



Case Study

Education in Côte d'Ivoire: Fofana family

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Gbalia Fofana, 33 years old, is a volunteer teacher at a primary school in Bouaké, the second largest city in Côte d'Ivoire, and the main stronghold of the Forces Nouvelles, the non-governmental groups controlling the north of the country after the conflict in 2002.

The conflict destroyed big parts of the education system in this West African country, previously famous for its high attendance rates: 78% of all children in Côte d'Ivoire went to school before the conflict. Gbalia was one of the many who understood the importance of continuing children's education despite the fighting, and began volunteering his time as a teacher after he lost his job when conflict erupted. Gbalia has been volunteering as a teacher since 2004, working without a stable salary to continue the education of children in Côte d'Ivoire.

Like her father, Gbalia's 12 year old daughter Sephora realises the importance of education. *"School is important because it teaches children lots of things, and gives us a chance to get a job when we grow up. If you don't work, you cannot do anything in the world. I would like to be an engineer so that I can work with computers"*.

Like many families in Côte d'Ivoire, the Fofana family is struggling to make ends meet. In addition to his daughter, Gbalia is also taking care of 14 year old Ismaël, his stepson, and 12 year old Naminata, his niece. As a volunteer who receives only a small payment from community donations instead of a regular or sufficient salary, Gbalia estimates that he can currently cover only about 10% of the costs of supporting his family¹.

Many in Côte d'Ivoire are hit by increased costs of food and of all imported goods, as well as higher costs of all transport. These rising prices do not help the situation for families who are already struggling. Save the Children is providing school kits for children in schools in their implementation areas throughout Côte d'Ivoire. Although this helps lessen the burden on families in getting their children in school, there are additional costs a family has to bear when they send their children to school.

In West Africa, where many families help support children in their extended family, the case of 14 year old Ismaël is not unique: at the beginning of the school year, money that was supposed to come in from one of Ismaël's uncles never arrived. When money is short, families have to prioritize and often the children of others suffer the brunt. Gbalia and his family were forced to remove Ismaël from his school, and he is now unable to further his education. Although Ismaël understands the reasons behind this decision, he recognises the value of education and feels that he is missing out. *"I wish all children could have the chance to go to school, because school is good for children. If you go to school, you can be a doctor or a nurse. If I had been able to stay in school, I would have been able to be a director."*

¹ It is estimated that volunteer teachers in Côte d'Ivoire make approximately 10-20% of what government paid teachers earn per year.

Making the decision to take Ismaël out of school wasn't easy for Gbalia, a teacher himself. But like so many others across Africa he was forced to prioritise among basic needs. Gbalia admits to having to choose between making sure his family has enough to eat, and making sure all the children can get a basic education. *"I have three priorities. My number one priority on a daily basis is to make sure there is enough food to feed my family; I cannot allow them to go hungry. After that, I have to make sure they are healthy. I know how important education is, I am a teacher myself. I know that education is a right for all children including those in my family and that it should be my highest priority. But because of the situation we are in, I have had to make my family's education my third priority. If the children are hungry, if they are sick or suffering, how can they go to school?"*

Despite the challenges, Gbalia is determined to keep his daughter in school. *"I am doing everything I can to ensure that my daughter makes it to college. I don't want her to miss out on anything"*.

Gbalia is continuing to work as a teacher and receive the small payment for his work. He hopes to one day be able to finish his own education, interrupted by the conflict and ensuing lack of infrastructure which forced him to cut his university studies short. He would like to find a stable job with a steady income that would be sufficient to meet the basic needs of his family.

ADDITIONAL NOTE:

Now that he is out of school, Ismaël has started an apprenticeship at a mechanic workshop for two-wheeled vehicles. Although he misses the opportunities school can bring, he seems happy with his new situation and he's looking forward to his future. *"I know that going to school is important, but it was also hard for me because I was 15 years old and in grade 5, I was the biggest kid in my class. I felt embarrassed. I like mechanics. One day, when I master the trade, I will open my own garage to repair bikes myself. I like doing this work, it makes me happy"*.