SUCCESS STORY ON “KAYAYEI” PROJECT BEING CARRIED OUT BY BIBIR-GHANA IN NORTHERN REGION AND HISTORY BEHIND “KAYAYEI” IN GHANA
PROFILE OF BIBIR-GHANA

Bibir means “childhood” in Dagaare. Its initiative has been setup to offset the urgent needs identified in Ghana and to protect children and encourage them to study and grow as human beings, to become the major motors of change in their communities.

Currently, Bibir’s integral development-focused projects are running in Burkina Faso and Ghana where management has adapted their action plan to the specific characteristics of each area. Management believe in maintaining a long-term presence in areas so that they may help to create a better future.

The identity of Bibir-Ghana

Management of this Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) believe in the individual community’s capacity to bring about improvement in their own living conditions. Thus, all projects are local initiatives that focus on the development of the country and attend to the specifics of each population: culture, language, forms of behaviour and ways of understanding the world. Management point of departure is respect.

In addition, project personnel come from the local community, something that facilitates projects execution and involves members of the community in the planning, performance and evaluation of each activity.
Bibir’s projects in Ghana

Five years ago, Bibir opened its Ghana office to provide social services to the largely poor society. As the name suggests, Bibir’s primary focus are children, and so its activities have always commence within the framework of education and health. Every girl and boy has the right to grow up happy and to have his or her basic needs provided for. Through the support the NGO provide to schools it oversee the child’s nutrition, monitor their health and ensure that they are learning in a safe, appropriate environment, equipped with the required resources.

The NGO works simultaneously in the production sector, too. Management implement sustainable projects in areas such as crop production, livestock farming, and micro credit etc.

Thanks to these actions performed with the support of Bibir and the full participation of the local population, the entire community benefits from improved living conditions.

Some of Bibir’s projects:

- Distribution of educational materials to schools
- Medical check-ups in schools
- Construction and renovation of classrooms
• Donation of school furniture

• Provision of library services to basic school pupils

• ICT or computer training and remedial classes

• Crop innovation, etc

**VISION**: In Ghana, Bibir exist to encourage sustainable socio-economic development of the disadvantaged people in Northern Ghana for “the best interest of the child”, by providing the platform for community participation, creating the enabling environment for the survival of growth and development of the child in their own communities.

**MISSION**: While it exist to strengthen the development initiatives of poor communities and provide the platform necessary for community participation and action for sustainable development, it is also to help the disadvantaged people towards identifying the path of realization of their rights and potential for sustainable grow.
THE SUCCESS STORY........................

As part of its contribution towards eradicating the menace of Kayayei in Ghana, Bibir-Ghana in 2009 carried out feasibility studies in some peri-urban communities in the Tamale Metropolis to identify some of the potential Kayayeis and returnees in some eight communities. The communities included Nanton-zuo, Wamale, Kpavo-yapaala, Kulaa, Taha, Sanzirugu, Kalariga and Young-Dakpemyilli.

The objective of this feasibility studies was to enable the NGO extend support to these potential Kayayeis and returnees who were between the age group of 15 to 28 years in way to let them rescind their decision to migrate to the South to engage in Kayayei trade. These vulnerable group of people who are mainly females are have been given support in the form of skills training (dressmaking) whilst those who still have the desire to go back to school have also been given bursaries in the form of school uniforms, exercise books, school bags, pens and pencils.

Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), Departments of Children and Women, Department of Community Development and the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly helped Bibir-Ghana to identify these vulnerable girls in the above communities.
For instance, twelve (24) potential Kayayeis and returnees in Kpavo-yapaala, a peri-urban community in the Tamale Metropolis, have been supported with sewing machines including their accessories to enrol in skills training (dressmaking).

Also, six children of school going age who expressed interest in going to school were each provided with two free school uniforms, exercise books and school bags.

Besides this Bibir-Ghana is also supporting the mothers’ of these beneficiaries (forty women) to venture into commercial groundnuts oil extraction and processing with a loan facility of about GH¢4,000.00.
In Nanton-zuo, a farming community in the Tamale Metropolis, about 23 girls were given sewing machines and their accessories to learn dressmaking. They have been provided with bicycles to enable them travel a distance of about 15 kilometres everyday to the town centre to learn the dressmaking. Three (3) children were also assisted with 10 exercise books each, school bags, pens and pencils among other things to go back to school.

Interestingly, because of this support that is being extended to girls who are likely to migrate to Accra and Kumasi to engage in Kayayei, many parents have sent messages to their daughters who are already in Accra and Kumasi doing Kayayei to come back home to benefit from the Bibir’s grant rather than continue to suffer in the cities. Currently, about 38 girls have returned home from Accra and have expressed the desire to learn one trade or the other.
A section of both returnees and potential kayayei (kulaa community)

Presentation of bicycles for Nanto zou beneficiaries

A married beneficiary with her sewing machine (Yapaala community)

Sewing machines for married beneficiaries at Yapaala community
FUTURE PLANS FOR “KAYAYEI” PROGRAMME

In the short-term, Bibir-Ghana intends resettling all the girls at the end of the three year skills training by providing each of them with sheds and other logistics to work with and repay later in instalment.

- The organisation intends giving assistance to one hundred potential Kayayeis and those who will return home from Accra and Kumasi by enrolling them into the skills training programme and also assist about sixty people who will have the desire to go to school.

- In the long-term, Bibir-Ghana wants to build a skills training centre with hostel facilities for the training of the youth of Northern Ghana who are likely to migrate to the Southern part of the country in search of greener pastures. Knowledge on skills like dressmaking, hairdressing, weaving, beads making, carpentry, welding, electronic repairs, electrical works among others, would be impacted onto the youth so that when they come out they would not be burdens on their families any more. The skills they acquire would create employment opportunities for them and this will ultimately reduce the poverty and unemployment situation in the North and probably end the Kayayei syndrome in the country.

- Besides this, the NGO also intends organising periodic medical check up for the trainees and education on reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and other general medical conditions.
Meanwhile, the Director of Bibir-Ghana Joseph Charles Osei wants present and future governments to develop marshal plans towards improving the socio-economic development situation of Northerners.

He is also advocating for more schools to be provided, safe drinking water, electricity, factories, improved roads network, revamp agriculture, train more professionals to man training and educational institutions, build more hospitals/clinics, etc.

Mr. Osei in his estimation thinks that doing this, will ultimately solve the rural-urban migration in the North, create employment opportunities for the people to make income, reduce maternal/infant mortalities, increase grassroots participation among women, bring development closer to match the South, reduce social vices, and among others.
Bibir – Ghana will like to acknowledge David, Eva, Alex and Chema from Spain for being the brain behind the Kayayei project that the organization is currently undertaking. We appreciate their contribution and all those who have contributed towards this project, hoping that more sponsorship will continue to come in order to realise the dream of the project.

Finally, there is a plan to improve the infrastructure of the Northern sector under the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) by providing quality education to all, hooking villages up to the water system, improving road networks, and ensuring access to electricity, etc. The Director of Bibir-Ghana commended the current government for that initiative but also urged any government that will come afterwards to endeavour to sustain the project.
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT “KAYAYEI”

**Background**

‘Kayayei’ which literally means head-portering or head-carriers, is often associated with children and adults from Northern Ghana (Upper West, Upper East and Northern Regions), who migrate to the Southern sector of the country to engage in menial jobs (carrying loads of goods and other stuff on their heads or backs from one place to another for pay). Some of these people also work in chop-bars (local restaurants), hawk on the streets, assist market women in trading, act as shop assistants, fetching water for people,
and among others just to make ends meet.

Kayayei has been going on in Ghana for over three decades now and children under the ages of 18 including adults as old as 45 years indulge in that hand-to-mouth job. Majority of these Kayayei traders (about 80%) are females working in cities like Accra, the nation’s capital and Kumasi in the Ashanti Region.

Various organisations and agencies have estimated the population of Kayayei traders in Accra and Kumasi to be over fifty-thousand (50,000). While most of these Kayayei traders are school dropouts, some too are people who have escaped from outmoded socio-cultural practises such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation, widowhood rites, etc.

Indeed, the poverty situation in the three Northern Regions is the worst in the whole country as a result, a greater percentage of the population live on less than a dollar a day. Illiteracy in these areas is not also the best and accordingly, ignorance on certain issues such as the effects of violent conflicts and diseases have further worsened the plight of the people. These among others are the root causes of Kayayei in Ghana and thus, have become a serious development issue facing the country and most especially Northerners.

In this report, one will understand how long Kayayei has existed, how it came about, the problems associated with the phenomenon and what development organisations think need to be done to address
the situation permanently. One will also get to know the kind of people involved in this, where they come from and among others.

**What happened before the inception of Kayayei**

About fifty-three (53) years ago or more, Ghana’s first President Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah had a big dream for the country he so much loved, after leading its people to gain independence on March 6, 1957 from the British dominance. His dream was to develop the whole of Ghana to be like any of the Western countries at the time and he demonstrated his vision by executing several development projects including schools, factories, hydro-electric dam, roads, railway lines, hospitals, just to mention a few.

However, having had the opportunity as a political leader to tour the whole country and to also assess the development needs of the people, Dr. Nkrumah realised the total neglect of the then Northern Territory now Upper West, Upper East and Northern Regions which is also often referred to as Northern Sector, Northern Regions or Northern Ghana. He observed that the presence of colonial rule did not have any positive impact on the Northern sector of the
country except traces of slavery, abject poverty, severe underdevelopment, diseases, poor education (lowest in the country) and among others. Indeed, anything like formal education and healthcare services were virtually or entirely provided for the people by foreign Christian missionaries before and shortly after Ghana’s independence.

Having diagnosed the problems of Northern Ghana, Dr. Nkrumah quickly took bold steps to ensure that the North which was far behind the Southern part of the country in terms of socio-economic development and progress was put on the right pedal or lever for acceleration.

He built more basic and senior high schools across the three Northern Regions and awarded fulltime scholarships to students to study from the basic school up to the university and training college levels. Some of the schools he built included Lawra, Navrongo, Bawku, Tamale and Ghana Senior High Schools among others. Dr. Nkrumah actually saw formal education as a powerful drive to liberate the people of Northern Ghana from poverty, illiteracy and ignorance.

As a matter of fact, Ghana’s first Head of State also made it possible for the people of the North to make use of the large tracts of lands at their disposal by implementing irrigation projects (example Vea irrigation dam and others) which results was bumper harvest and this earned Northern Ghana the accolade “Bread Basket of Ghana”. Food was produced in abundance through the hard work of the people and they stored what they could eat after harvesting, while the rest was sent to feed people in many parts of Southern
Ghana. Dr. Nkrumah certainly had a big dream for Ghana but he actually seems to have had a bigger dream for Northern Ghana. His friendly and gainful policies brought a momentous amount of relief to Northerners who by nature are very hard working people and could have made things better for themselves with the help of the government.

But unfortunately, the soldiers who overthrew his government in February 1966 while he was outside the country never sustained his good and friendly policies; not even those who later came through the ballot box tried to restore those privileges for Northerners to catch up with their Southern counterparts.

**Causes of Kayayei**

Many Northerners including the elite group believe that the February 1966 coup was not only bad to the whole of Ghana but it was actually the beginning of the woes of the people of the Northern Regions. Undeniably, this was the beginning of Kayayei trade in Ghana’s big cities like Accra and Kumasi. The revolution which saw the unexpected exit of the government of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah seriously dashed the hopes of Northerners, as...
progress began to retrogress signifying a general economic mismanagement and deprivation under the leadership of the coup makers who were then ruling.

The Southern part was hit but the Northern sector which was least developed was gravely hit and the men began to migrate in exoduses down South to do menial jobs. They will do anything they found with their hands continuously for eight to nine months, mostly from October/November to May/June. They only returned home when they amass some significant amount of cash, a close relative dies or when the rainy season begins. Mostly, they returned with personal effects or stuffs like torch-lights, mats, beds and mattresses, clothes, building materials (roofing sheets, nails, woods, etc), bicycles and among others just to upgrade their social status.

This phenomenon continued for about two and a half decades (i.e. between the 70s and mid 90s) and that was when the youth mostly men, ranging between the ages of 25 to 40 also started trooping to the South to work and earn money to come home and marry, build zinc roofed houses, support their large family systems, help siblings and children in school, etc. While some of them were actually taken there by their well established family relations who were businessmen and women, most of them also travelled to the South because of the immediate transformation that they saw in relations who returned from there. They looked good and got married to good-looking men and women.
However, between the mid 90s and the year 2000 onwards which actually saw the Kayayei trade in Ghana reached its highest peak, children who dropped out of school as a result of parental neglect and harsh economic conditions or poverty, decided to sojourn to Kumasi and Accra to engage in head-portering. Up till today, many of the children below 18 years and the youth above 18, who migrate to Kumasi and Accra to engage in Kayayei trade, blame poverty as one of the reasons why they run away from their hometowns and villages. Some too, because of bad socio-cultural practises, example forced marriage, female genital mutilation, widowhood rites, witchcraft accusations, etc; they are forced to escape to these cities and will or never return to their hometowns and villages. It must also be put on record that most parents influence their children to migrate to the cities to make money.

Development indicators in the three Northern Regions are worst in the whole country and the least said about them, the better. The good people of these regions have been making “Save Our Soul” or SOS calls to past and present governments to bring development to them but all seems to have fallen on deaf ears. Several research works have been conducted on Northern Ghana but the outcome of these researches have been allegedly used to solicit aid from donors to help people in other parts of the country instead of Northerners. This discrimination many Northerners and civil society groups in the area say must stop. Some have continually asked why Northerners are being used as “guinea pigs”. Anything good stays in the Southern part of the country whiles development gap between the North and South continued to widen. A clear example many people have cited is the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) which
feasibility studies was conducted in the Upper East, Upper West and Northern Regions to source for donor support, but at the end of the day only few schools were chosen in the Northern sector to benefit from this particular programme whilst the Southern sector benefitted most.

A greater number of the population in Northern Ghana are illiterates and women form a greater percentage, about 80 percent, hence few of them take part in decision-making processes within the family, community and at the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly levels. For instance, very few women in Northern Ghana are Assembly members and Members of Parliament, and even occupy few positions in the Civil and Public Services. The whole of Northern Ghana has only one female legislator, that is, the Member of Parliament for Savelugu Constituency Hajia Marie Bofofo, whilst the number of Assembly Women is 142.

Also, 70 percent to 90 percent of Northerners are poor and thus live on less than a dollar a day. For instance, 7 out of 10 people in Northern Region are poor, Upper East 8 out of 10 and Upper West 9 out 10, respectively. By this figure, it also means that food insecurity in the three regions is the highest in the whole country. The rainfall pattern in these regions is not the best due to the geographical location of the area. The whole of Northern Ghana is a semi-arid region or what is often described as savannah land barely covered by trees or forest reserves. The North-East trade wind popularly known as harmattan from the Sahelian countries like Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, etc which hit parts of the Northern sector between November and June every year, makes life unbearable. Its accompanying characteristics
are dry skin, cracked lips, hazy weather conditions, dust, drying up of water bodies, etc. The North also records perennial drought and flooding every cropping season leading to crop failure and food insecurity.

Furthermore, most of the maternal and infant mortalities recorded on yearly basis in the whole country come from these regions and it’s due to the lack of health facilities and professionals to solve the critical health needs of the people. For instance, several medical doctors and other professionals trained with the tax payers’ money refuse postings to the North due to the deprived nature of the place. The few others who have also sacrificed over the years to work here are growing older and therefore can no longer withstand the stress of their work. Over 100 women die each year in Northern Ghana as a result of delivery complications, unsafe abortion practises and other related maternal problems.

Over 50 percent of the roads in Northern Ghana are also unmotorable or inaccessible. Vehicles do not go to most of the areas and as a result, pregnant women in critical conditions die on the way to the hospital as most of them are carried on bicycles, motorbikes, donkey carts, etc and by the time they arrive at the health facility, they pass along living the child behind or both mother and child pass away. Farmers who want to send their produce to the big markets in the district and regional capitals to sell are also unable to do so. Besides, the few roads that have been asphalted have also developed serious potholes or what could best be described as manholes because of shoddy work done by contractors, thereby leading to fatal motor accidents.
Chieftaincy disputes, communal violence and tribal conflicts have over the past five decades forced most of the people to migrate down South to seek asylum leaving behind the aged, women and their children who are vulnerable during any outbreak of violence. Politicians have also succeeded in interfering with most of these issues because of their parochial and selfish interest and that have further undermined the development efforts of the people and the little support that come from government.

**Final destinations of potential Kayayei traders**

The nation’s capital, Accra and Kumasi, are the most preferred destinations for Northerner children and adults who migrate to the South to seek greener pastures. They live in areas such as Konkomba market, Mallam Atta, Alajo, Tema station, Kaneshie, Agbogbloshie, Makola market, etc all in Accra. In Kumasi one can locate them around Kejetia, Adum,
Alla Bar, Aboabo, Moshie Zongo, Ash-town, etc. There are many reasons why they choose these places. Accra and Kumasi have been the most developed cities in Ghana since colonial days and has so many businesses being run by wealthy Ghanaian individuals and foreigners.

Aside this, there is plenty food, electricity to provide several varieties of entertainment, beautiful streets and mansions, good transport system, affordable goods, high demand for labour, among others.

Southerners are interested in jobs like cleaning of public toilets, choked gutters, work as watchmen, work in chop bars, and other menial jobs, even though these jobs can employ about five thousand people at a time and so, they are reserved for “Ntafour” or “Esremufour” which literally means Northern people or People from the bush, as they are often referred to. In fact, the relationship that exists in the olden days and still continues to exist now between Southerners and Northerners even though has improved very significantly is just like the case of the African man in Europe seeking greener pastures. He does any work that is given to him or her by the Whiteman because at the end of the day, he/she is assured of some few dollars, pounds or Euros to enable him or her return to Africa and set up a business.

Meanwhile, another place or region in Ghana that is likely to attract the attention of Kayayei traders is the Western Region, because of the oil find. There will be a serious boom of economic activities in that region and definitely jobs like cleaning of public toilets, loading of goods at transport (bus) terminals, cleaning of
offices, desilting of choked gutters, weeding of cocoa, coffee, cassava and palm plantations among others will be the preserve of Northerners.

Indeed, it must be acknowledged that there are Northerners dwelling in the rest of the other regions or cities in Ghana such as Sunyani, Koforidua, Ho, Cape Coast and Sekondi-Takoradi. They are gainfully employed and many of them working as medical doctors, nurses, lawyers, bankers, managers of big organisations, heads of department, engineers, etc.

**Population of Kayayei traders in Southern Ghana**

There is no official statistics regarding the population of Kayayei in Ghana but it’s been estimated that there are over 50,000 children and young people of Northern descent in Kumasi and Accra alone who are engaged in Kayayei trade just to earn a living. For instance, the 2009 US State Department report on Human Trafficking revealed that there are over 20,000 Kayayeiis in the Greater Accra Region alone. If that is the true situation, then one can say that the situation would not be totally different in Kumasi, the Ashanti Region. The Kayayei
traders migrate from villages and towns in Northern Ghana example, Tolon-Kumbungu, Savelugu-Nanton, Gushiegu, Yendi, West and East Mamprusi, Nanumba North and South, East Gonja and Bole in the Northern Region.

Others also migrate from Bolgatanga, Bawku, Kasina-Nankana, Sandema, Bongo and other places in the Upper East Region to these cities.

Those from the Upper West Region also come from towns and villages around Wa, Tumu, Jirapa-Lambussie, Lawra-Nandom, etc.

Take a walk on the busy streets of Kumasi-Kejetia or Accra-Tema station, and you will hear people speaking languages like Gonja, Dagbani, Mampruli, Kusal, Dagaare, Waali, Sisaala, Kanjarga, Frafra, Konkomba, Nanumba, Kasin, etc. They make between GH¢5.00 and GH¢10.00 a day, eat once and those with offsprings feed them twice a day. They can’t afford sanitary pads and pampers for themselves and their kids and this raises a big question on their reproductive health and other health issues.

These are children and young people between 8 and 45 years of age who could have gone to school to become responsible persons in future. Any of these Kayayei traders can become medical doctors, nurses, engineers, teachers, lawyers, police or military officers, corporate executives, etc to help Northern Ghana grow faster to catch up with Southern Ghana which is far ahead of the North with over 50 years in terms of development or progress.
**Problems Kayayei traders face in the cities**

Due to the huge number of Northerners now engaged in the Kayayei trade coupled with the harsh economic conditions in these cities, the Kayayei traders live from hand-to-mouth as some of them indulge in prostitution just to buy food to eat. They eventually acquire Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) or unwanted pregnancies and have to commit abortion. Those who are also able to carry the pregnancy for nine (9) months or less, finally give birth to fatherless children. This is because, in the final analysis the paternity of such a child is not always known or determined, and the mother of the child is likely to abandon the child somewhere or “poison” the child to death as a result of frustration.

Lack of accommodation is also a serious problem to these Kayayei traders since the money they make cannot even rent a descent accommodation for them to lay their heads. Most of them wait till stores and big shops situated along the streets and markets are closed, then they go and sleep in front of these shops. Those who are lucky find some kiosks and sleep inside. They sleep on cardboards, bare floor or ground, benches and tables. As soon as the first cock crows in the morning around 4 am, they wake up and begin to walk to their various places of work to start hustling. Unfortunately, some ‘idiotic men’ (some of the male Kayayeis) and other thieves rape them mercilessly and steal the little money that they make during the day. The end result is either acquiring STIs or having unwanted pregnancies.

Besides, when it rain during the night they have to cover themselves with polythene bags or find a place and perch till the rain stops. Those who have young ones (children) also suffer the same fate and
sometimes, the extreme weather conditions cause their children and themselves to fall sick or even die. “Children caring for their own children”, certainly the Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5 aimed at reducing child and maternal mortality cannot be achieved in the face of these happenings.

The male ones (Kayayei boys) because of bad peer influence, some have turned to drug addicts, pick-pockets, armed robbers, sakawa (fraudsters), and among others. One should not be surprise when he or she watches television or listen to radio news and names with Northern origin are mentioned for being suspects of armed robbery in one residential area, bank or in a car snatching syndicate. These boys who grow up on the street and have nothing doing finally end up like that. Many of these kayayei boys and ladies are also prone to some hazards like gang attacks leading to their untimely deaths while some of them are being knocked down by vehicles everyday and when perpetrators realise that the victim does not have any family relation around, they simply abandon them and run away. Normally those who hawk on the busy streets and those robbed at gun or knife point, face such life threatening predicaments.

Also, a lot of the Kayayei traders cannot afford healthcare services and therefore, when they fall sick the last resort is the chemist or pharmacy shop where they buy some pain killers and other medicines to treat themselves. They abuse these over-the-counter drugs and this sometimes aggravates their health conditions leading to complications or death. Those who cannot just afford to buy drugs look up to God for help.
**Effects of Kayayei on Northern Ghana**

Most Northerners who migrate to Kumasi or Accra to do Kayayei often go there with high hopes. Whiles those who still have the zeal or interest to go back to school, go to look for money for their school fees and to also enable them buy learning materials, others go there to look for the money to buy some tools to learn a job to be able to secure their future. Others also go to look for the money to start a business of their own in their hometowns and villages to be able to support their immediate family members and other relations.

However, the merits are still far below the demerits, the reason being that a lot of the Kayayei guys end up joining bad groups and become social misfits. Their modus operandi leads to increase in crime rates in the cities and ghettos in which they live. By and large, some of them get killed because live on the street is “survival for the fittest”. A lot of them also contract HIV/AIDS and have to go back to their hometowns to become a burden on their family members.

More so, the ladies end up indulging in promiscuous lifestyles such as prostitution and they end up acquiring HIV/AIDS and having unwanted pregnancies. Some are also raped or defiled by ‘foolish men’. They go back to their hometowns or villages and begin to spread the disease amongst community members perhaps due to the lack of knowledge of their HIV status. Others are also stigmatised by family members or the community in which they reside because they returned with fatherless children.
Most of the Kayayei returnees, return in the same state of poverty like they were when they migrated to the city and as a result become psychologically traumatised due to the names calling from friends in the community. In some instances, some commit or attempt suicide because they cannot bear the frustration.

The presence of the Kayayei in Accra and Kumasi has also led to excessive congestion in the centre of the cities and makes the places unattractive to visitors. The situation has become so overwhelming that there is also pressure on facilities such as transport systems, sanitation facilities, water, price hikes on basic commodities in the market, and among others.

The Kayayei menace still plays a bigger role in children dropping out of school and running to the cities to make money thereby further worsening the poor educational situation in the Northern Regions. Over 70 percent of people in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions are illiterates. Most of them have never been to school at all.

Child labour is a crime under the laws of Ghana. The practise also offends international Conventions which the government of Ghana is signatory too. According to the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, a child is anyone under the age of eighteen (18) years. Given the definition of a child, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Convention 138 defines child labour as “labour that is performed by a child who is under the minimum age for the kind of work (as defined by national legislation, in accordance with accepted international standards) and that is those likely to impede the child’s education and full
development”. But here is the case children under the age of 18 engage in Kayayei trade in the nation’s capital at the full glare of government officials.

Ghana has one of the best legal regimes for children in the whole of Africa. The country was the first in the world to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on 5th February 1990 even before it became international law. There is a whole chapter in the country’s 1992 Constitution on the right of the child, there is the Juvenile Justice Act passed in 2003, there is the Children’s Act, 1998 and there are a dozen more other adopted national policies on children. So why are we not making progress? Implementation of policies by government is the problem and seems a little too late to make the right decisions.
Beneficiaries at work

Director of bibir-Ghana interacting with beneficiaries

Yapaala beneficiary girls learning shop

Learning in progress for Nanto-zou girls
**What has been done to address the menace of Kayayei in the past?**

In the past, government and some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) made attempts to empower Kayaye traders by engaging them in skills training or lifeline projects. Several interventions had been put in place by government and NGOs like the Catholic Action for Street Children, Rescue Foundation, Assemblies of God Relief and Development Service and Apple, to provide shelter, training and medical assistance.

Government also introduced the Skills Training and Employment Placement (STEP) programme and the Stop Kayayei Programme, which was sponsored by UNICEF in 2003 to rescue, educate and reintegrate the Kayayeis into their families. The STEP programme is an innovation by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) aimed at fighting social exclusion and poverty and promoting social protection worldwide. It has now been transformed into the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP).

However, due to a lack of monitoring no one is sure how effective these programmes have been. Despite these setbacks, government claims it was not relenting. It is in collaboration with all stakeholders making conscious efforts to bridge the development gap between the North and the South in order to stem the flow of migration.

There are also reports of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs that it had changed its strategy in order to efficiently deal with the Kayayei issue.
The Ministry was in the process of registering all Kayayeis in the city to establish a database to help repatriate them to their various communities. This was a way of making the activities of the Kayayeis unattractive to those who otherwise might try the lifestyle.

The Ministry ran several training programmes in trades including hairdressing, tailoring, tie-dye and batik in order to give the Kayayeis skills to live on so they could leave the streets. In addition to this, was also the collaboration between the Ministry and the various Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies whose people are involved in the Kayayei phenomenon, to reintegrate them back into their communities and give them the necessary skills training needed to improve upon their standard of living.
Conclusion:

Ghana, like all signatories to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), has five more years to meet the target and things are not looking good. This raises the question of where are we, and what concrete are we doing as a nation to solve our development needs in areas of education, poverty, health services, etc if indeed an estimated population of over 50,000 children and adults are working as porters or Kayayei in Accra and Kumasi respectively. This certainly remains a major setback to Ghana’s attainment of the MDGs by 2015. Reading from the story, the obvious conclusion one would or is likely to draw is that, despite the various interventions put in place by government and NGOs to address the Kayayei phenomenon, nothing has changed that much. Many of the projects have either stalled due to lack of funds or monitoring and even most of those who have been supported to learn one skill or the other, have still not returned to their hometowns and villages or have gone but returned to do Kayayei. Kayayei or head-portering is like getting addicted to hard drugs. Weaning yourself from it is not easy and the best way to address the problem is to tackle it from its roots.

It should be noted that the children and young people migrate from Northern Ghana to the Southern sector simply because of poverty and other factors that inhibit their rights or freedoms to progress in life and those problems must be addressed with the right expertise and with a sense of urgency.
Any form of support geared towards empowering these head-porters ought to be sent to the regions or Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies that these people migrate from to the South to engage in the Kayayei trade. There are NGOs like Bibir-Ghana, Gubkatimali, Ghana Artisans Movement, ActionAid Ghana, Girls Growth and Development (GIGDEV), Christian Children’s Fund of Canada (CCFC), etc who are doing very well in terms of implementation of good training programmes to help address the rural-urban drift in Northern Ghana. These NGOs can be supported with funds, tools and other things to role out training or reintegration programmes that would address the Kayayei syndrome.

This is because many people especially Northerners observed that the various interventions for rescue and training should be targeted at communities in the North instead of the cities. They believe programmes administered to the head-carriers in Accra and Kumasi makes the lifestyle more attractive, and serves as an incentive to migrate to the Southern sector in order to enjoy the same “good” treatment.

**CREDIT TO**..........................


(2) *The Statesman* newspaper report on Kayayei captioned “Untold stories of “Kayayei”.

(3) *The radio feature filed by Joy Fm’s Evans Mensah* captioned: “Street life in Accra: The story of a 17- year-old mother at Mallam Atta”.
(4) Department of Women, Northern Region.