TRANSCRIPT FOR "’When a King has Good Counsellors, His Reign is Peaceful’ - A Call to Action for Our Children and Our Communities’ Futures"

<https://vimeo.com/171963022>

|  |
| --- |
| **VO:** Children are our most precious assets as a community. Imagine a community where all our children are healthy and strong, able to play happily, do well in school and grow up to become successful adults, to have healthy children of their own and carry on the strong traditions of Ghanaian life. What leader, community member or parent wouldn’t want to see healthy children grow to be productive members within their community?**\*** |
| **VO:** Unfortunately, many of the scenes from everyday life in communities across northern Ghana are not of healthy prospering children. Rather they are of young children struggling, behind in their physical and mental development. In fact, one in every three children in northern Ghana are not growing and developing adequately. This deficit will stay with them for life. These children will not realize their potential, and as a society we will not realize ours.  **But**, we need not continue this situation. The onus lies with us to advance; to apply today’s know-how to help our children reach their potential for the good of us all. |
| **VO:** To realize our vision for a brighter future when all children are healthy, growing and developing well, we must identify the situation that causes our children to struggle.  Unfortunately the children being held back are identified only by their inactivity and poor growth. Their situation often develops undetected, even by their parents. In our communities poor growth is considered normal or a child’s fate because they were born sickly or to parents who are poor or into a family where all members are short, therefore we believe it is natural for the child to be short. |
| **VO:** But**,** did you know ALL children, world-wide have the same potential to grow and develop during their first two years of life? Ghanaian children are not an exception.  Global studies on child growth have shown that neither a child’s family background, nor where they grow up, holds back their potential to meet the minimum standards of healthy growth. The culprit when a child has poor growth is under-nutrition. |
| **Dr. Joseph Larbi:** It is a chronic condition whereby the child doesn’t receive adequate nutrients for a certain period. |
| **VO:** This time period can be weeks, months and even years of a poor diet or multiple illness over time that rob the body of the nutrients required for growth. |
| **VO:** We can identify poor growth by comparing the growth of our children to the global standard. Children with very slow growth are referred to as stunted; they are significantly short for their age. It is important that by each child’s second birthday he or she has reached the global standard for normal growth—at least 80 cm for girls and 81.7 cm for boys. Any boy or girl who measures less than this on their second birthday is suffering from chronic under-nutrition or is stunted. |
| **VO:** This situation is something we can control and overcome in northern Ghana. Everyone, from community leaders to parents must recognize when a child is growing poorly, and take action. For small children the actions are not costly. They are within the means of the community and households when everyone, works together to create a home and community where children can enjoy healthy growth.  Let us explore the situation in more detail to understand what faces us and the urgency for us to take action. |
| **VO:** First, stunting, is not a disease and it does not appear suddenly. Instead it develops gradually. Most children are born healthy; not stunted. According to the 2014 Demographic Health Survey, only 8% of children in Ghana less than 6 months are stunted. But, by the time the children reach 2 years of age, 25% are stunted. This shows the gradual process by which children BECOME stunted over the two year period because of inadequate nutrition and frequent illness. The damage caused by poor nutrition in this period lasts a life time. |
| **VO:** This rapid increase in the number of children who become stunted early in life means that the time for action is the period beginning with a fetus’s growth during the mother’s pregnancy until the child is two years old—the First 1,000 Days. |
| **Dr. Jacob Mahama:** Usually the child needs good nutrition during the first 1000 days of his life. Because that’s when there is rapid development of the organs and the cells in the body. When there is lack of nutrition and there is lack of energy, it will impede the development of the child and affect the child cognitively and physically. |
| **VO:** Second, the situation in northern Ghana, is worse compared to other parts of the country. If we look at a community with 12 children under the age of two, generally in Ghana 3 or fewer, of those children would be stunted. However, 4 would be stunted in the northern zone. This is far too many!  Third we need to understand the consequences of not acting. |
| **Dr. Jacob Mahama**: If the child is stunted and is anemic like I said, it affects the child cognitively and also developmentally and these children who have a short attention span find it difficult to sustain what they have learnt, will definitely affect their schooling. And these are the people who will occupy the lower part of the classes during exams and they are the people who are most likely to drop out of school. But if they are well, they are the ones who are most likely to go up to university and come home and have better jobs that will actually improve the socio-economic status of the family and the community as well. |
| **VO:** Our communities of the future will therefore not have the strong and healthy people they need to prosper. It is estimated that between 2011 and 2020, 720 million Ghana cedis (US $504 million) will be lost in decreased worker productivity due to stunting or poor growth in early childhood.  What can be done about this situation? Whose responsibility is it?  Do you think that this problem of poor child growth is in the hands of women to fix, that only they can make a difference? Or, is there a role for everyone? Let’s explore these questions by hearing what health officials have to say. So what is this proper nutrition that we need to practice for the healthy growth of our young ones? |
| **Dr. Joseph Larbi:** We advise the mother to eat the appropriate food so that it will go into the formulation of the child or the infant. Then when the child is also born, we focus on exclusive breast-feeding for the first 6 months. |
| **Regional Health Promotion Officer, Upper East**: The first 6 months, we talk of exclusive breastfeeding. If you do not exclusively breastfeed the baby for the first 6 months, you are hurting the child. Because the child’s tummy before the 6 months is not well developed and the child cannot take anything which is heavy. |
| **Dr. Joseph Larbi:** There is something we call complementary feeding, whereby the mother is educated as to the type of food that the child should be given so that there wouldn’t be that difference as to the growth of the child when the child is being exclusively breastfed and afterwards. |
| **Dr. Jacob Mahama**: The local food that we actually have, like beans, green leaves, eggs and also we have these are blends where we have soya mixed with other kinds of grains and all that the child actually needs to build up the blood and also to supplement whatever feeding that they have. |
| **VO:** With this advice from our health authorities it is essential that it is passed on to the mothers who must breastfeed and prepare the food for the young children. Let’s see the role that elder women, grandmothers and mothers-in-law are playing to ensure healthy growth.  Ayishatu Ayata is one of the leaders of the Atampintin mother to mother support group in the Bongo District. She volunteers leading her peers, other grandmothers in supporting their daughters, or daughters–in-law to practice proper breastfeeding. These grandmothers use the knowledge they have gained to educate their daughters who are expecting to have young children. Sometimes they must make home visits. Often, women face pressure from well-meaning friends to introduce water and food too early to infants. With the education provided from the mother to mother support groups, they are able to explain to these friends that exclusive breastfeeding is the best way to fight stunting and ensure that the child avoids illness and grows healthy and intelligent during the first six months of life. |
| **Aishatu Ayata:** A lot of advocacy is done within this community particularly for the pregnant women. The new mothers are also educated to give the utmost care to their wards.  Mothers are advised to exclusively breastfeed their new-born babies within the first 6 months. Food and water can only be given after this period.  Mothers are also advised to wash their hands before feeding their babies, If the mother cannot be around to breastfeed her child, her breast milk can be extracted, stored in hygienic containers and later given to the child. |
| **VO:** While these mothers groups and the crucial role of women cannot be denied, there are other forces at work for the good of our children that show us the importance of leaders and fathers in ensuring healthy child growth.  In the Northern Region, one of the traditional rulers, the king of Mamprugu, Nayiri Naa Mahami Abdulai Sheriga and his elders are helping their community put a stop to stunting. The health of the children within their community is of great concern to them. **Taarana John Wuni Nguruma** is the first elder of Nayiri. He visits the Baptist Medical Center and observes as some children are taken through growth monitoring activities. |
| **Taarana John Wuni Nguruma:** In fact if we go back, we can trace probably the course of mal-nutrition and therefore stunting to some lukewarm attitude of parents, particularly the male. They see the bringing up of children, the growing of a child to be more or less the sole responsibility of the mother, which is not the right thing to do because it just doesn’t take breast milk alone for the child to develop properly. The child needs to be fed properly, even to begin with, the mother when pregnant, the expectant mother needs to be properly fed with the right kinds of food. And who is supposed to provide the food. It is the males, the husbands who are more or less the leaders of the family. |
| **VO:** The first elder works with local health workers to ensure that children under 2 are brought to the center for growth assessment every month. All mothers are offered support on how to feed children as they grow, but when a child is found to be lagging behind on their growth as seen on the growth chart the mother receives special nutrition counselling to help her correct the situation immediately so it is not allowed to get worse over several months. In the Bongo district in the Upper East, another traditional elder **Awumbilla Aya** the chief of Atampintin is making efforts to ensure that households, especially husbands, do what is needed to help their wives and newborns get the required nutrients to prevent stunting. |
| **Awumbilla Aya:** I am very impressed with the advocacy and sensitization programme. I have learnt a lot and will advise all my chiefs, elders and the entire community to make it a habit to attend health centers regularly and to provide good care to their wards. They will therefore learn that taking good care of children helps them to develop better in future. |
| **VO:** Awumbilla Aya reminds fathers to use some of their money to purchase meats like liver, fish, and eggs for their young children who are over 6 months. When he sees them eating out, he never fails to remind them of their duty as heads of household and to take some of the meat home to their families. |
| **VO:** Leaders like **Awumbilla Aya and Taarana John Wuni Nguruma** have the power to influence husbands to help their wives and send them for health counseling and to also take action to provide special foods for their young children. |
| **Awumbilla Aya:** The men here are sometimes ignorant. The moment the wives try to send their wards to the health center, the men begin to talk against it or even refuse which is not the best. I’ll advise all men, they should provide all the necessary support to wives. |
| **Bongo husband of twins**: My advice to my male colleagues, especially we the husbands; we should do well to help our wives to take proper care of the newly born babies, because wives like this they need a lot of support. They are vulnerable so they want us to help them in terms of basic needs, to help them with the financial support. Especially when they are attending health centers or hospitals, we should do well to help them to attend. |
| **VO:** All religions support the parents’ role in raising a child who develops physically, mentally and morally. Therefore, the support of religious authorities in ensuring healthy growth of children is important. This is the **chief Imam in the Tolon district**. He appoints his right hand man who officiates over each naming ceremony in the community. During the naming ceremonies and other public gatherings he encourages the men in his congregation to take an active role in caring for their children. As heads of household they must do more than simply making sure that there is grain for their family. They should take action to provide special foods for their young children. He and his right hand man remind husbands of the Koran’s advice to give off their possible best to their wives and young children.  Leaders like the chief Imam and local pastors have the power to influence husbands to take action to provide special foods for their young children. Doing this helps the child to grow strong, healthy and intelligent and thus stopping child under nutrition even before it begins. |
| **Chief Imam in Tolon:**Truly, not all of us are the same. Some are capable, whilst others are not. Those who are capable can lead the way and those who are not capable should do whatever they can. Because our main aim is to promote good health so that there will be healthy living that will allow children to grow normally thereby reducing stunting. That is what we can do. |
| **VO:** Just as nutritious food and adequate feeding practices are important, so too is a clean environment and good sanitation practices that protect children from infections. This is, **Abdullai Abubakari** the District Environmental Health Officer in the Mion district. He knows that well-nourished children are cleverer, complete more schooling, and earn higher wages as adults. So he does his part to ensure healthy growth in young children by encouraging communities to take action to keep their homes and compounds clean. |
| **Abdullai Abubakari**: I always visit communities to educate them on household latrine promotion and then construction of household tippy-taps and also mounting tippy-taps closer to the latrine. I also give them education on hand washing with soap at critical times. Also I educate them on household water treatment and safe storage in the community and also educate them on environmental sanitation and hygiene.  Before we entered into the community, Open Defecation was being practiced in the communities and all the drains were insanitary and the households were not using even tippy-taps. Through our intervention, the communities were able to mount tippy-taps in the household and practice hand washing with soap at critical times. |
| **VO:** We have seen what the health officials in northern Ghana are saying about nutrition and good hygiene and we have seen how our leaders, are working so children in their communities are on the road to a brighter future where they will be prepared for both the joys and the challenges life holds. We know that childcare needs women’s attention, but we have heard here about the important role of men. To reach the future we imagine we need to spread the word of the leaders we have heard from.  They ask that every leader and community member join them to help the communities’ youngest children. |
| **Dr. Joseph Larbi:** As a man of the home, we do expect you to take the full responsibility of your family; your wife and children and your environment. We don’t want your baby to be stunted. We don’t want your baby to be under-weight. |
| **Chief Imam in Tolon**: Every human being is looking for two things. One, good health. Two, development. And once these two things go to affect the development of society, I will like to call on everybody to ensure that they provide good nutrition for their families. |
| **King James Rexford**: Normally we only talk of female that is the women aspect. We the men, we are also part and for that matter, we need to be supportive. At times it’s not only financial support that the woman needs in order for her to stay healthy, some are psychological. Even carrying out firewood and other things, if you support in that area, it will relieve the woman and psychologically she will feel well and being respected for her to stay healthy to take care of the unborn child. |
| **Tahiru (2nd Bongo household head):** My advice to my male colleagues, especially we the husbands, is that we should do well to help our wives to take care of the newly born babies.  This is because our wives need a lot of support. They are vulnerable, so they want us to help them in terms of basic needs, and to help them with the financial support especially when they are attending health centers or hospitals. We should do well to help them attend. |
| **Dr Jacob Mahama:** The man is the head of the family, so what we actual do is trying to make our religious leaders, our traditional leaders, understand that the health of their families is in their hands and let them understand that cleanliness of the environment is paramount. And also supplementation of the child’s food is important. Usually, traditionally, when there is food in the house, it is only the man who eats and calls the child to give them tidbits. We let them understand that it’s actually the child who needs the protein more than the grown-up. |
| **Taraana John Wuni Ngruma**: The leaders should be able to guide the people to know that, so far as feeding is concerned, the males should be encouraged to provide the proper food and they should identify sources of support for the communities so that they can mobilize the communities to take advantage of support that will encourage them to feed their families well. |
| **VO:** Our children, if cared for properly will grow to become the leaders of tomorrow. Remember, the successful leaders of today were once children; the Imams, the pastors, the chiefs, the nurses, the doctors and the president were once children: Children who were given the opportunity through the right nutrition. |
| Imagine a future where the children of today, the youngest among us, are receiving the best nutrition our region offers and growing up in communities that are clean where they are protected, not only by their family, but by their community.  Imagine those children and what they will do for our future, becoming the great leaders of tomorrow carrying on the strong Ghanaian traditions…. |
| **Imagine this future being shaped by you. Are YOU ready to take action?** |