

# Sawla Girls Model School

## WHAT HAVE WE ACHIEVED IN SIX YEARS?

When the Sawla Girls Model Junior High School (GMJHS) was established in 2008, it was not only to increase the enrolment of girls, but to create opportunities for more girls, particularly from deprived homes and communities, in the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba district to have quality tuition, produce good learning outcomes and be able to progress with their education beyond the basic level.

There was equally a desire to prepare the girls to be assertive, competitive and disciplined. Essentially, the idea was to ensure that the knowledge and skills to be acquired by the girls should not be by accident, but rather through a well-planned process so that the learning could be shared. It has been six years since then and there have been significant results and lessons worth sharing.



IBIS

Education for development



SAWLA-TUNA-KALBA  
DISTRICT ASSEMBLY



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A successful partnership

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## Background

The Sawla GMJHS was established in 2008 by IBIS, a Danish non-governmental organisation, in collaboration with the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba (STK) District Assembly and the Ghana Education Service (GES) and with funding from DANIDA.

The intention was to promote girl-child education by focusing on improving learning outcomes for girls, which should lead to the completion and transition of more girls from basic education to senior high school (SHS) and beyond.

Under its Education for Empowerment (EfE) Programme, IBIS seeks to, among other objectives, 'increase the number of girls acquiring capabilities in literacy, numeracy and life skills to achieve higher education' in furtherance of both national and global targets on promoting girl-child education.

The STK district was an obvious choice for locating such a school because school enrolment, retention, transition and pass rates in the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) in the district were generally poor, especially for girls.

In 2010, only 22.17 per cent of girls who wrote the BECE in the district obtained a pass mark as against 46.44% for boys, according to the GES. And the completion rate at the JHS for girls in the district was estimated at 26%, whilst that of boys was 34.1%. These imply that about two thirds of the girls dropped out before completion and only about one-fifth of those who managed to complete actually passed their exams and qualified to move to the next level. Hence, the vast majority of girls were left behind.

And as in other rural communities, there exist a number of cultural practices in the district that have conspired to keep the girl-child out of school. By age 15, many girls are given out for marriage and if they were in school, then it marks the end of the road in education for them.

IBIS and its implementing partners hoped, therefore, to use graduates of the model school to convince communities about the potentials and rights of the girl-child, highlighting what the benefits are to households and communities when the girl-child is educated properly.

IBIS is a Danish non-governmental organisation, working at global, national and local levels for the empowerment of civil society and underprivileged communities with a focus on equal access to education, influence and resources. IBIS works through strong partnerships with civil society and government institutions – [ibisghana.org](http://ibisghana.org)

As at July 2014, both past and present pupils of the school totalled 146. Four batches have successfully graduated and those in the first batch have even completed SHS.

## Physical Infrastructure and Facilities

The model school started with a three-unit classroom block, but has seen a major expansion in infrastructure with the provision of an additional six-unit classroom block together with a library, sanitation facilities, dormitories, teachers' quarters and other ancillary facilities, with funding from DANIDA, the STK District Assembly and Kirsten and Peder Harboe, Denmark. A borehole and pipe borne water have also been provided by Mrs. and Mr. Harboe. There is electricity, as well as solar power installed by Deng Solar Training Centre (DSTC), Accra.

Teachers' Quarters



The school has a computer laboratory with desktop computers, television (TV) set, DVD player, laptops, digital cameras, adjustable tripod projector screens, video camcorder, overhead projectors, printers and internet connectivity facilities, funded by Edukans, a Dutch NGO.

With the provision of ICT facilities and Internet connectivity, ICT has been successfully mainstreamed in various aspects of academic life and it has made teaching and learning lively and participatory. Lesson delivery is made more effective by the use of PowerPoint and other visual presentations. The teachers prepare weekly forecasts, lesson notes and examination records using ICT. They are also able to deliver lessons using web-based teaching and learning programmes, such as the 'World Starts with Me' (WSWM), a programme for Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) education.



Students Hostel



## Why it is a Model School

*“The school is called a model JHS not because of the nice structures or because we are admitting model girls. We rather expect the school to be a model one that will take in ordinary girls and groom them to be counted among the best wherever they go” – former Country Director of IBIS in Ghana, Mr Chals Wontewe.*

Indeed, the Sawla GMJHS was not established to be just another girls' school. Rather, it was a deliberate effort to provide holistic education for the girl child to make her academically sound, competitive, responsible and productive. The education provided should be of quality, relevant and empowering such that upon graduation, the girls should be able to enter into a highly competitive world and do well not only academically, but socially, politically and economically.

For that reason, emphasis is on the use of effective teaching and learning methodologies, such as gender-sensitive and participatory approaches, as these stimulate learning, encourage active participation by all students and make the girl-child comfortable in school.

Much attention is paid to preparing the girls to be confident, assertive and responsible. As such, the teachers do more than just teaching. They serve as mentors and counsellors helping the girls to overcome any inferiority complex they might be harbouring, develop a sense of self-worth and to see themselves as potential achievers.

The girls participate in IBIS' Annual Girls Education Clinic, where they engage in activities that are intended to inspire them to take their education serious and dream big about their academic future, their careers and their personal development.

The curriculum used by the model school has been designed to inculcate into the girls leadership qualities, team spirit and democratic skills. Sexual reproductive health education and HIV prevention have been effectively incorporated into the curriculum to ensure that girls are aware and stay away from situations that expose them to early and unprotected sex.

“It is not just a girls' school, it is a model school and so must be an example to all other schools. The way we teach and the way we conduct ourselves must all be exemplary. Discipline is number one. IBIS and GES visit us often to supervise us and give us moral support. I am proud of the teachers here. They are willing to take up additional responsibilities without pay. The girls are also very eager to learn. It is not easy handling girls so we show care and concern instead of shouting at them.” – Headmistress, Sawla GMJHS, Madam Iddrisu Niamatu.

## Academic and Social Environment

The school maintains a class size of 35 and there is enough space for class activities. Each student has her own table and chair. There is a school park and so the girls regularly engage in sporting activities to keep them healthy and stimulate their minds.

Discipline is one of the outstanding attributes of the Sawla GMJHS. Classes and other activities take place within their

stipulated time as both students and teachers have nurtured a habit of showing respect for time. Although teachers and students interact and relate very well, they respect each other's boundaries. Teachers peer review each other's lesson delivery and the headmistress and her assistant join classes occasionally to monitor teaching and learning to ensure that the right things are done.

## What Have We Achieved?

It has been six years and the girls, teachers, parents and the implementing partners are glad to look back at what has been collectively achieved.



*“When we established the model school, we had high expectations on the performance of the pioneer batch of this school to set a high standard for subsequent batches to match or beat. We have very high expectations of the performance of this school, demonstrating that if given the same chance as boys, girls can excel in the same way some boys have done.”*  
– Chals Wontewe, former Country Director, IBIS in Ghana.

### Good learning outcomes

In 2011, when the first batch of 28 students of the Sawla GMJHS wrote the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), 24 of them made it to SHS and the school placed third out of 17 schools in the district. It was the first time in the district that such a high number of girls had passed the BECE and progressed to SHS. In fact, girls who qualified for SHS from the other JHS combined were just thirteen (13) in number.

The next year, the model school moved up to second position among 22 schools and had one of its students, Grace Bourawono, getting the best grade in the BECE for the district. All 31 girls who wrote the BECE from the model school passed and had admission to SHS.

In 2013, the school presented 26 students and all the girls passed and gained admission to SHS. The model school maintained the second position. So, the Sawla GMJHS is moving progressively

towards becoming the number one school in the STK district.

Apart from churning out good results in the BECE, the girls put up good performances in other disciplines. The school emerged winners of an inter-school quiz competition organized in Bole in 2011. It won the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba district debate in 2012 and topped the spelling Bee competition that same year. The girls perform very well in inter-school sporting activities and, as a result, they mostly emerge winners in all-girls' events. The girls have also been among the best performers in the annual Northern Regional ICT Competition organized by Savana Signatures.

These encouraging performances have made the Sawla GMJHS very popular and has demonstrated clearly that girls can do very well when given the needed push. Thus, it is hoped that many families and communities in the district would be encouraged not only to take their girls to school, but see to their progression.

# What Have We Achieved?

## Girls with self-esteem and discipline

Aside the good academic results, the model school has been largely successful in nurturing its pupils to be assertive, outgoing and disciplined. Consequently, many of them have learnt to believe in themselves and easily associate and interact with their acquaintances. The girls are competitive among themselves and seem prepared for competition anywhere. Much effort is made to instil in them qualities of leadership and team play. The girls demonstrate appreciable knowledge of their sexuality and are cautious of risky sexual behaviours because the school provides comprehensive sexuality and reproductive health education

## Education for poor and marginalised girls

One of the significant achievements of the model school is the future it has provided to many disadvantaged girls who could have been denied their right to education. Since its establishment, the model school has given preference to girls from poor and marginalised homes and communities, such as those from rural areas and those in foster homes. Indeed, these girls face the greatest challenges in their pursuit of education and, thus, the need to support them to overcome these barriers and fulfil their potentials. Mensah Marie Freda, who grew up in the Sawla Children's Home, is one of such children..

*"When I was in primary school, the girls and I in the Children's Home were always talking about Sawla girls (model school). We all wanted to come here because we heard the school was good. So I was very happy when some of my friends and I were admitted to this school. We are all girls and so I am not shy. There are no boys to disturb us. In this school, we have computers and a library, so we learn a lot. My favourite subjects are Science and Social Studies. I want to be a journalist. I want to read news on television."*  
– Mensah Marie Freda, JHS 2.



*"We remained focused on helping the girls to believe in themselves and their abilities. We want them to stand shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts everywhere they go. We have had parents coming to thank us and say they have seen major improvements in the conduct of their children and that they are very supportive at home. We are happy to be making such an impact in their lives,"* – Rev Frederick Assan, Assistant Head, Sawla GMJHS.



## What Have We Achieved?



*“My name is Mumuni Mercy Alima. I am 16 years and I am in Form 1 at the Tamale Girls Senior High School. I still remember when I was attending Sawla Girls. The school had a lot of facilities which we enjoyed as students because it helped us in our learning. I participated in sports, quiz competitions, girls club and HIV/AIDS Club activities. We performed very well when we went for interschool competitions.*

*When I was in primary school, I was not doing well, but when I got to Sawla Girls, I started doing well. When we wrote our final exams, I got aggregate 15 and I was admitted to this school. I developed interest in science when I was in Sawla Girls and so I am learning hard so that I can become a nurse in future.”*

### Progressive education for the girl-child

From the 2010/11 to 2012/13 academic years, 85 girls graduated from the Sawla GMJHS and 80 of them gained admission to SHSs in various parts of Ghana.

Today, some of these girls can be traced to schools such as the Tamale Girls SHS, Yaa Asantewaa Girls SHS, St Francis Girls SHS, Wa SHS, Bolga SHS and St Anne's Girls SHS. Many of them have confirmed fitting very well into academic and social life at their schools and they attribute this to the grooming they went through at the model school. They are among top performers in their classes and they take active part in extra-curricular activities such as sports, debates, drama and quiz competitions.

### ...And a real boost for girls' education in STK

With a higher number of girls graduating from the Sawla GMJHS and other schools, the completion rate for girls in JHS in the STK district has risen significantly between 2010 and 2014. In the 2009/10 academic year, before the first batch of the Sawla GMJHS graduated, the completion rate for girls at the JHS level was 22.7 per cent. It increased to 26 per cent the next academic year, after the model school produced its first batch of graduates, and by the 2013/14 academic year, when the fourth batch of students graduated from the model school, the completion rate for girls now stood at 67 per cent.

Completion Rate for Boys & Girls at JHS – STK District

| Academic Year | Female | Male  | District Average | Sawla GMJHS |
|---------------|--------|-------|------------------|-------------|
| 2009-10       | 22.70  | 37.80 | 31               | ----        |
| 2010-2011     | 26     | 34.1  | 30.4             | 71.8        |
| 2011-2012     | 54.8   | 69.4  | 65               | 91.2        |
| 2012-2013     | 45.9   | 95.5  | 66.4             | 83.9        |
| 2013-2014     | 67     | 73    | 70               | 80.9        |

Source: GES, STK

## What Have We Achieved?

### Developing competent and committed teachers

The Sawla GMJHS has not only been successful with the development of the girls, but has equally helped to train the right calibre of teachers, i.e. teachers who are effective in the use of appropriate teaching methods. As a result, the teachers do not just transmit knowledge to the students, they facilitate sharing and learning because they have learnt to use teaching methods that are participatory, gender sensitive and focus on the needs of every learner. “We create an atmosphere where all students feel encouraged to

participate by sharing what they know and by asking as many questions as necessary to clear their minds of any doubts,” says Rev. Frederick Assan.

Many times, the teachers take the back seat and allow the students to lead lesson delivery, such as making presentation on topics under discussion. The teachers make extra efforts to help the girls build their self-esteem and develop a can-do spirit by constantly reminding them of their potentials and psyching them to believe in their ideas and assert themselves everywhere they go. They pay special interest to shy and introvert students, getting them to speak up and gain confidence to become active participants.

In addition to the training received at college, teachers at the model school undergo regular refresher trainings to keep them up to date on the use of proven teaching and learning methods. The teachers have also been trained to deliver lessons using web-based applications (e.g. the World Starts with Me) and other ICT tools.

*“I am very glad that I was posted to this school. Over here, the teachers are so committed that if you don't pull your weight, you would not fit in the school. You have to have a very good excuse to miss classes or come late to school. Every teacher is prepared at anytime to take up a free lesson period and so if you make a mistake and delay to enter the class, another teacher would take advantage. We organise extra classes because we want to cover the syllabus – Mabel Sombour, English Teacher, Sawla GMJHS.*”



## Lessons Learned

In piloting the concept of a GMJHS in Sawla, IBIS, the STK district assembly and the GES have learnt a few lessons that are worth sharing...

### Education for the girl-child must be holistic:

Although, the idea of having girl-only schools is not new, the Sawla GMJHS has proved that educating girls is beyond just providing facilities or teaching them to make good grades. With the challenges facing the girl-child, education of the girl child must be holistic in such a way that it combines both academic and social or psychological grooming. Education must make the girl child assertive, responsible and disciplined.

### Managing admissions is critical:

As the Sawla GMJHS gains more recognition, there is scramble for

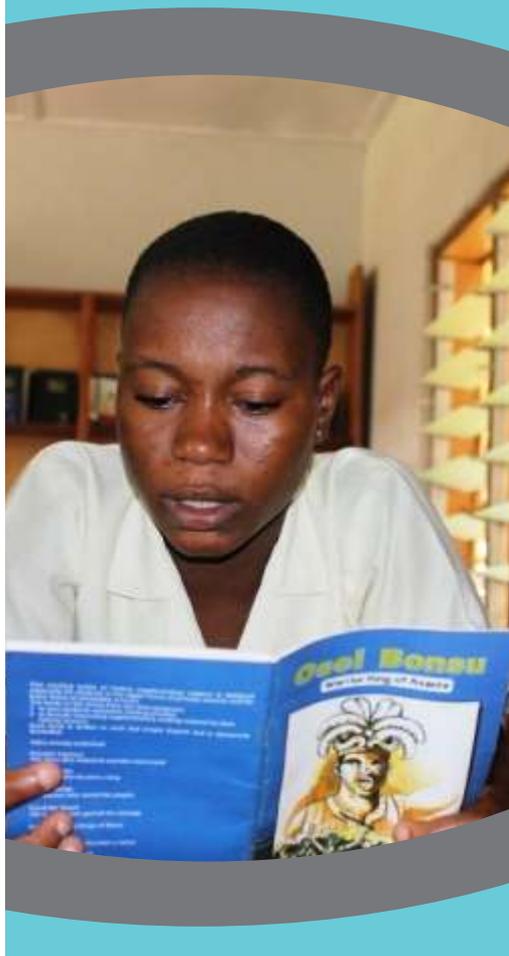
admissions. If the process of admissions is not well managed, like most private institutions, the model school could become a school for the elite and well endowed at the expense of the poor and disadvantaged. And, hence, the need for the district assembly, GES and other collaborators to remain committed to the objectives of the model school.

### ICT – an added value with huge cost:

The provision of ICT facilities by Edukans has made teaching and learning lively and interesting for both students and teachers. However, it has culminated in making teaching and learning at the Sawla GMJHS look sophisticated and costly. Thus, in replicating the model in other districts, it is important to point out that ICT facilities could become an added value and should be provided when there are available resources.

### Student accommodation – a necessity:

Residential accommodation for the GMJHS was initially not part of the concept. However, with time it emerged that providing accommodation for the girls must be a necessary component of the school because many of the girls were coming from very far rural areas and faced the risk of dropping out due to the distance. The provision of a boarding facility has, accordingly, reduced significantly the dropout and has also contributed to eliminating lateness, absenteeism, pregnancy and many others.



## A Successful Partnership

The success of the Sawla GMJHS is a testament that successful partnerships between state and non-state actors can enhance the provision of basic social services and advance the rights of citizens, particularly women, children and the marginalised.

From its conception to full realisation and present operation, the Sawla GMJHS has been the product of a thriving partnership among IBIS, the STK district, the GES and other stakeholders, which has led to greater commitment from each stakeholder and a sense of ownership.

*“The people in the district are very happy and proud of the Girls Model School. The PTA is always working closely with the District Assembly and the GES to provide the needed facilities and improve teaching and learning. An academic board was set up and the board instituted extra classes for the pupils. All the teachers volunteered to teach. Besides the terminal exams, the teachers organize mid-term exams. These have made the model school to get ahead of many others in the district – Mr Takora Dongu Justice, PTA Chairman of Sawla GMJHS.*”



## Adopting or Replicating the Model

Increasingly, the Sawla GMJHS has become a point of reference for demonstrating what is possible and works best for the education and empowerment of the girl-child. And therefore, there is greater focus on the part of IBIS and its partners in education to ensure either a replication of the model in other districts or the adoption of the workable strategies that have been used in the model school for use in other schools.

In September 2013, IBIS together with the Kpandai District Assembly and Education Directorate opened a GMJHS in Kpandai. Whilst this is also intended to improve girl-child education in the district, it is also an opportunity to further experiment with the GMJHS concept.

Other district assemblies are increasingly showing interest in establishing GMJHS in their respective districts. The Bole District Assembly has already started one and the Saboba District Assembly is making similar efforts. Certainly, replicating or emulating the Sawla GMJHS would undoubtedly augur well for the education and empowerment of the girl-child.

It is clear now that the Sawla GMJHS has come to stay. The assembly, GES, traditional rulers, opinion leaders and parents have shown a greater sense of ownership of the school as the assembly continues to commit resources to the provision of facilities and other stakeholders also playing their respective roles towards ensuring proper management of the school.



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