEND GHANA facilitated dialogues with Licensed Cocoa Buying Companies (LBCs), leading to commitments on fair weighing practices and Corporate Social Responsibility. For instance, Nyonkopa Cocoa Buying Limited renovated the Nyankomase AME Zion School, transforming overcrowded and dilapidated classrooms into a modern six-block facility with an ICT lab, a canteen, washrooms, and astro turf. This investment improved literacy, teacher commitment, and student engagement, while inspiring alumni contributions to sustain progress. The school now stands as a symbol of



community empowerment and inclusive development. Media campaigns also exposed rights abuses and pressured companies to adopt more transparent and equitable practices.

The third pathway sought to strengthen regulatory frameworks. SEND GHANA engaged institutions such as COCOBOD, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA), and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ). Despite initial resistance, COCOBOD eventually participated in dialogues and training sessions, leading to the adoption of recommendations from research on human rights, living income, environmental due diligence, and gender assessments of LBCs. These developments are expected to inform policy reforms and create

momentum for stronger protections in the cocoa sector.

The fourth pathway addressed fiscal and trade reforms. In collaboration with the Ghana Civil Society Cocoa Platform, SEND GHANA led advocacy campaigns that contributed to a 58.26 percent increase in cocoa producer prices. Media discussions across major outlets amplified farmer voices and pressured policymakers to act. Research on cocoa receipts and spending was converted into accessible formats such as braille and audio to promote transparency and ensure inclusivity. Gender-responsive budgeting workshops trained district officers to embed gender responsiveness into planning cycles, while national dialogues emphasised the importance of integrating gender analysis into public service delivery.



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SEND GHANA's role throughout the project was multifaceted. It acted as a convener, bringing diverse stakeholders together; as an advocate, leading campaigns for fair pricing and gender equity; as a capacity builder, training farmers, civil society actors, and government officers; as an innovator, introducing tools such as the Participatory Performance Tracker and ABP Ambassadors; and as a bridge, connecting farmer voices to national and international policy spaces. The organisation's persistence and creativity ensured that outcomes were not only achieved but sustained.

The successes of FAIR for ALL were remarkable. Loan disbursements grew significantly, infrastructure improved with modern school blocks and ICT facilities in Nyankomase, and environmental practices shifted toward sustainability. Communities developed ownership of outcomes, and civil society was strengthened. Yet challenges remained. COCOBOD's initial reluctance slowed reforms, youth disengagement due to illegal mining undermined sustainability, multinational chocolate companies resisted engagement, and community tensions occasionally erupted.

Macroeconomic pressures linked to Ghana's IMF programme also threatened farmer incomes and project continuity.

Sustainability was embedded through local ownership structures such as ABP Ambassadors, district monitoring groups, and liaison officers. Institutional partnerships with banks and COCOBOD ensured continuity of reforms. Tools such as the Participatory Performance Tracker and gender-responsive budgeting checklists empowered communities to monitor progress independently. Policy shifts in farmgate pricing and fiscal transparency set precedents for future responsiveness. Most importantly, behavioural changes in farming practices and gender inclusion became embedded in community life, ensuring that the gains of FAIR for ALL would endure beyond the project's lifecycle.



OUR HOMES ARE NO MORE SAFE

Eunice Adjei Mensah (Intern)

A new study on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) among youth and Persons with Disability (PWDs) in Ghana has identified homes as the place where most abuses of young people take place, accounting for 65% of reported cases.

This alarming finding highlights the need for guardians not only to become more conscious of their own actions but become more observant of the actions of people around them and those they expose their children to.

A group of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) advocates undertook the study in six districts as part of the Power to Choose (P2C) project implemented by SEND GHANA with support from Oxfam in Ghana and Global Affairs Canada.

The study highlights the troubling realities faced by young people and persons with disabilities across selected communities. The findings show that SGBV remains widespread, cutting across age, gender, disability, and socioeconomic backgrounds.



The study also revealed that persons with disabilities face heightened vulnerability, often experiencing abuse from caregivers and authority figures. Survivors continue to encounter deep stigma, pressure to remain silent, and limited access to justice. Additionally, many young people face judgmental attitudes at health facilities, restricting access to essential SRHR services.

On 23rd October 2025, SEND GHANA officially launched the research report titled “Unequal Risk: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Among Youth and Persons with Disabilities - Building Inclusive Policies and Protection for All in Ghana.”

The launch, conducted virtually, brought together policymakers, development partners, civil society actors, the media, community leaders, and youth advocates to discuss the findings and renew national commitments to action.

The event marked an important step in amplifying youth voices and strengthening evidence on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in the country. Youth advocates, Theophilus Ntaah and Rufaida Shirazu, presented the report and put forward several recommendations to address SGBV among the youth and PWDs.

They called for stronger punishment for SGBV-related cases and improved survivor-

friendly services through the training of service providers. They emphasized the need for traditional, religious, and community leaders to play a more active role in prevention efforts.

They also encouraged expanded youth-focused education and advocacy initiatives, as well as enhanced inclusion of persons with disabilities within national protection systems to ensure they can access justice and support without barriers. In addition, boys must be targeted and empowered with information and education just as girls, so they don't grow up as abusers.

The launch ended with a strong call for collective effort from all stakeholders to strengthen protection systems, enhance access to justice, and ensure that all young people especially those living with disabilities, are safeguarded from violence.



DONA FOUNDATION STRENGTHENS PARTNERSHIP WITH SEND GHANA

Joana Ankomaa Addey
(Communication Officer)



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In November 2025, DONA Foundation visited SEND GHANA to strengthen its relationship with SEND West Africa and to explore new collaboration opportunities.

The Foundation has been a long-standing partner of SEND West Africa, supporting SEND in diverse ways over the years.

During a two-day visit to Ghana, the delegation led by Jan Vanberkel, met with leadership and staff in Accra, during which they were briefed on SEND'S programme activities, including advocacy for public health emergency funding, promoting fair and sustainable cocoa production, and advancing inclusive social protection.

The Chief Executive Officer of SEND West Africa, Mr Siapha Kamara said the visit was an opportunity for both SEND and the Dona Foundation to reflect on their long-standing relationship and explore new areas of cooperation that will benefit more vulnerable communities in West Africa.

He expressed appreciation to the Foundation for its consistency and partnership over the years.

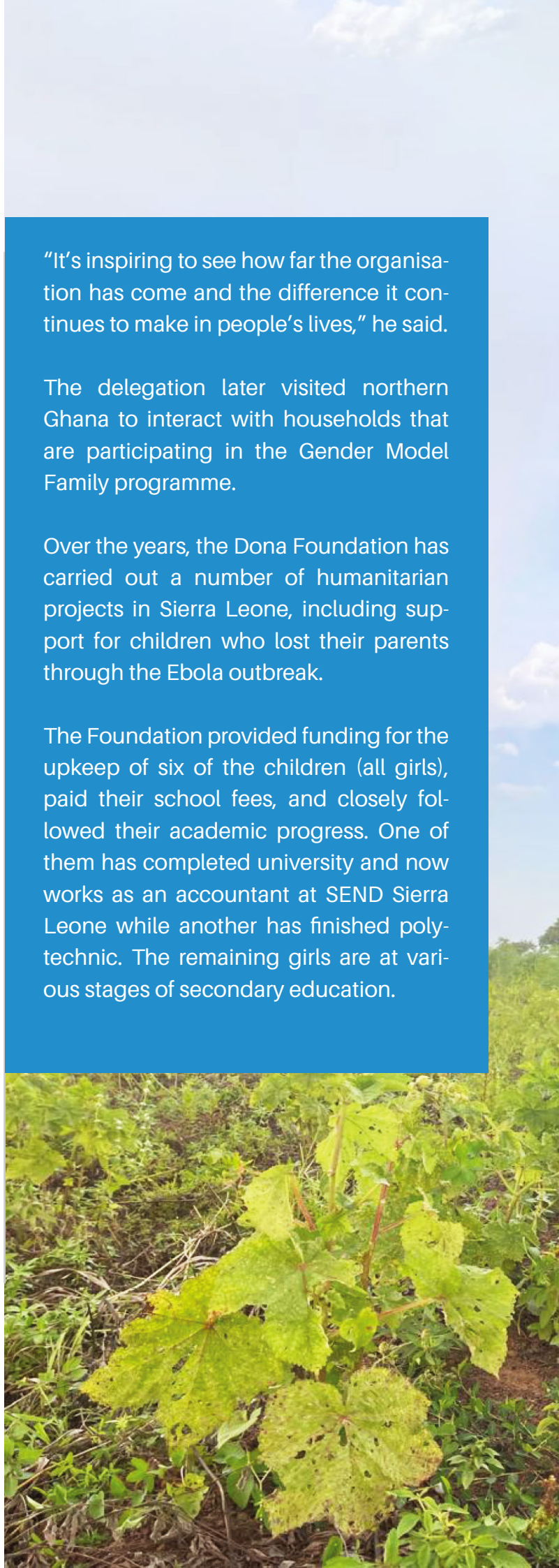
Mr. Jan Vanberkel said the team was happy to see the growth of SEND GHANA'S work and commended the organisation for its continued commitment to social justice.


"It's inspiring to see how far the organisation has come and the difference it continues to make in people's lives," he said.

The delegation later visited northern Ghana to interact with households that are participating in the Gender Model Family programme.

Over the years, the Dona Foundation has carried out a number of humanitarian projects in Sierra Leone, including support for children who lost their parents through the Ebola outbreak.


The Foundation provided funding for the upkeep of six of the children (all girls), paid their school fees, and closely followed their academic progress. One of them has completed university and now works as an accountant at SEND Sierra Leone while another has finished poly-technic. The remaining girls are at various stages of secondary education.





STRENGTHENING FAMILIES THROUGH GENDER EQUALITY: U-CARE TRAINS COMMUNITY FACILITATORS AND DISTRICT STAFF

Jamilatu Zakaria (Gender and Social
Behavior Change Officer)



Salamatu Iddi on her okra farm



SEND GHANA, under the U-CARE project, has trained 300 community facilitators and 40 staff of Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) across ten districts in the Northern, Northeast, and Savannah Regions to support the rollout of the Gender Model Family (GMF) approach. The district-based trainings were held from 4th to 12th August 2025.

The GMF model, under the UCARE project, promotes shared household responsibilities and aims to reduce women's time poverty by supporting volunteer families in assessing their gender roles at home and developing a Family Gender Equality Promotion Action Plan (FGEPAP). These action plans help families redistribute unpaid care work and strengthen joint decision-making.

During the one-day training sessions, community facilitators were introduced to the objectives of the U-CARE project and the steps involved in guiding families through the GMF training process. They practiced using the Daily Activity Profile, engaged in role play, and reviewed community case studies. These exercises strengthened their confidence in leading discussions on gender roles, shared responsibilities, and inclusive decision-making.

The training also highlighted the role of Gender Champions, couples within the community who model positive behaviours and support other households to adopt equitable practices. Community Facilitators were equipped with guidance on how to identify, mentor, and work with these Gender Champions to enhance peer learning within communities.

District Assemblies played an active role throughout the process. Staff, including Gender Desk Officers, Planners, and Community Development Officers, contributed relevant insights on local gender dynamics. In the Mion District, the Chief Executive, **Hon. Azindow M. Hamzah**, expressed strong support for the initiative, noting that the district remains committed to promoting gender equality.



With their strengthened capacity, community facilitators are now prepared to work with volunteer families in 300 communities to promote more equitable household practices. Their role is expected to contribute to improved wellbeing as families adopt shared responsibilities, reduce time burdens on women and adolescent girls, and strengthen harmony within the household.



Salamatu Iddi and Iddi Mahamud on their farm











**SEND
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SEND GHANA is a policy research and advocacy organization working to promote good governance, social justice, and equitable development in Ghana. Through research, citizen engagement, and strategic advocacy, SEND Ghana works with communities, civil society, and policymakers to influence public policy and improve access to quality services in areas such as health, nutrition, education, social protection, and sustainable livelihoods.

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