

CONCEPT NOTE

NATIONAL & AFRICAN YOUTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2026

“WHAT AILS GHANA, AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT”

Organised by: Spio-Garbrah Foundation (SGF) & African Business Centre for Developing Education (ABCDE)

In collaboration with: African and international educational, diplomatic, media, private-sector and civil-society partners

In Honour of: Dr. Ekwow Spio-Garbrah's Birthday

Launch Date: Thursday, 10 September 2026

Target Participants: Young people aged 16–20 years

Proposed Awards Ceremony: November/December 2026

1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Ghana's future is inseparable from Africa's future and from the wider global environment in which Ghana operates.

Although Ghana is a relatively small country, many of the challenges confronting the country have important regional, continental and international dimensions. Youth unemployment, education, migration, climate change, external debt, trade, environmental degradation, illegal mining, corruption, development financing and the country's ability to add value to its natural resources cannot be addressed effectively without considering Ghana's relationship with Africa and the wider international community.

It is therefore proposed that the Spio-Garbrah Foundation and the African Business Centre for Developing Education (ABCDE) establish a National & African Youth Essay Competition to encourage young people to examine Ghana's problems from both domestic and international perspectives and propose practical solutions.

The initiative, being organised in honour of Dr. Ekwow Spio-Garbrah's birthday on 10 September 2026, will invite young people aged 16–20 to submit a 300–500-word essay on the theme:

“What Ails Ghana, and What We Can Do About It”

The competition will challenge participants not simply to identify Ghana's problems, but to examine their underlying causes, international dimensions and possible solutions.

It will also encourage young people to think about how Ghana can strengthen its productive capacity, compete internationally, create jobs, attract investment and contribute more effectively to African development.

2. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS: AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

Participants may write on one or more of the following challenges and opportunities:

1. Youth unemployment and underemployment — creating jobs through entrepreneurship, industrialisation, technology and skills development.
2. Weaknesses in educational content — reforming education to better prepare young people for employment, entrepreneurship, innovation and global competitiveness.
3. Poor sanitation and waste management — developing sustainable systems involving citizens, businesses and local authorities.
4. Corruption and abuse of public resources — strengthening institutions, transparency, accountability and ethical leadership.
5. Galamsey and environmental degradation — balancing economic opportunity with environmental protection and responsible natural-resource management.
6. Environmental pollution and climate change — examining Ghana's responsibilities, vulnerabilities and opportunities within the global climate agenda.
7. Crime, cybercrime and “sakawa” — addressing the social and economic causes of crime while promoting legitimate opportunities for young people.
8. Irregular migration and the lure of greener pastures abroad — creating an environment in which young Ghanaians can see viable futures at home while promoting responsible global mobility.
9. National leadership and governance — exploring how Ghana can develop more effective, accountable and visionary leadership.
10. Greed, materialism and declining social values — strengthening citizenship, ethics, community responsibility and national consciousness.
11. Producing more Made-in-Ghana goods for domestic consumption and export — building competitive Ghanaian industries and brands capable of succeeding in African and international markets.
12. Value addition to Ghana's natural resources — particularly processing more Ghanaian cocoa into chocolate and other finished products and transforming Ghana's gold into jewellery and other value-added products for export.
13. The Ghanaian and African Diaspora — developing stronger mechanisms for Ghanaian and African Diasporans to invest, finance businesses, transfer skills and contribute to national and continental development.

14. Ghana's external debt and international financial relationships — examining how Ghana can manage its debts, strengthen its economy and protect national development interests while remaining a responsible member of the international financial system.

15. Ghana's role in Africa and the global economy — examining how Ghana can increase trade, investment, innovation and cooperation within Africa and with the rest of the world.

16. Other major challenges or opportunities identified by participants.

Participants will be encouraged to demonstrate how local problems can have international causes, consequences or solutions, and how Ghanaian and African young people can become part of addressing them.

3. OBJECTIVES

The competition seeks to:

- Encourage young Ghanaians and young people studying in Ghana to think critically about national development.
- Give young people a platform to propose practical solutions to Ghana's challenges.
- Promote civic responsibility, patriotism and ethical citizenship.
- Strengthen research, analytical and writing skills.
- Encourage solution-oriented rather than purely problem-oriented thinking.
- Promote understanding of Ghana's place within Africa and the international community.
- Encourage entrepreneurship, innovation, industrialisation and value addition.
- Explore constructive ways of engaging the Ghanaian and African Diaspora in development.
- Stimulate dialogue among young people, educators, policymakers, diplomats, business leaders and development practitioners.
- Identify promising young thinkers whose ideas may contribute to Ghana's future development.

4. ELIGIBILITY

The competition shall be open to young people aged 16–20 years, subject to the following categories:

A. Ghanaian Students in Ghana

Ghanaian students enrolled in Senior High School and other eligible educational institutions within Ghana.

B. Foreign Students Studying in Ghana

Non-Ghanaian students studying in Ghana who fall within the stipulated age range.

C. Ghanaian Students Studying Abroad

Ghanaian students studying outside Ghana who are within the stipulated age range, provided that at least one parent is fully Ghanaian.

The inclusion of these categories is intended to give the competition a broader African and international dimension and allow young people with different experiences of Ghana and the world to contribute their perspectives.

Each participant may submit only one essay.

5. ESSAY REQUIREMENTS AND RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Theme:

“What Ails Ghana, and What We Can Do About It”

Word Limit

300–500 words.

Each submission must include:

- Full name
- Age
- School/institution
- Country of residence/study
- Class/form or level of study
- Telephone/contact details
- Email address, where applicable
- Parent/guardian or responsible school authority contact

Rules

1. The essay must be the participant's original work.
2. Plagiarism shall result in immediate disqualification.
3. Entries must remain within the 300–500-word limit.
4. The essay must directly address the competition theme.
5. Participants must demonstrate practical, realistic and/or innovative solutions.
6. Participants may discuss Ghanaian challenges from domestic, African or international perspectives.
7. Essays containing defamatory, hateful, obscene or discriminatory material shall be disqualified.
8. The organisers may verify the identity, age, school and originality of shortlisted entries.

9. The use of AI to generate the substantive content of an essay shall not be permitted. Shortlisted participants may be required to explain or defend their essays.
10. Late submissions shall not be considered.
11. Judges' decisions shall be final, subject to the competition's established procedures.
12. By submitting an essay, participants grant the organisers permission to publish their essays, names and photographs for legitimate educational, promotional and archival purposes connected to the competition.

6. JUDGING CRITERIA

Entries shall be assessed objectively according to the following criteria:

Criteria/Weight

- Understanding of the problem - 20%
- Quality and practicality of proposed solutions| 30%
- Originality and creativity - 20%
- Critical thinking and analysis -15%
- Clarity and quality of writing - 10%
- Ghanaian/African/global relevance - 5%

TOTAL - 100%

Shortlisted participants may be invited for a brief verification or oral presentation before the final winners are confirmed.

7. JUDGING PANEL

A five-member independent panel shall be constituted to ensure credibility, diversity and fairness.

The proposed composition is:

1. Senior Educationist/Academic - Chairperson
An experienced academic or education professional.
2. Development/Policy Expert
A professional with expertise in governance, development, economics or public policy.
3. Senior Journalist/Communications Professional
An experienced media or communications practitioner with knowledge of national and international affairs.
4. Youth, Entrepreneurship or Innovation Expert
A professional experienced in youth development, entrepreneurship, innovation or skills development.

5. Non-Ghanaian Diplomat/International Representative

Preferably a diplomat or representative affiliated with a diplomatic mission or international institution in Ghana.

The inclusion of a non-Ghanaian judge will reinforce the competition's international outlook and ensure that the initiative incorporates perspectives beyond Ghana.

All judges shall declare potential conflicts of interest and recuse themselves where appropriate.

8. PRIZES AND SPONSORSHIP

The core cash prizes shall be:

■ FIRST PRIZE

GH¢10,000

■ SECOND PRIZE

GH¢5,000

■ THIRD PRIZE

GH¢3,000

In addition, the organisers will seek cash and in-kind sponsorships from Ghana, Africa and the wider international community.

Potential sponsors may support the initiative through:

- Additional cash prizes
- Educational materials
- Stationery
- Books and learning resources
- Computers and technology
- School supplies
- Consumer products
- Scholarships or training opportunities
- Entrepreneurship support
- Internships and mentorship
- Media and communications support

Potential corporate and institutional partners may include companies operating in retail, manufacturing, education, financial services, technology, consumer products and other sectors.

The sponsorship programme will provide an opportunity for businesses and institutions to demonstrate their commitment to youth development, education, innovation and African development.

9. INSTITUTIONAL AND IMPLEMENTATION ROLES

Spio-Garbrah Foundation (SGF)

The Foundation will provide overall institutional leadership and coordination, including stakeholder engagement, programme development and oversight.

ABCDE

ABCDE will support programme coordination, educational outreach, communications, media engagement and stakeholder mobilisation.

ABCDE may also provide the Media Communication/Spokesperson function for the initiative and support the public presentation of its objectives, activities and outcomes.

This communications role shall initially remain focused on education, youth development, national development and the African/international dimensions of the initiative, without immediate political references.

ASF/Partner Organisations

The Foundation and designated partner organisations may assist with mobilising corporate, institutional, diplomatic and international sponsors for cash and in-kind contributions.

Schools and School Patrons

Schools, teachers and patrons will assist with identifying eligible participants, encouraging participation and facilitating communication with students and parents.

10. MEDIA AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

The competition will be officially announced through a full-page advertisement in the Daily Graphic on Thursday, 10 September 2026, featuring the profile of Dr. Ekwow Spio-Garbrah and explaining the purpose of the initiative.

Additional communications may include:

- Radio and television interviews
- Newspaper coverage
- Digital and social media campaigns
- School outreach

- Educational forums
- International and diplomatic outreach
- Corporate communications
- Youth-focused media engagement

The communications strategy should position the competition as a serious youth-development and national-development initiative, rather than merely a school essay contest.

11. PROPOSED TIMELINE

10 September 2026:
Official launch and newspaper advertisement.

September–October 2026:
Publicity, school outreach, international outreach and receipt of entries.

Closing Date:
To be announced in the official competition advertisement.

October–November 2026:
Screening, verification and judging.

November/December 2026:
Public Awards Ceremony, announcement of winners and presentation of prizes.

The Awards Ceremony may also provide an opportunity for selected finalists to present their ideas to an audience comprising educators, policymakers, diplomats, business leaders, civil-society representatives, parents, media and development practitioners.

12. LONG-TERM VISION

The 2026 competition may serve as the foundation for an annual Ghana/Africa Youth Ideas Initiative, creating a continuing platform through which young people can contribute ideas on national and continental development.

Outstanding essays and ideas could subsequently be compiled into an annual publication such as:

“Young Ghanaians' Ideas for Ghana”

or

“Ghana's Next Generation: Ideas for a Better Future.”

Selected ideas could also be presented to relevant institutions, policymakers, businesses and development organisations for further discussion.

13. CONCLUSION

The National & African Youth Essay Competition 2026 seeks to give young people an opportunity to do more than identify what is wrong with Ghana.

It asks them to think critically about why these problems exist, how Ghana's international relationships affect them, and what practical solutions Ghana and Africa can pursue.

The initiative recognises that Ghana's development cannot be separated from Africa or the wider world. Its future depends on stronger education, productive industries, value addition, responsible leadership, environmental sustainability, effective international engagement and the active participation of Ghanaians and Africans at home and in the Diaspora.

The competition therefore seeks to inspire a generation of young people who do not merely ask:

“What is wrong with Ghana?”

but are prepared to ask the more important question:

“What can we do about it?”

Prepared for:

Spio-Garbrah Foundation (SGF) & African Business Centre for Developing Education (ABCDE)

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