

NGO bails out children engaged in mining activities

SOME years back, I received a call from one of the mining sites in the Talensi-Nabdam District. A young boy who had gone into one of the several mining pits in search of gold had suffocated and died. It was such a pathetic sight; seeing one young boy who should have been in the classroom losing his life while mining for gold.

In the Talensi-Nabdam District where gold is mined legally or illegally (galamsey), the miners employ the services of children to sift the pounded rock extracted from the mines to get the gold dust. The masters then sell the gold through the buying companies.

Even though the involvement of children in mining is illegal, it is very difficult to clamp down on the perpetrators. Parents either encourage their wards to venture in the activity or the children themselves, out of adventure, go into these activities at the expense of their education.

Instead of finding their way to the classrooms, these children make their way to the mines and no wonder the district has witnessed a decline in the performance at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) level.

A survey conducted by the district assembly in 2007 revealed that as many as 658 children who were supposed to be in the classroom or learning various trades were working in the mines.

The Talensi-Nabdam District Assembly, in partnership with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), engaged Afrikids Ghana to undertake a project to tackle child labour in the small-scale gold mines in the district. One hundred and fifty out of the 658 identified children were pulled out and enrolled in school.

AFRIKIDS Ghana is a charity organisation based at Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region working for the welfare of children. This year, the



Mr Richard Amoah (right), handing over a package to one of the beneficiary children. Those looking on are family members of the child.

same NGO has, through the support of the Baring Foundation from the UK, gone to the aid of 30 children who hitherto were engaged in mining with a view to giving them education and skills training.

Twenty-three out of the 30 children will be put in schools while the remaining seven will be given skill training in vocations like carpentry, hairdressing and dressmaking.

The Talensi-Nabdam Area Manager of Afrikids Ghana, Mr Richard Amoah, disclosed this during the presentation of school uniforms and working kits to the beneficiaries.

He said his organisation was hopeful of stopping children from engaging in the dangerous activity of mining.

As part of the support, each of the children who had been withdrawn from mining and sent to school was presented with 10 exercise books, a school bag, foot wear, two pairs of socks, pens, pencils, a set of uniforms and a belt.

Each of the children was also presented with two female goats and a sheep for them to rear, and it is expected that the animals will reproduce and later sold to take care of financing their education.

The organisation has also paid the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) dues for one year while those not registered under the National Health Insurance Scheme have been registered.

The children pursuing skill training will also get sets of working tools, training fees as well as bicycles for those who travel to distant places to work, lunch allowance, two goats and sets of training uniform.

Apart from those items, Afrikids Ghana will provide quarterly supply of soap and toiletries, organise quarterly meetings of parents and child, conduct weekly monitoring at training centres, schools and homes, educational and empowerment talks, counselling and literacy and numeracy classes for those in skill training.

Mr Amoah said a lot would be required from the parents of the beneficiary children in solving the problems confronting them, stressing that

their intervention would only last for two years.

He also pleaded with the district assembly to work closely with the traditional leaders to see the urgency to stop children from engaging in child labour in the communities, especially in mining activities.

Mr Amoah further called for the extension of the school feeding programme and other interventions to cover very remote places.

"There should also be the need for a lively and friendly atmosphere in our schools to retain such children," he stressed.

The Country Director of Afrikids Ghana, Mr Nicholas Kumah, pledged Afrikids' commitment to ensure the effective monitoring of the children who had been withdrawn from the mining activity.

He advised the pupils not to revert to the mining activity but stick to their books in order to become responsible people in future.

The District Chief Executive, Madam Viviane Anafó, commended Afrikids Ghana for initiating the move to get the children out of the mining pits.

She advised those currently benefiting from the programme to encourage others who were in the pits to embrace education and desist from the dangerous activity of mining.

Madam Anafó also spoke against the migration of children to the southern parts of the country in search of menial jobs, stressing that parents should encourage their children to stay back and pursue education and other skill acquisition programmes.

The Deputy District Director of Education, Mr Duncan Nsoh, lauded Afrikids Ghana for adopting home grown measures to competently deal with the problems facing children's welfare in the district in particular and the region as a whole.

Today, Afrikids Ghana has taken a big step to stop children from engaging in mining but many more children are in the pits to make a living. It will take a lot more efforts to get all of them out and enrol them in school.

Let us not let the chance to give these children a bright future slip by. The time to act is now. All hands must be on deck to withdraw these children from the dangerous activity of mining.