

Ministry of Education

- Discharging its mandated roles proactively.

By Francis Gbadago

Many a time, society applauds the proactive and diligent manner in which leaders, especially those holding public offices do their work. It is indeed, an undeniable fact that the Ministry of Education, for some time now, has been one of the many ministries in the country that fell within lucky ones to be led by a renowned and refined academician, Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, as its Minister.

Just like other ministries, the Ministry of Education has total supervisory role over all the twenty-two (22) agencies under it. The Ministry as captured on its official website, has five main functions, namely:

- To initiate and formulate policy options on Education for the consideration of government;
- To initiate and advise on government plans;
- To undertake such research as may be necessary for the effective implementation of government policies and plans;
- To review government policies and plans;
- To coordinate and monitor the implementation of sector policies and strategies.

It is, therefore, very significant to note that taking into account the fifth (5th) function of the Ministry of Education (ie. To coordinate and monitor the implementation of sector policies and strategies), the Minister, and for that matter the ministry, with the largest number of agencies, has a major and challenging role to play when it comes to the coordination and monitoring of the implementation of its policies and strategies.

Here, reference is made to a publication at the Opinion column in the Monday, June, 30, 2014, edition of the Daily Graphic which sought to create an erroneous impression that the Ministry of Education is usurping the functions of the Ghana Education Service (GES), one of its agencies.

The writer, Osei-Mensah, quoted the following policies and strategies as his parameters: the rationalisation and redeployment of staff in the GES, the teacher absenteeism and what he also termed, "the direct management of industrial relations in the education sector" as reasons for his erroneous presentation in the publication.

As a matter of fact, the Ministry of Education is never directly involved in the rationalisation and redeployment of staff in the GES (the largest agency under the ministry). The Ministry does not post, redeploy or even transfer teachers in this country; GES does. Rather the Minister, Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, is more concerned about the successful conduct of the upcoming teacher rationalisation exercise to ensure that no teacher is affected negatively. To that effect, the Minister (at a meeting with teacher unions, the Ministry of Finance and the GES) recently directed the GES to allocate adequate funds to take care of the exercise, which among other things, would take care of transfer grants for the affected teachers. She maintained that until the funds were made available, the exercise would not go on. What do you think about this? This is indeed, a lovely and humble mother who cares for the welfare of her children. Right, your guess is as right as mine.

Teacher absenteeism we all know is one of the contributing factors to poor performance among students. In the 2014 budget, the ministry endeavoured to tackle the menace. As a result, the Minister announced the "the zero tolerance for teacher absenteeism policy" which has so far yielded a positive result. To ensure strict compliance, a committee (comprising all stakeholders) was inaugurated by the Minister to identify clear cut factors that contribute to teacher absenteeism and provide appropriate recommendations. Of course, most of the recommendations would be implemented by the appropriate agencies under the ministry at the end of the day. Here, the Minister is still within her jurisdiction so far as the functions are concerned.

With regards to the industrial relations aspect of the argument, we all know the Ministry for that matter, the Minister, holds the ultimate responsibility so far as the sector is concerned. The Minister should be highly commended for her open door strategies especially through regular meetings with the teacher unions to ensure that they are given the needed attention, all towards a serene industrial harmony. This, indeed, reflects a high sense of proactive influence attached to issues regarding labour.

Under what circumstance, would one question the proactive and diligent manner in which the Ministry of Education, under the able leadership of Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, decides to operate in order to serve the collective interest of staff in the education sector? When the Minister for that matter, the Ministry performs its mandated

functions, how then would this amount to “usurping the functions of GES” as purported by the writer?

Clearly, the Minister, Prof. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang, deserves the commendation, for her determination to ensure that quality education is delivered to all Ghanaians right from the Kindergarten to the University.

Several positive changes have emerged since the current Minister of Education took office. Undoubtedly, she is admired by many for her hard working credentials and coincidentally flanked by two industrious deputy ministers, Hon. Samuel Okudzeto-Ablakwa (Tertiary) and Hon. Alex Kyeremeh (Pre-tertiary), more legacies are yet to arrive.

The Ministry remains the policy formulator while its agencies are responsible for the implementation of such policies and strategies. At the same time, the Ministry has the role to coordinate and monitor the implementation of sector policies and strategies, and this should under no circumstance be misunderstood for anything else.

It must however, be emphasized that there is no administrative technical hitch between the Ministry and its agencies and none is expected in the near future. As such, care must be taken by all to ensure that their opinions do not culminate in pre-mature conclusions that have the tendency of creating unnecessary puzzlement.

The writer is a Public Relations Officer

at the Ministry of Education, Accra.