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## **PRESS RELEASE: VIAM CALLS ON GHANA'S MINISTRY OF EDUCATION TO DEVELOP A MORE ROBUST SYSTEM OF VALIDATING TEXTBOOK CONTENTS**

Accra, Ghana, April 4, 2016 - Last week, there was a public uproar over the content of a Primary 1 textbook titled "Natural Science for Primary Schools" written and published by one Albert Joseph Quarm. According to the said book, the function of the human head is for carrying objects.

Both the Author and the Ghana Education Service (GES) have since said they find nothing wrong with the description, despite public concerns. VIAM Africa (Ghana) joins others to strongly object to this inappropriate description of the functions of the head.

The function of the human head includes ingestion of nutrients, intake of air, use of senses such as vision, hearing, tasting, feeling, and smelling. The human head also provides communication, mind and brain functions. Given that the functions of the sense organs, mind and brain are extensively treated in Primary 3 and later years, the Author could have emphasised the communication function of the head such as nodding (up and down), and shaking (from side to side). This can easily be mimed by the kids during lesson delivery in the form of a role play.

It is not the case that the human head cannot be used to carry objects but that example is inappropriate given that an important purpose of education is to instil good habits and moral values.

So the Author could not have equally said the mouth is used for smoking Marijuana; or the leg for kicking heads. Indeed, there is some evidence, especially in African context, suggesting that carrying objects (e.g. containers with water) on the head over a certain distance is associated with musculoskeletal disorders, such as spinal (neck or back) pain or other joint problems, with recommendation for desisting from carrying things on the head. We contend that the role of the body parts including the head must be taught within the context of healthy lifestyle.

A large body of studies has shown that promoting positive health behaviour of pupils within schools has the potential to improve their educational outcomes, and their health and wellbeing. It is in light of this that we reject the pontification of the function of the human head as a load carrier.

An important observation about the present issue is the fact that, the specific content in question was captured in a Primary 1 textbook, although it falls under Unit 3 of the GES Syllabus for Primary 2. To think that the GES approved this content together with the obvious inappropriate examples stated above is very worrying. This comes at the back of a similar report published on [citifmonline.com](http://citifmonline.com) (24th November, 2015), in which a Junior High School (JHS) teacher, MrPhanuelAyawly, petitioned the Ministry of Education, requesting the withdrawal of a set of integrated science textbooks for JHS. According to the petition, the book titled "New Integrated Science for Junior High Schools:

Discovery series, authored by Theodore E.T. Kom-Zuta and published by Sedco and Pearson” were full of grammatical and typographical errors. Till date, little or nothing has been said about it and the books are still in use.

VIAM Africa (Ghana) holds the view that the blame for all these problems in the textbooks should be laid squarely at the door step of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and GES. A textbook is generally conceptualised as a standard work on a particular subject designed for classroom use with appropriate vocabulary, illustrations and student exercises. They are supposed to be used as the primary material for referencing and instructional delivery.

The implication is that textbooks must necessarily be purged from factual inaccuracies, grammatical errors, misrepresentations and inappropriate illustrations. At present, there is a textbook development and distribution policy for pre-tertiary schools published by the Ministry of Education. Section 7 of the policy highlights the processes that textbook manuscripts go through before final approval for printing in wholesale.

The testing of the manuscript according to the policy is carried out by the Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD) for a period of not more than two months and covers not more than five units per textbook (Section 7v).

The policy further states that, every textbook selected should meet a minimum evaluation standard which includes 80% conformity with the syllabus. However, the recommended duration and the scope of coverage for evaluating the quality of the textbook manuscript are likely to undermine critical scrutiny of the textbook. Hence, important details and information might skip the personnel from CRDD who are mandated to carry out this exercise.

We contend strongly that this policy imperative and arrangement may pose operational difficulties to the CRDD in executing this function. It is also questionable for the MoE to be accorded the right to waive the entire process of assessing the quality of the textbook for use in the Basic schools as contained in the policy document. The questions that we wish to ask are, why should evaluation criteria cover not more than five units of the entire textbook? What constitutes the pre-evaluation stage of the manuscript testing? And under what circumstances would the MoE waive the entire process of post evaluation?

VIAM Africa (Ghana) wishes to make the following policy recommendations:

1. To align the curricula with the aims of education in the 21st Century, the MoE should conduct a holistic review of the curricula and developed an open and flexible curriculum framework that caters for students’ diverse needs.
2. The MoE must re-evaluate all government approved textbooks as practically as possible.
3. Textbooks which contain factual inaccuracies, inappropriate illustrations and poor proofreading should be withdrawn from the school system immediately.
4. The minimum evaluation standards established in the textbook should be revised to take account of the components of the curriculum (aims, content, learning/teaching activities, assessment) as the main benchmarks of quality textbooks.

5. Teachers must be the final point of the textbook evaluation criteria and the post evaluation should cover all the units in the textbook.

**Signed**

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