

## **Do Not Forget the Children of Sodom and Gomorrah Examining the Convergence of Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Lives of Ghanaian Children Living in a Slum Called Home**

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### **Abstract**

*The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana guarantees that “all persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities and with a view to achieving the full realisation of that right” and that “basic education shall be free, compulsory and available to all.” However, these rights are not fully accorded the children living in Old Fadama. Also called Sodom and Gomorrah, Old Fadama is the largest slum in Accra, Ghana. This paper raises the issue of the denial of constitutional rights to some of the most vulnerable children living in the capital. As Ghana push forth to meet MDGs 2 and 3, to achieve universal primary education and promote gender equality, it is imperative that no child is left behind. This is an exploratory study. Its goals are to raise consciousness and engender further discourse and research about children living in slums throughout the world.*

**Keywords:** Ghana, Old Fadama, Accra, Sodom and Gomorrah, Slums, Basic Education, MDGs, Constitution.

### **1. Introduction**

In *The State of the World's Children 2012: Children in an Urban World*, the Executive Director of UNICEF writes that action must be taken to “better understand the scale and nature of poverty and exclusion affecting children in urban areas” (UNICEF, 2012). This report provides an in-depth analysis about the millions of children living in abject poverty throughout the world in and near city centers. For the purpose of this paper, I hone in on one of the report's salient points and that is the urgent need to address the fact that “children living in slums are among the least likely to attend school” (ibid.) This paper aims to discuss this phenomenon and the subsequent consequences by examining the impact poverty and social exclusion have on the educational attainment of children residing in Old Fadama also known as Sodom and Gomorrah.

When one hears the words “Sodom and Gomorrah,” for most it conjures up the image of twin cities of disrepute referenced in the Bible. Images are evoked of places that were evil to its core, so much that they were destroyed by God himself. It is this image that many reference when they speak of an informal settlement in Accra, the capital city of Ghana. Old Fadama, vehemently called Sodom and Gomorrah, on the surface resembles the ancient cities of the Bible. It is often described in derogatory and demagogic prose such as what was written in a 2009 article in the *Economist* that read:

Carefully stepping round another heap of fetid refuse in Sodom and Gomorrah, it is easy to despair of Africa's future. Accra's notorious slum is aptly named. Here, about 30,000 families (no one knows for sure how many) crowd into a warren of hastily thrown-together shacks on the fringes of Ghana's capital: there is no power, sewerage or running water, diarrhoea and other diseases are rife and deadly fires rapidly take hold. It seems to contain all that is wrong with modern Africa—too many people, deep poverty and the failure of inept or corrupt governments to do anything to help (The Economist, 2009).

The above quote paints a dark and hopeless picture for the future of not only the capital city of Ghana, but the whole of Africa. As I engaged in content analysis of other literature, I found that this language and imagery is often used to describe Old Fadama. It is the impetus which prompts this paper. Given the fact that there is 1) a significantly high migration of citizens from the Northern part of the country to the South, 2) a critical lack of housing in general and affordable housing in particular within Accra to absorb the ever growing demand, and 3) poor urban planning by the government, it is evident why there is a proliferation of slums in the capital. Currently 38.4% of the population living in Accra (1,652,374 people) live in slums (UN Habitat For a Better Future, 2011). An extensive report for slum upgrading and prevention, completed in October 2011, found that there are 78 slum settlements and pockets of slums situated within the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (UN Habitat For a Better Future, 2011). Of all the slums, whether formal or informal, Sodom and Gomorrah is the most notorious and largest with an enumerated population of nearly 80,000 people (Housing the Masses, 2010). It is because of the depth of the stigma and social exclusion experienced by the people and the breath of the densely populated area that I have chosen Sodom and Gomorrah as a research interest into the educational access and delivery of basic education to the children living in the slum.

## **2. Methodology**

The pragmatic utilization of a mixed-method is most appropriate in seeking to understand the descriptive (what is) and the normative (what ought to be) within this qualitative research. Aspects of both critical ethnography and black feminist theory are relied upon to help ground this exploratory study. Critical ethnography is utilized because it “begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain” which is the premise of this study – the unfairness and injustice in educational access and delivery in Old Fadama (Madison, 2005). Tenets of Black feminist theory is applied because it utilizes gender as a lens while acknowledging and including one’s social location (age, race, class, etc.) to analyze phenomenon, thus allowing a deeper analysis into access and delivery of education for girls living in Old Fadama. Each approach allows us to also measure the efficacy of Ghana reaching United Nations Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 by the 2015 deadline. The preference of this mix methodology allows for those who have been silenced, marginalized and oppressed to have voice. This encapsulates the purpose for this research, and that is we do not forget the children of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In addition, historical/archival research methodology is used in examining secondary sources to extract empirical evidence within reports, transcripts, journal articles, special publications and any other pieces of literature concerning policies, laws and human rights in general, and children’s right to a free compulsory basic education more specifically. Findings emanating from this mixed-method approach provides for a comprehensive probe into the strengths, weaknesses, successes and failures of Ghana’s implementation of a constitutional and human right to a free compulsory basic education for all children. This integrative methodology allows for a wider lens to be used to make those most vulnerable and rendered invisible, children living in slums, central to the discourses on urbanization, poverty and social exclusion.

As with exploratory research, the purpose here is to become more familiar with the basic facts and conditions under which children live, especially the girl child, in formulating questions and providing direction for future research by determining the feasibility of conducting an in-depth phenomenological case study. For now, this paper seeks to raise the conscientiousness of society to the plight of children being denied government supported basic education based solely on the fact that 1) they do not live in areas that are “recognized” as legal, and 2) as it has been repeated often of those settled in Old Fadama, “they are not supposed to be there anyway”.

## **3. Limitations**

As this is an exploratory paper, it has its limitations. A full scale research project could not be undertaken. The researcher was unable to conduct field work, thus relying upon secondary sources to bring to light the conditions under which children in Old Fadama live and give them voice. Additionally, as there is a dearth in scholarship specific to children living in Old Fadama, the secondary sources were limited in the scope of information found. What was found, based on the community-led enumeration in 2009, was the number of children living there, the number of children who attended school, where they attended (inside or outside the settlement), and information on a few schools within Old Fadama established by community members. Finally, beyond visiting Old Fadama and the Agbogbloshie Market in 2012 for observation, lack of funding and time in-country limited access to and contact with the studied population.

Critical ethnography requires being on the ground with the observed. Due to the funding and time constraints, I relied on the ethnographic findings in the 2009 enumeration of Old Fadama, interviews conducted by 40 college students within Old Fadama, several video documentaries that have relevance to the plight of children in Sodom and Gomorrah, and other social science research projects that examined the lived experiences within Old Fadama to help craft the narrative and formulate critical questions. Moving forward, by conducting a full scaled funded research project in the future, these limitations will not be of any consequence.

#### **4. Discussion**

This paper is driven by the need to understand the impact of the depths of poverty and social exclusion on children living in Sodom and Gomorrah. Today for nearly 80,000 people, Sodom and Gomorrah is a bastion of economic inequalities and inequitable social services which are manifesting in the urbanization of poverty. It is there, in the midst of illiteracy, hunger, homelessness, landlessness, filth, fear and marginalization that the hopes and dreams of Ghanaian children are threatened. It is there that the nexus between poverty and social exclusion is stark and the life chances of those who live there appear dismal. The primary inquiry of this study looks at what are the educational chances of those children caught at the convergence of poverty and social exclusion, who are victimized by policies and circumstances that strip them of their fundamental constitutional rights to a free compulsory basic education.

The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana guarantees that “all persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities and with a view to achieving the full realisation of that right” and that “basic education shall be free, compulsory and available to all”(Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992). Since Old Fadama is categorized as an informal settlement it is not recognized by the government. Therefore, the government does not provide basic infrastructure or social services to the community which other citizens enjoy by virtue of the fact that the government is legally responsible for providing such. Herein lies the crux of the argument to attain within this research – children living in Sodom and Gomorrah are victimized by the convergence of poverty and social exclusion. They are victims of poverty and the lack that it brings. Through no doing of their own they have been born into a situation that necessitate living where they do. They are also victimized by social exclusion because where they live excludes them from fully obtaining their rights to not only a formal education but other critical needs like health care. This paper is just the beginning of inquiry into the manifestation and proliferation of policies that openly discriminate against and deny constitutional rights to one of the most vulnerable populations in Accra – poor urban children.

This micro-analysis illuminates a greater phenomenon presented in the UNICEF 2012 report on the state of children in a rapidly growing urban world. To this end, the research questions raised address constitutionality, human rights, and rights of Ghanaian citizens, in addition to what are underlying realities faced by children living in the largest slum in Ghana in particular, but also of children living in slums throughout the world. Within the body of this work, the various dimensions of poverty and exclusion are explored. Linkages between how poverty and social exclusion determine the educational attainment of slum dwellers are made. Finally, current public policy for addressing poverty and reducing social exclusion and marginalization in relation to the MDG target are examined.

##### **4.1. The Children of Sodom and Gomorrah**

In the past two decades, Ghana has made significant inroads when it comes to the rights and protection of children. This is demonstrated by the fact that 1) the overall number of children in primary school has increased, 2) there is a gender parity of those entering primary school, although girls have a greater attrition rate, and 3) there has been an extreme reduction in poverty. These are all good indicators of Ghana's commitment to its own policies and United Nation's MDGs. But let us not forget the children of Sodom and Gomorrah. They are lost in the facts above. They are the ones invisible in the reports and statistics. They are the ones for which growth and inclusion has no meaning. There must be, as it has been said frequently by politicians, activists and slum dwellers, a “human face” placed on those rendered invisible and powerless. To put that human face on those living in Old Fadama, in 2009 the slum dwellers themselves, along with assistance from NGOs and CBOs conducted their own enumeration.

This was the third such undertaking, but the most comprehensive which documented that over 79,000 people live and work in Old Fadama. A particularly important finding was “Of the 33,742 respondents with children, 65% of the children [did] not go to school while the remaining 35% attend[ed] school” (Housing the Masses, 2010). From this statistics, the following fundamental questions are raised: 1) for the 65% (approx. 19,311 children) who do not attend school, what are they doing? and 2) for the 35% (approx. 10,398 children) who do attend school where are these schools located, are they being taught the official curriculum, and how often do they attend? (Housing the Masses, 2010). Education is a right not a luxury and the issues surrounding Old Fadama need to be depoliticized in order to provide comprehensive evidence-based policies and plans toward the treatment of and provisions for those living in informal settlements. Issues of pervasive poverty and exclusion need to be at the crux of the decision and policy-making process.

In 2011 40 students from the African University College of Communications in partnership with three CBOs spent a day inside Old Fadama documenting the lived experiences of the women, men and children living there (Faces of Old Fadama, 2011). The students’ findings were published in a magazine entitled *Faces of Old Fadama*. For the purpose of this study, I focus on the content of one such article written by Dennis Moot. Moot opens up his piece with the following description of By His Grace International School:

[It] is a typical school found in the Accra slum community Old Fadama—a small, shabby building that also acts as a video center, rented for 4 Ghana Cedis a day. The room is dark and very hot. There is no blackboard on the walls and students are sitting on uncomfortable and cramped short wooden benches. There are no washroom facilities. The surrounding area is hectic and loud (Moot, 2011).

The community recognizes the need for educational facilities within the settlement, and work to meet the need as evidenced by By His Grace. However, they are ill-equipped and ill-prepared to provide for the children. Moot’s interview illuminates the hardship under which the children are subjected in their quest to be educated. One of the students he interviewed, Salam Fausiatu, said “The environment is always noisy which makes concentration much difficult. Sometimes we do not hear what the teacher says and, therefore, get confused” (Moot, 2011). What we can ascertain is that the children labor under such difficulties because they want to go to school. Of the 35% of the children who attend school, 54% of them attend schools within Old Fadama. What we can again ascertain is that more than 5,000 students are victims of public policies that position them to receive inferior education. What is known is “Children enrolled in Old Fadama schools do not learn government standardized curriculum and are taught by teachers who are not properly trained—most having only completed their senior high school level” (Moot, 2011). However, there are those within the community who try to bring a higher standard of education to the children of the community.

Queensland School is another example of the community taking ownership over their children’s future. Journalist Vicky Wireko of the Daily Graphic wrote the following after visiting the school:

Madam Paulina Nlando is a former teacher from Northern Ghana. With eleven years teaching experience behind her, she definitely knew what she was about and was determined to actualise her dream. With just 12 children at the start, the school now has 200 children on roll even though active attendance fluctuates between 100 and 120. She employs seven teachers who cover such subjects as English, Mathematics, ICT, Natural Science and Creative Arts.

Paulina Nlando’s small contribution to keeping the children of Kayayie off the street and maintaining them in a classroom is a yeoman’s job (Wireko, 2010). This observation discounts the prevailing ideas of the people living in Sodom and Gomorrah. The community inhabitants are not all deviant and the children and their parents do value education. Madam Nlando is among those activists who cannot wait on the government to provide for the basic education guaranteed to them by the Constitution. This causes me to pause and ask is the Constitution of the Fourth Republic of Ghana the law of the land or is it symbolic?

Ghana cannot reach 100% education for all, if these children and others like them are not included in the “all.” The sentiments within the community are articulated well by Bright Dzilawho said “The sad thing is that we are only remembered when it is time for elections and the education of the children and the entire community is relegated to the background” (Moot, 2011). Politicians must stop playing the blame game repeating over and over “they are not supposed to be there” and deal with the realities that 80,000 people now occupy Old Fadama.

They must focus on what is and not what is supposed to be and work incessantly to develop and implement comprehensive collaborative public policies that go beyond rhetoric of forced evictions and arbitrary resettlement. As observed by Johnie Kodjo Nyametso in his study on improvement in squatter settlements in Ghana:

the various reactions and *ad hoc* solutions to the plight of the urban poor of successive Ghanaian governments have not eradicated squatting in Accra. Temporary relocations and occasional evictions of squatters in the absence of a comprehensive policy to provide accommodation and livelihood opportunities for the affected people have led to the persistence of the problems (Nyametso, 2010).

If the situation at Old Fadama is not dealt with the only thing that is assured is that there will be more people moving and settling in every day. It is necessary to elucidate the fact that the first enumeration of the community in 2004 identified over 24,000 inhabitants, the second in 2006-2007 identified over 48,000 and the last in 2009 identified approximately 80,000 inhabitants (Farouk & Owusu, 2012). What this tells us is the problem is growing and action is needed.

There is a dearth in the literature when it comes to disaggregate information about the children of Sodom and Gomorrah. Most that is known is based on generalities of children living in slums, but that too marginalize the more than 29,000 children living there (Housing the Masses, 2010). To better understand their plight, we must understand by way of definition and policies what education, poverty and exclusion mean in Ghana and within the global context and measure it against the realities of the 29,709 children, taking into account their social location.

#### **4.2. Education – The 1992 Constitution, UN Millennium Development Goals and FCUBE**

A cogent definition of education is found in *Realizing the Future We Want for All: A Report to the Secretary-General* of the UN. In it, it states that “education – understood as the transmission, acquisition, creation and adaptation of knowledge, skills and values — is indispensable for inclusive economic development”(Realizing the Future We Want for All: A Report to the Secretary-General, 2012). Further, it states that basic education is “a human right in itself and a condition for the realization of other rights. It is also a foundation for inclusive economic growth and transformative change”(ibid.). The attainment of basic education is inextricably connected to the socio-economic well-being of the individual, the family and community. According to Ghana’s Constitution it is a right.

##### **4.2.1. The Constitution**

Ghana’s Fourth Republic Constitution ratified in 1992 sets forth traditional civil and political, along with some social, economic and cultural rights for all the people of the republic. The stability of the State, demonstrated in part by free elections and transfer of power, minimal tribal wars, and a steady economy, ensures the supremacy of the Constitution. Ghana’s strong and stable democracy places it ahead of most other developing countries, particularly in Africa. Chapter Five of the Constitution entitled “Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms” sets forth the rights of those most vulnerable in society.

In Section 12 (2) it states that “Every person in Ghana, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinion, color, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual contained in this Chapter but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest”(Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992). These fundamental human rights according to Section 12 (1) “shall be respected and upheld by the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary and all other organs of government and its agencies and, where applicable to them, by all natural and legal persons in Ghana, and shall be enforceable by the Courts as provided for in this Constitution”(Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992). According to John Mubangizi, the “constitutional Bill of Rights provides the fundamental legal framework for the protection of human rights in Ghana”(Mubangizi, 2006). The primary argument within this paper, children living in Old Fadama are being denied their fundamental right to a free compulsory basic education, hinges on the supremacy of Section 25 (1) of Chapter Five. It in fact guarantees that “a basic education shall be free, compulsory and available to all.” To ensure the institutionalization of this guarantee Chapter Six Section 38 (1) provides that “The State shall provide educational facilities at all levels and in all the Regions of Ghana, and shall, to the greatest extent feasible, make those facilities available to all citizens”(Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992). On a macro-level Ghana is committed to the education of its children.

This is demonstrated in its Constitution and in its 2002 pledge to attain United Nations Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3, achieving universal primary education and promoting gender equality and empowerment of women, respectively. In addition, the government implemented “Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy I and II” (GPRS). GPRS I issued in 2003 “reflected a policy framework that was directed primarily towards the attainment of the anti-poverty objectives of the UN’s Millennium Development Goals” (Government of Ghana, 2005). GPRS II implemented in 2006 led the objective to “accelerate the growth of the economy so that Ghana [could] achieve middle-income status within a measurable planning period” (Government of Ghana, 2005). In addition, GPRS I was also a guideline for the development and implementation of the Education Strategic Plan (ESP). Two objectives of ESP are to obtain 100% equal access to and completion of universal basic education for all children in Ghana by 2015. These public policies in conjunction with the constitutional guarantee should be sufficient in not only securing, but protecting the rights of all Ghanaian children to accessible, affordable and quality basic education.

#### **4.2.2. Millennium Development Goals**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emanated from the Millennium Declaration and was endorsed in September 2000 by 189 world leaders at the United Nations (UN). In the UN Millennium Project 2005 report entitled *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals – Overview* MDGs are described as:

the world’s time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions—income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion—while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability. They are also basic human rights—the rights of each person on the planet to health, education, shelter, and security as pledged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Millennium Declaration (UN Millennium Project, 2005).

There are eight (8) goals associated with 18 targets. For the purpose of this study MDG 2 and 3 are most salient. However, MDG 1 and 7 (Target 11), to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020, respectively bare import to the lives of children living in Sodom and Gomorrah.

MDG 2 is to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling (UN Millennium Project, 2005). MDG 3 is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015 (UN Millennium Project, 2005). To ensure that Ghana reaches these goals, in 2003 the government launched ESP to accelerate the rate of attainment of MDG 2 earlier than the target year of 2015 and MDG 3 by the end 2008. Today Ghana has a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 0.95. A GPI of 1 means 100% parity has been reached between boys and girls being enrolled in primary school. A GPI of 0.95 is significant, particularly given socio-cultural barriers girls face. Such barriers include first and foremost, poverty, a deprivation in the psychosis of the importance of education of the girl child, gender socialization, the educational level of the parents, and cultural and traditional practices. Unfortunately, enrollment does not equate to completion. Although there is parity in terms of enrollment, in the UN Habitat report on Accra, we learn that “at the primary level, 36.38 % of eligible children are enrolled” and “the enrolment of girls is higher than boys” (United Nations Human Settlement Programme, 2009). Additionally, the enrollment at the JSS level is 57.17%. These facts tell us that a significant portion of Ghanaian children are not being educated.

#### **4.2.3. Free Compulsory Basic Education (FCUBE)**

What does FCUBE really mean and to whom does this meaning have meaning? The government is obligated under the Constitution to provide access to Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE). FCUBE consists of 11 years of training divided into three parts, two years of kindergarten, six years of primary (Class 1 through Class 6), and three years for junior high school (JHS 1 through JHS 3 a/k/a Form 1 through Form 3). The FCUBE policy was put into effect by the Ministry of Education/Ghana Education Services in 1995. A myriad of educational reforms and programs have been implemented as strategies to reduce poverty constraints/restraints and increase enrollment by eliminating school tuition fees and levies on basic education for all children.

A significant policy measure, capitation grants, was created with the goal of increasing basic school enrollment by making basic school free of any and all forms of school fees. However, free is not free. Although there is no tuition cost for basic education in Ghana, and uniforms are free, parents have to pay mandatory ancillary fees consisting of PTA dues, Friday wear for children, textbooks for courses other than core subjects, projects such as building and farm, and entertainment and sports fees. Additionally, other costs are assumed when parents resort to private schools for the basic education of their children because of the myriad problems and concerns they have with the government schools. Families stretch their economic boundaries in order to pay for private schooling. These added expenses make a “free” basic education, as stipulated in the Constitution, prohibitive.

Tremendous funding and allocation of resources are necessary in the achievement of universal basic education for all. The Government of Ghana is solely responsible for funding FCUBE. Therefore, in addition to providing funding through the traditional budgetary process, the central government has established the Capitation Grants, District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) and the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFUND) to raise revenue to meet the current unmet needs and growing demand (Development Strategies That Work, 2012). Can the country keep up with the demand? Will there always be those whose educational needs go unmet? This may be Ghana’s reality. In measuring social deprivation, a report on Ghana’s poverty reduction strategy pointed “to a grim state of vulnerability and exclusion in Ghana.” The “proportion of children with no or inadequate education is alarming. Currently, between 20%-25% of children of school going age are not in school” (Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy 2003-2005: An Agenda for Growth and Prosperity, 2003). What is the fate of those children who are off the government’s radar – children not being provided access to quality free compulsory basic education because they live in informal settlements?

Those who play the blame game by saying they (those living in Old Fadama) should not be there any way because the place was not meant for habitants, overlook the humanity of those who are there, those who are also Ghanaian citizens, and those whose constitutional rights are being trampled upon. Although the members of the community have gone to court to stop the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) from evicting them from the land, there has been no court action taken to compel the AMA to provide basic education within the community. This is in no way an indictment against the dwellers. When people face the perils of abject poverty, it is understandable that issues of shelter and food are paramount and take priority. It is necessary to have a holistic perspective on poverty to understand the phenomenon taking place in Accra whereby those who come to the city seeking a better way of life often find themselves in informal settlements like Old Fadama.

### ***5. Poverty – Definitions, Pervasiveness, and Reduction Strategies***

A basic understanding of poverty is the pronounced deprivation of one’s well-being. It is connected to lack of income to access and buy goods and services, thereby stifling one’s ability to meet the basic needs of life. This is a simplistic definition; however, it captures the essence of the quandary many poor people find themselves. Even within the concept of poverty there are degrees of deprivation ranging from relative to absolute. According to the report *Strengthening Efforts for the Eradication of Poverty and Hunger*, “over the last 15 years Ghana has managed to reduce poverty levels significantly by an annual average rate of 1.5% per year, from a high of 51.7% in 1991/92 to 39.5% in 1998/99 and then further to 28.5% in 2005/6 (GLSS 5)” (Government of Ghana, 2007). Although Ghana has made significant strides in this area, what does this mean to the 4.8 million people who currently live in slums in Ghana? In Accra alone 1.5 million people live in slums, representing one third of the capital’s population. Ghana is going to have to take precautions so that its lauded successes do not further marginalize those who have yet to be elevated in society. If not careful, the poverty of the 28.5% may become obscured by the growing wealth of the remainder of the population.

Paul Shaffer writes in *New Thinking on Poverty: Implications for Globalisation and Poverty Reduction Strategies* that “Attacking poverty requires actions that go beyond the economic domain” (Shaffer, 2008). He suggests that there must be a broadening of the conceptualization and the action agenda to eradicate it. To better understand the marginalization of the most vulnerable, children, we must further understand two concepts – the feminization of poverty and the urbanization of poverty. The feminization of poverty describes a phenomenon where women are the face of poverty and the deprivation she faces is passed on to subsequent generations, thus perpetuating a cycle of poverty. The urbanization of poverty describes a phenomenon where those living in urban spaces constitute the largest proportion of the poor. Together, these two concepts bare on the life chances of children living in Accra’s largest slum.

Mothers are the primary caregivers of children. The level of poverty experienced by the mother are passed to the child. Based on the Old Fadama Enumeration in 2009 this means that 29,709 children are doubly impact by forces that perpetuate endemic poverty. The endemic poverty faced by the poorest in the country is characterized by being subjected to “unreliable water supply, poor sanitation, pollution, and limited access to power supplies and to poor nutrition” (Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy 2003-2005: An Agenda for Growth and Prosperity, 2003). This is emblematic of the conditions in Sodom and Gomorrah. In addition, “emerging forms of exclusion also depict[s] worsening vulnerability” of the poor, particularly in urban spaces. In Accra, these emerging forms of exclusion include “the phenomenon of street children, increasing child labor; and the phenomenon of Kayayei” (Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy 2003-2005: An Agenda for Growth and Prosperity, 2003). In *The State of the World's Children 2012* report the concept of the urbanization of poverty is key in its urgent assessment of the hundreds of millions of children living in urban slums. The report seeks to make visible the invisible by elucidating that “for billions of people, the urban experience is one of poverty and exclusion,” and that “standard data collection and analysis fail to capture the full extent of both problems” (UNICEF, 2012). The report goes on to further elaborate that:

Often, studies overlook those residents of a city whose homes and work are unofficial or unregistered – precisely those most likely to be poor or suffer discrimination. Moreover, official definitions of poverty seldom take sufficient account of the cost of non-food needs. In consequence, poverty thresholds applied to urban populations make inadequate allowances for the costs of transportation, rent, water, sanitation, schooling and health services (UNICEF, 2012).

Social deprivation models are useful in enabling the full conceptualization of poverty in Ghana. Shaffer posits that a greater understanding of poverty can be gained by using theoretical frameworks that broaden the definition of poverty. Below are two frameworks that help in the inquiry of the impact on the life chances of children in Sodom and Gomorrah (Shaffer, 2008):

The Human Poverty approach . . . underlying idea is that poverty should include both what we feasibly could or could not do (the capability set), the commodity requirements of these capabilities which differ interpersonally and over time, and what we are or are not doing (functionings). UNDP draws on this conceptual framework and proceeds to specify some of the basic capabilities in question. It includes the capability to ‘lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity self-respect and the respect of others’.

The underlying idea of the Social Exclusion approach is that poverty or deprivation is best regarded as lack of resources required to participate in activities and enjoy living standards which are customary or widely accepted in society. The Social Exclusion approach connects poverty closely with issues of citizenship and social integration and their associated resource requirements.

The synthesis of both approaches within a longitudinal study will enable a greater understanding of the issues of exploitation, oppression, power and inequality which are prevalent in the lives of those living in abject poverty in Old Fadama.

### **6. Social Exclusion – What Is In A Name?**

Old Fadama and Sodom and Gomorrah have been used interchangeably throughout this study to connote a fervent principle and that is the importance of a name. What you call someone or something is vital, and a part of the very fabric of Ghanaian customs and traditions. Names represent the soul/essence. What you call yourself and what others call you matters. The relationships the residents/slum dwellers in Old Fadama (as they call themselves) have with the government, the Ga people on whose land they occupy, and Ghanaians in general are tenuous at best. The negative attitudes and perceptions of these respective segments of society toward the squatters in Sodom and Gomorrah (as they are called by the outside world) speak to the daily challenges of overcoming all forms of discrimination faced by those who come to Accra from all over the regions seeking a better life. The enumeration of Old Fadama in 2009 found that 96% of the working age population does work. Within the informal economy of the city, particularly in Agbogbloshie Market, they provide an invaluable labor force. In addition 76% of those who moved into the community did so because of housing affordability (Old Fadama Enumeration, 2009). Economics is the driving force behind the settlement of the 79,684 temporary and permanent residents of Old Fadama (Housing the Masses, 2010).



Unfortunately, many equate the area with the worse elements of society barraged by crime, drugs, violence, and insecurity of safety. It is these perceptions held by outsiders who instigate, primarily through media, calling Old Fadama Sodom and Gomorrah, thus causing further exclusion through stigmatization and discrimination. The government has also been complicit in the continued marginalization of the most vulnerable children living in Accra. It goes without saying that Old Fadama is the full embodiment of the characteristics of informal settlements better known as slums. In a UN Habitat report slums are defined as having the following characteristics (United Nations Human Settlement Programme, 2009):

- Location on marginal land with poor drainage
- Insecurity of land tenure
- Poor housing conditions with few foundations, makeshift roofs and impermanent building materials
- No community health facilities or schools
- Poor or non-existent sanitation and water services
- High density, poor access on foot and no roads

Slum living is symptomatic of a multi-dimensional socio-economic political climate. In the state of the world's children report, slums are described as "an expression of, and a practical response to, deprivation and exclusion" (UNICEF, 2012). Although this may be the case, there are those in the community who fight for it. Philip Kumah is one of those who have organized others to advocate for the human rights of those living in Old Fadama and other slums in Ghana. He writes on his website:

I am a Human Rights Activist fighting for social, political and economic rights in Africa. I am currently working to end forced evictions. I work in Old Fadama, one of the largest slum communities in Accra, Ghana. Since 2002, my community has been under the threat of forced eviction. We are labeled squatters and criminals—our community is even derogatively nicknamed Sodom and Gomorrah. Despite these challenges, we continue to work hard, send our children to school, and are active citizens in our country (Kumah, 2012).

Until the political will of Ghana to develop, implement and provide oversight for serious public policies that address the critical needs of the most vulnerable in the country, remember the 4.5 million citizens still living in poverty, then Sodom and Gomorrah and other Sodom and Gomorrah will continue to outgrow the capacity of the nation to provide basic human rights.

### ***7. Conclusion – A Pathway Forward***

There is a pathway forward but it will take a partnership of all those vested in attaining MDGs and eradicating poverty and ensuring the human rights of those most vulnerable in Ghana. Currently, there are many people, governmental agencies, NGOs, CBOs, programs and projects which seek to work together to create the best society for all in Ghana. Nonetheless, it is easy for the most vulnerable to fall through the cracks. This exploratory research project serves to begin the discourse on bringing those in the margins, Ghanaian children living in Old Fadama/Sodom and Gomorrah who are being deprived of their right to a free compulsory basic education, into the mainstream evaluations of the convergence of poverty and exclusion. Some could argue that schools exist in the surrounding areas of Old Fadama and since it is illegal to provide schools in Old Fadama, then the children living there should attend a surrounding school. What some may fail to consider is 1) the distance children would have to travel, without transportation, to such schools and 2) the fact that many of those schools have reached capacities and cannot absorb more students.

It seems deployable that politics outweighs citizens' constitutional rights. We must all ponder the fact that no government school is provided within the informal development which given its population of almost 80,000 people could be a district on its own. Although there is talk of dismantling the informal settlement, therefore, rendering the issues raised in this paper invalid, it must be noted that this is not the first time this threat has been made. For over 30 years this settlement has been in existence and it only continues to grow in population. So until the people of Old Fadama are actually relocated, this issue is paramount.

When the people of Old Fadama are relocated, this issue will still be paramount because informal settlements will continue to exist with the continued urbanization of Accra. The fact of the matter is Old Fadama/Sodom and Gomorrah will continue to grow because economic factors are driving the migration into the city. There has to be a comprehensive plan put in place consisting of urban planning that will set Accra in a direction of being proactive and not reactive in its public and legal policies. It is unfortunate, that while politicians politic and engage in low level discourse around the issues of 1) whether or not those people are “supposed to be there” and 2) the inevitability of relocating the people living in Sodom and Gomorrah, I contend that there needs to be a higher level of discourse that examines the constitutionality of government policies toward citizens living in informal settlements. When the dust settles, in the end children are being victimized as their lives converge with poverty and social exclusion and they suffer from adults’ inability to meet their fundamental needs and constitutional rights.

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