

# E A S E



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*...expediting access to basic education for Africa's future*

*"Investments in basic education are essential to improving Africa's human capacity. That capacity is the foundation needed to realize increased productivity, improvements in health status and reductions in fertility, and the development of democracy." -USAID in Africa*

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# 1 Introduction

EASE is an acronym for *Expediting Access to Standard Education*. The aim of the program is to improve access to basic education in Africa through sponsorship programs and the establishment of libraries in villages. We believe that education holds the solution to most of the world's problems. Yet, many children are denied the opportunity due to financial constraints. We are convinced that a little effort on our part will go a long way to help.

Although the program has hopes of expanding to other African countries, the initial scope is limited to Ghana. The current focus is to sponsor underprivileged children through Junior Secondary School (JSS), which forms the core of basic education in Ghana. The general goals of EASE are to:

1. Provide funding for students to attend JSS who would otherwise not be able to do so
2. Help selected villages establish community libraries/stock existing ones
3. Increase African awareness at MIT and in Cambridge schools

## 2 Background

### 2.1 Why Ghana?

Ghana was selected to benefit from the pilot program because it was the motivation for EASE. As a politically stable country with a reputable and strong public education infrastructure, Ghana provides a viable ground for such an initiative.

Two events gave birth to EASE. The first was a BBC correspondent report on the effects of IMF policies on the lives of Ghanaians entitled "Ghana -Prisoner of the IMF" published on November 5<sup>th</sup> 2001. Below is an excerpt from this article (including the picture and its caption):

"The poor have to pay for all the essentials of life, for education; for clean drinking water - even to go to the toilet. A mile or so down the road from the hospital, I come across Mary Agyekum. She breaks stones for a living. Small flint hammer in hand, she sits on the parched ground under the sun, 12 hours a day, chipping away at boulders. Her children help her out. If she's lucky, she receives £2 a week.

She tells me of her shame, of the pains she feels carrying her heavy loads of stones. She can only send two of her children to school now, but they are chased home by the teachers if she hasn't paid the fees on time." -BBC News



Paying school fees is a struggle

After reading this rather touching article, we decided that something had to be done to improve the plight of poverty-stricken children. However, a cultural session on Ghana that

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<sup>1</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/audiovideo/programmes/correspondent/newsid\\_1634000/1634502.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/audiovideo/programmes/correspondent/newsid_1634000/1634502.stm) has a related article, "Profits of Doom". We cannot find the link to the exact article quoted above. If you really want to read it, search the archives at <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

Regina (a member of EASE-MIT) presented to 2<sup>nd</sup> graders at the Carlisle Primary school provided the needed inspiration to start EASE. The children were very excited and teachers suggested that similar sessions be held at other schools for a fee. EASE was originally formed to raise funds to help in the education of poor children, like those of Mary Agyekum, by giving cultural sessions on African countries in Cambridge schools. However, it has now expanded into a larger-scale, organized student initiative that explores other sources of funding and cultural exchange.

## 2.2 The Education System in Ghana

The educational system in Ghana consists of 6 years of primary education followed by 3 years of Junior Secondary School (JSS). Junior Secondary graduates who pass the nationally administered examination then proceed through 3 years of Senior Secondary and then to the university.

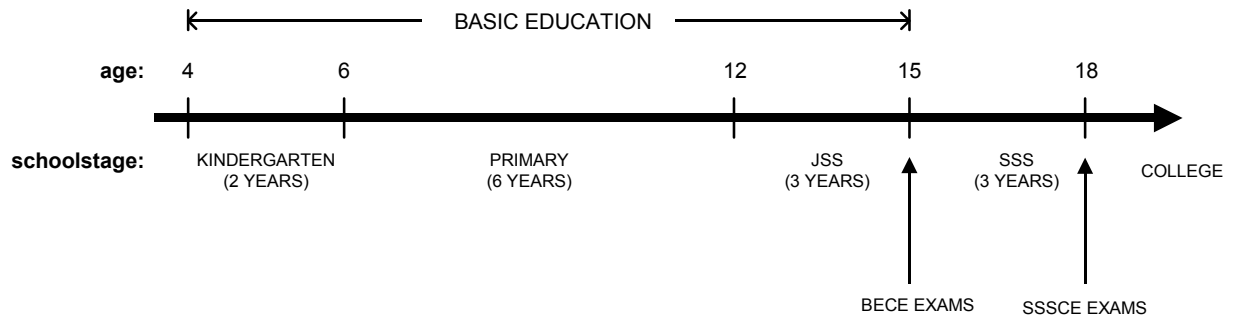


Figure 1: Roadmap of Education in Ghana

JSS teaches children regular subjects such as the sciences, languages, cultural and social studies as well as basic accounting and enterprising skills like carpentry, sewing, and arts and crafts. Graduates of JSS who do not proceed to Senior Secondary are often able to run successful small-scale businesses.

## 2.3 The Need

In The Living Standards Survey for 1992-1993, 65% of rural families in Ghana said they could not afford to send children to school consistently. Furthermore, 77% of street children in the capital city of Accra dropped out of school because of inability to pay fees<sup>2</sup>. Although these numbers are relatively old, we do not believe the situation has improved. If anything, it has gotten worse. Economic indicators show that Ghana’s economy has been on a decline for the past 2 decades, and (as attested to by the BBC report on the economic situation in Ghana,) more health and education user fees, which are often a condition for IMF loans have been introduced. This has taken a toll on the populace, leaving the poor even poorer.

Although many parents realize the value of education, many are forced to withdraw their children from school after completing primary education due to the relatively high cost of JSS.

<sup>2</sup> source: Internet document: <http://www.globalizethis.org/s30/wbuserfees.pdf> 04/13/02

Whereas primary school costs about \$3 a term, the cost jumps to about \$10 a term in JSS<sup>3</sup>, which could well represent a parent's monthly income from an agricultural job. Families, especially those in rural communities, are forced to make tradeoffs as to which child, if any, to send to school.

Basic education is a human right. In fact, it is a critical one if the cycle of poverty in developing countries is to be broken. It is in light of this that we formed EASE – to lend a hand to parents who have successfully sponsored their children through primary education, but cannot afford the cost of JSS.

#### **2.4 Community To Be Served**

Although the operation of EASE is currently limited to Ghana, the program has hopes of expanding to other African countries that fit our profile of low-cost quality education, provided we receive adequate human and financial support to do so.

Potential beneficiaries must be enrolled in public schools. EASE intends to pay government approved fees and provide stationery for program beneficiaries. Parents of beneficiaries will still be responsible for providing uniforms and materials for vocational and technical classes and any.

EASE scholarships are need-based. Whereas continued sponsorship is not determined by academic performance, EASE may be forced to withdraw support in cases of excessive absenteeism.

#### **2.5 Existing Solutions**

Attempts at addressing the problem of limited access to education in Ghana come in the form of subsidized fees and the provision of educational infrastructure.

Whereas the provision of infrastructure has gone a long way to improve access to basic education, it often comes at an increased cost to parents whose communities bear the responsibility of maintaining the infrastructure. This leads to higher user fees, which tend to keep education inaccessible to the poor.

Attempts at subsidizing the cost of basic education have mainly come from government, which instituted the fCUBE program in 1996. fCUBE promises Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education for all by the year 2020. So far, the program has successfully subsidized school fees at the primary and JSS level. However, the cost of education, especially at the JSS level, continues to rise, since material needed for technical and vocational courses, as well as the maintenance of existing infrastructure, is still the responsibility of parents. Of the estimated annual cost of \$20/year for JSS, less than \$8 of it is actual fees charged by government.

Most existing private aid-organizations offer merit-based scholarships to promising students at the senior secondary and tertiary level even if the selected students already have an adequate means of support. This aim, while noble, does not address the problem of a high school-dropout rate caused by poverty.

Those that advertise as need-based organizations often operate with so much bureaucratic and financial overhead that the average parent in need gives up due to frustration while a large portion of money meant for their assistance goes into keeping the organization afloat.

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<sup>3</sup> And to \$100 a term in Senior Secondary

### 3 Implementation

As stated earlier, the main goal of EASE is to improve access to basic education. EASE is currently working on three projects: The JSS Sponsorship Project, The Library Project and The EASE-Adopt Cultural Exchange Program.

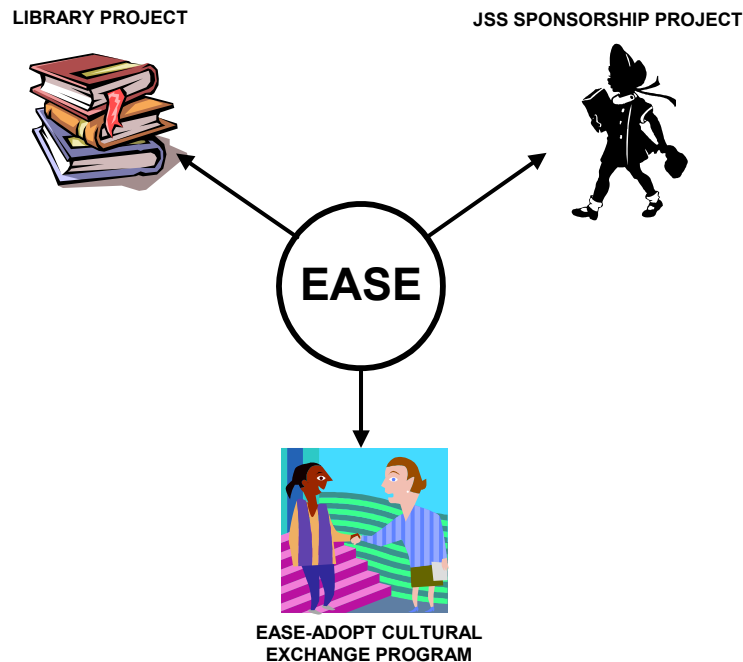


Figure 2: Current Projects

In the next few sections, we discuss the basic structure of the organization and the various components that go into realizing the goals set out for the program.

#### 3.1 Organizational Structure

EASE a coordination of activities between EASE-MIT and members of the communities that EASE is trying to assist. Both the structure and operation of EASE were chosen to:

- ❑ minimize financial overhead
- ❑ minimize bureaucratic overhead
- ❑ minimize loopholes for misappropriation of funds
- ❑ facilitate the formation of independent project and action groups under EASE

EASE-MIT is fairly loosely structured, with each member on the organizing board taking up tasks as they see fit. However, in order to relate with the outside world and the various bodies at MIT, there are a number of positions that handle the various aspects of this interface. Figure 3 shows the basic structure of EASE-MIT. The project leads head independent teams that plan their approach to implementing EASE projects and submit their plans to the entire EASE team for evaluation.

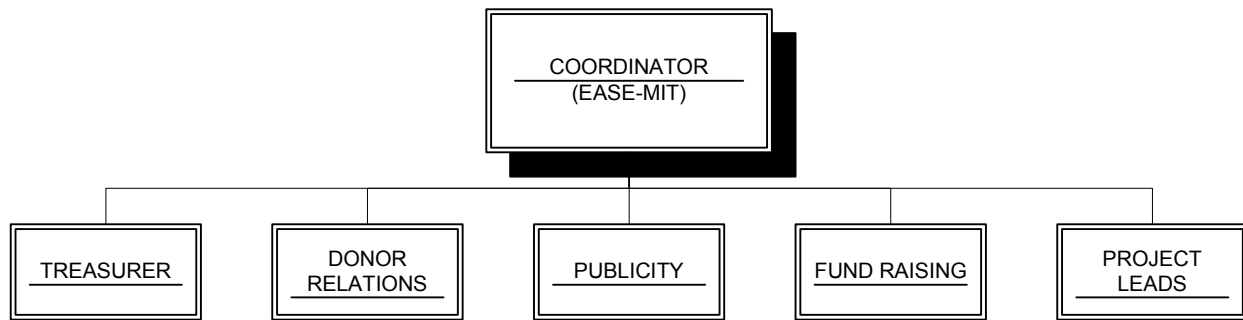


Figure 3: Structure of EASE-MIT

EASE-Ghana is made up of a Board of Trustees elected by current members of EASE. The coordinator and the Treasurer handle the details of disbursement of funds and send feedback to EASE-MIT. The person in the position of donor relations communicates with donors in Ghana while other members of the board aid in the selection of students and facilitate the EASE-Adopt program. Members of the Board of Trustees may appoint persons to temporary positions as the need arises.

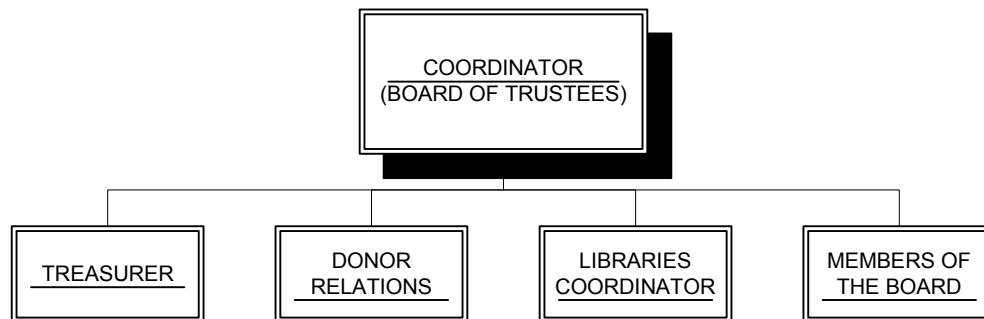


Figure 4: Structure of EASE-Ghana

### 3.1.1 Board of Trustee Selection

Most of the fund-raising and resource generation is done by EASE-MIT, but the program's success is measured by how these funds are utilized. Since the Board of Trustees is responsible for disbursing the funds generated by EASE-MIT, a set of criteria for selection to the board has been adopted to facilitate the achievement of these goals. To be elected to serve on the Board of Trustees, the individual must:

- ❑ be nominated by a current member of EASE (EASE-MIT or EASE-Ghana)
- ❑ maintain permanent residence in the communities they are to serve
- ❑ have a history of service/philanthropic activities
- ❑ be financially secure
- ❑ be accessible by phone and either fax, mailbox or email

Persons elected to the board must also agree to abide by the EASE code of conduct with respect to beneficiary selection, disbursement of funds and distribution of other resources.

### **3.2 Fund-Raising**

EASE intends to raise funds through various cultural events in which we impart some aspect of Ghanaian culture. Below are the various options EASE is currently considering.

#### **Cultural Expo**

This is EASE's main cultural event. EASE will have an array of African artifacts, clothing and food on display and on sale. The show will involve dancing and drumming from some African countries as well as cultural sessions on various African countries tailored towards children between the ages of 7 and 9. We expect this Expo to be a very exciting opportunity for children in the Cambridge/Boston area and the MIT community to get an in-depth knowledge about Africa.

#### **Booth in MIT's Lobby 10**

Once every Spring semester, EASE will run a donation booth in Lobby 10 for a week. These booths will often have artifacts on display, as well as others to give out as souvenirs to donors who contribute more than some specified amount.

#### **Food Table at I-Fair**

EASE will sell food and African artifacts at the International-Fair held at MIT in the spring semester. The I-Fair attracts a large audience, and EASE hopes to seize the opportunity to publicize the program, increase awareness to African culture and raise some money in the process.

#### **Ghanaians in the US**

EASE intends to contact the Ghanaians in the US to ask for donations. We hope that each Ghanaian will believe in our cause and pledge an amount to support one child over the three years. This amounts to only \$30 a year.

#### **Corporate Sponsors**

In the near future, EASE will contact companies in Ghana and the US to match funds raised by our volunteers. We hope that the rather significant impact of small funds on the lives of our beneficiaries will motivate corporate sponsors to donate to EASE.

### **3.3 Implementation Plan: JSS Sponsorship Project**

The focus of EASE in its early stage is the provision of financial assistance for students who would otherwise not enter JSS. Table 1 shows a break down of the estimated costs of books and fees for the 2001-2002 academic year. The cedi-dollar conversions are based on a rate of \$1 to 7000 Ghanaian cedis.



Table 1: Estimated Costs for JSS in 2001-2002 academic year. Currency conversions based on \$1 to 7000 cedis

Item Description	1st year (Cedis)	2nd year (Cedis)	3rd year (Cedis)	Total Cost for 3 years (Cedis)	Total Cost Per Item (\$1 = 7000 Cedis)
Base Fee	30,000.00	40,000.00	50,000.00	120,000.00	\$ 17.14
Books	100,000.00	110,000.00	120,000.00	330,000.00	\$ 47.14
BECE Registration	-	-	40,000.00	40,000.00	\$ 5.71
<b>Total</b>	<b>130,000.00</b>	<b>150,000.00</b>	<b>210,000.00</b>	<b>490,000.00</b>	<b>\$ 70.00</b>

EASE currently uses an estimate of \$90 per student to account for cost and currency fluctuations as well as minimal overhead.

The JSS-funding project involves 3 phases, all carried out by EASE-Ghana. First, is the selection of beneficiaries, then the payment of their fees and supply of stationery, followed by feedback in the form of receipts, stories of beneficiaries and a summary of expenses sent to EASE-MIT.

### 3.3.1 Selection of Students

The board of trustees in Ghana selects beneficiaries to the program. Students are mostly selected from the pool of Primary 6 students getting ready to enter JSS. This transition is one of the main dropout periods since parents who think they cannot afford the cost of JSS often withdraw their children at this stage so they can help raise money for the family's upkeep. EASE will also consider children already enrolled in JSS if they meet the rather simple requirements of sponsorship.

Whereas the specific details of the selection process are mostly left to the discretion of the board, EASE has a selected set of criteria that has to be respected by any procedure the board chooses:

- ❑ Potential beneficiaries must be enrolled in public schools
- ❑ Request for funding should be endorsed by the head of the JSS
- ❑ Bank statements, pay slips and other financial documents are not required, and are not in themselves sufficient to demonstrate need.
- ❑ Academic records may be used to assess the student's determination to complete JSS and to select students (who already meet the needy, determined and public school enrollment criteria) to join the EASE-Adopt Exchange Program.
- ❑ No student shall be denied funding due to "poor" grades if their grades can gain them admission to JSS.

We picked public schools as opposed to private schools because public schools do not charge tuition. They do charge other fees approved by government, however so EASE will pay those fees as well as provide stationery required at the beginning of each academic year. About 95% of children in school are enrolled in public schools. This is a direct positive reflection on the strength of the public school system in Ghana.

The requirements of endorsement by heads of JSS and the insufficiency of financial documentation to demonstrate need come from a careful analysis of the socio-economic environment in Ghana. Given the socio-economic environment in Ghana, the average needy person cannot demonstrate need because he/she often lacks the needed documents to do so. EASE expects that many of the children sponsored will have illiterate parents who are self-employed in small-scale businesses. It is very rare that these “petty traders” keep bank accounts or any official documentation of their annual income. Requiring proof of need by way of such documents will therefore be detrimental to EASE’s cause.

In fact, the ability to provide such documents is not enough to demonstrate need. EASE needs the endorsement of someone who can attest to the fact that the person requesting funding has had trouble paying his/her child’s fees in the past. This avoids the problem of funds going to those who have the means to demonstrate need, instead of those who are truly poor but do not have the means to demonstrate it, which is often the case.

Once EASE decides to sponsor a child, a check for the fee is made out to the school. An approved EASE vendor, who receives payment directly from EASE, supplies the needed stationery.

### ***3.3.2 Disbursement of Funds***

In its early stages, EASE will only take on as many students as we have funds in our accounts to sponsor. This is to ensure that we do not break sponsorship promises.

EASE-MIT will set up an external account, which will be accessible by the Coordinator and the Treasurer of EASE-Ghana. Members of the Board of Trustees operating in other regions in Ghana will send receipts and summaries of their expenditure to the Treasurer who will in turn issue a refund check to them. This approach to account management makes for easy accountability to EASE-MIT, which will in turn streamline their MIT ASA accounts.

### ***3.3.3 Feedback***

EASE-MIT will exchange project updates with our partners in Ghana on an informal basis during the course of the year. In addition to these informal updates, formal updates are exchanged semi-annually (March and September).

EASE-MIT sends an update on available funds, books, the number of students EASE-should take on and new participants in the EASE-Adopt Exchange Program to EASE-Ghana. EASE-Ghana sends receipts, summaries on expenditure, copies of letters of endorsement, and biographies of beneficiaries to EASE-MIT. The receipts will be forwarded to MIT for accounting purposes. Copies of summaries of expenditure will be sent to program partners who require them as a condition of continued support. EASE-MIT will use the beneficiary biographies in its fund-raising campaigns.

## ***3.4 Implementation Plan: Library Project***

The library project involves stocking existing libraries with books useful for basic education as well as encouraging the establishment of new libraries by communities and schools that do not have one. For starters, EASE will focus on stocking existing libraries with books donated by individuals; we will not finance the establishment of new libraries.

EASE intends to collaborate with the African Technology Forum based at MIT to facilitate the shipment of books. EASE will arrange the shipment of books with heads of institutions that have already set up a library management system in their schools. This could also be an incentive for heads to set up libraries in their schools if they do not already have one. Since the establishment of libraries is often limited by the availability of books, we expect the supply of books to greatly improve the state of libraries as well as encourage the establishment of new ones.

EASE has identified and contacted a number of sources of books suitable for basic education for the library projects. These include the World Library Partnership, the Riecken Foundation, teachers in Cambridge/Boston schools and some host-parents in the MIT Host to International Students Program. EASE anticipates that the shipment of books will not begin until 2003.

### **3.5 Implementation Plan: EASE-Adopt Exchange Program**

The EASE-Adopt exchange program is an opportunity for donors to develop a relationship between their children and the children they are sponsoring. Sponsors pay a minimum of \$90 to enroll in the EASE-Adopt Exchange program for a period of up to 3 years. EASE-Adopt facilitates communication and cultural exchange between participants. We expect the EASE-Adopt program to attract many parents with young children due to the potential for cultural enrichment.

A number of challenges make the implementation EASE-Adopt harder than a regular penpal exchange program:

- ❑ Sponsors in the program have to be able to leave the program whenever they want to. This means that EASE has to guarantee that the communication originating from their sponsored children will cease within a reasonable time frame after they inform EASE of their decision to leave the program.
- ❑ The children who will be enrolled in EASE-Adopt are selected from the pool of those who qualify for EASE assistance. Whereas they can receive letters through their schools, it is unlikely that they will have the means to mail letters to the US.
- ❑ This problem is complicated by the fact that, the only way to pre-pay for mailings from Ghana to the US is by affixing the right amount of stamps. There is no provision for prepaid mailing arrangements even for established organizations within Ghana.

These three challenges call for facilitators who will act as channels to get letters from children in the exchange program to their sponsors in the US. These facilitators are members of the board of Trustees within each region. They are given the addresses of US sponsors participating in the EASE-Adopt program in their respective regions. The sponsored students are given the names of their sponsors and the address of their EASE-Adopt facilitator. This way, the students only have to mail their letters within Ghana, which are then forwarded to their US sponsors by their EASE-Adopt facilitator. If mailings within Ghana happen to be beyond the family's means, EASE can provide the needed stamps at a very low cost. Letters from the sponsors can go directly from the US to the student's school address without going through EASE facilitators.

When a sponsor informs EASE-MIT of their intention to leave the program, we simply ask the facilitator to inform the child and stop forwarding letters to the US sponsor. Sponsors will also be informed when their students graduate from JSS. EASE encourages, but does not facilitate communication beyond graduation. The choice to continue correspondence beyond graduation is left to the sponsor and the student.

### **3.6 Challenges**

Some challenges to EASE's approach were discussed in the preceding sections. The following are some general challenges that EASE faces in its expansion process.

#### **3.6.1 Overwhelming Demand for Sponsorship**

EASE has made it easy for parents to receive assistance by removing bureaucratic roadblocks in our application process. Whereas this allows equal access to EASE funds for the needy, it could pose a problem if the demand for EASE funds greatly surpasses available funds. Letters from the heads of JSS institutions are not enough to distinguish between different levels of poverty. Formal solutions to this problem could involve any combination of the following. The phrases in parenthesis are the disadvantages of each approach.

1. Require more proof of need by documents (which are non-existent among the poor),
2. Have members of the Board of Trustees visit homes of potential beneficiaries to assess need (too huge a tax on their time, benefit unclear)
3. Use academic records of those who qualify (danger of EASE sponsorship becoming another merit-based scholarship).

We have no blue-print solution to this problem at the moment. We hope that a feasible, non-compromising approach can be derived to deal with the problem when it arises.

#### **3.6.2 Recruitment of Volunteers**

Since EASE is starting with its focus on one country in Africa, it might be difficult to recruit people to work on the organizational front of the projects, if they don't feel particularly attached to the project or the country. We expect recruitment to be less challenging as the program expands and we have positive results and stories of real people who have benefited from the program to use in our recruitment exercises, however. EASE-MIT will also be able to recruit at Activities Midway at the beginning of the school year since we acquired institute recognition. By making our long-term vision of expanding into other African countries clear, we hope to attract non-Ghanaians (Africans and non-Africans alike) interested in making basic education more accessible to children in all of Africa to join EASE. New members joined EASE following our fund-raising campaign in the week of April 1, so we remain hopeful. In the future, EASE may offer incentive to our workers by supplying hosts to students who wish to visit African countries in which EASE operates. The hosts will most likely be members of EASE-Ghana.

Another challenge is recruiting people to serve on the Board of Trustees for the 10 different regions in Ghana. In this regard, EASE-MIT is working with HOPSA (Holy Child Past Students' Association) whose members are spread across the country and often individually

sponsor children through school to recruit members for the different regions. Once the initial set of members are selected for each region, they can nominate others to serve on the board.

### **3.6.3 *Challenging Stereotypical Views About Africa***

During a session on Ghana at the Carlisle Primary school, the children were amazed to learn that there are buildings and televisions in Ghana. They wondered if Regina had a lion in her house and whether her skin was black because of the African sun. Of course, kids say the “cutest” things! Unfortunately, children are not the only ones who think of Africa as one big wildlife reserve. Many westerners have a distorted image of Africa due to the media’s biased projection of the continent. One challenge that EASE faces, is telling the story of underprivileged children without projecting an image of misery about Africa or lumping it into one rural continent. EASE’s goal is to help underprivileged children, but it’s important to make it known that not all children are underprivileged and that Africans generally seize every opportunity to make merry. This is the main motivation for the cultural element in our fund-raising strategies: to improve awareness of Africa by bringing out both the good and the bad about the state of affairs.

In fact, EASE is actively looking into the possibility of opening the EASE-Adopt Exchange Program to children who do not fall in our underprivileged category so that we can have a bigger pool of students to choose from. The proceeds still go to the underprivileged ones. It would be preferable if US participants in the program communicated with children who live in big cities, yet have a good sense of their culture since they stand a better chance of seeing the continent from a different perspective.

### **3.7 *Scope***

In its first year, EASE will sponsor 5-10 junior secondary school children from a low-income community in the Central Region of Ghana. For the first 2 years, we plan to stay within this community while the EASE team gains experience in running the project.

After the pilot phase, we hope that EASE would have acquired NGO status in the US so that donations to the program will be tax-deductible. Armed with the results of the pilot phase and NGO recognition, EASE will approach corporate bodies for sponsorship. Consequently, we hope to see a substantial increase in the funds we can generate. We also hope to be able to attract more students at MIT to work on EASE fund-raising activities to facilitate the growth and expansion of the program to other regions in Ghana and subsequently, support projects in other countries in Africa, using our experience in Ghana as a stepping-stone.

### 3.8 Timeline

Table 2: Timeline of Activities for EASE in the year 2002-2003

Activity	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Fund Raising												
Board of Trustees Selection												
Selection of Beneficiaries												
Finalizing Sponsorship Agreements												
Payment of fees												
Progress Reports												
MIT official recognition												
Setup Accounts												
Election of Officers												

### 3.9 Work to Date

#### 3.9.1 Project Definition, Organization, Partnerships

EASE has held several meetings to define itself by articulating its goals, fund-raising projects, and developing a general structure and a mode of operation. One outcome of these planning meetings is this document. Another is the EASE constitution, which will be completed shortly.

EASE submitted an application to the MIT Association of Student Activities for recognition as an MIT student group. This application has been approved and the final documents are being prepared to complete the approval process.

EASE is collaborating with AfricanMecca, a Washington-based African arts importer to supply us with African artifacts at low cost for our cultural events. The details of this agreement are yet to be fully laid out. We are also working on partnership with the African Technology Forum (ATF) at MIT for the library project described in section 3.4 of this document.

On the Ghanaian front, EASE is working with HOPSA, an organization of past students of Holy Child school that engages in small-scale educational projects to recruit members for the Board of Trustees for the different regions in Ghana.

#### 3.9.2 Background Research, Pilot Programs, Publicity

EASE-Ghana collected data on current educational expenses and have helped in the identification of our first set of five beneficiaries in the Central Region of Ghana. Sponsorship of these students will begin at the start of the next academic year, in August 2002. Of the five, two will be participating in the EASE-Adopt program.

A pilot presentation on Ghanaian culture, which was part of the inspiration for EASE, was made at the Carlisle Primary school in January 2002. EASE plans to hold more presentations modeled after this one to increase awareness about the program, Ghanaian culture and to encourage parents to participate in the EASE-Adopt Exchange Program.

EASE has prepared a website, information brochures and posters to publicize the project within the MIT community and without. The brochures and posters were disseminated at MIT

during the week of April 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>. As a result of these publicizing efforts, new members have joined the EASE organizing team.

The April donation booth also yielded close to \$700. This money will fund the premier run of EASE beginning in August 2002.

We have also placed an order for Ghanaian artifacts, which we plan, to auction off at the Cultural Expo event scheduled for October 2002 at MIT.

### **3.10 Support Network**

EASE is supported by the Public Services Center (PSC), which has provided EASE with guidance and grant money to get the project on its feet. Ms. Penny Rosser, acting director of the International Scholars Office at MIT, serves as advisor to the program.

EASE is in the process of establishing a Board of Trustees, which will be responsible for the disbursement of EASE funds, and oversee EASE affairs in Ghana.

One of the goals of EASE is to raise awareness of Africa in the Boston-Cambridge community and we plan to do this by organizing an annual Cultural Expo event during the Fall semester. EASE has already formed a partnership with Carlisle Primary school in Carlisle, MA, to get the word out to parents. We will expand this program to other schools in the next few months.

EASE also enjoys the support of members of the MIT African Students' Association and the general MIT community who volunteer on an activity-by-activity basis to help with organizing EASE events.

## **4 Innovation**

EASE is the first need-based organization to operate in Ghana that focuses specifically on assisting individuals at the JSS level. Although EASE does not expect many of our beneficiaries to proceed to senior secondary (unless more aid is provided), the completion of JSS empowers young adults with valuable trade skills needed to enter the work force or attain further vocational training.

The innovative aspect of our project is not in any single method we use, be it in fund-raising or the transfer of funds, but in the art of designing a complete system that addresses the problem of limited access to education in the most cost-effective and feasible way that is suited to the socio-economic environment in Ghana. EASE has been carefully designed to overcome the shortcomings we perceive in existing aid organizations. Our design goals were therefore to minimize financial operation overhead, bureaucratic overhead and loopholes for financial misappropriation. In the next few sections, we elaborate on how our solution, described in Section 3 minimizes these efficiency bottlenecks and in what ways EASE is an improvement over existing aid organizations.

### **4.1 Minimizing Financial Overhead**

A common practice of aid-organizations is to sponsor their workers to various countries to work on their projects. It's rather absurd that some aid-organizations will sponsor their workers from the US at the cost of \$1500/worker, (not to mention \$800/month stipend) to teach in a school that lacks teachers because their teachers could not be paid \$20/month. Although

EASE appreciates the cultural enrichment that could be gained by students by sponsoring them to various African countries to work on our projects, we find the overhead of doing so prohibitive and certainly not in the interest of our target group.

EASE is happy to introduce a solution that uses the resources already available in the communities. Take the library project for example; many communities in Ghana have been able to establish basic amenities using communal labor. The limitation to the establishment of libraries is not labor to build them. It's books to stock them if they exist and funds to establish them if they do not exist. To this end, it is not profitable to send students from the US to Ghana to build libraries for communities if the primary aim of the organization is not to culturally enrich their workers.

By leaving the coordination of activities in Ghana to our carefully selected Board of Trustees, EASE has avoided the cost of sending our workers to Ghana to oversee affairs. We have also by-passed the issue of working with organizations that operate with prohibitive overheads. Although EASE does not currently provide funds for the establishment of libraries, we believe the promise of books will motivate many rural communities to create one. And in cases where libraries exist, EASE will revive them with the supply of books. With the cost of books removed, communities will be able to manage their libraries using their district assembly fund, currently provided by government for such purposes.

#### **4.2 Minimizing Bureaucracy**

EASE selects program beneficiaries based on endorsement by the head of the junior secondary school rather than by the conventional method of requesting financial documents. This rather unique approach to identifying beneficiaries bypasses the bureaucratic system that the parents face in proving need. It avoids the problem of funds going to those who have the means to demonstrate need, instead of those who are truly poor but do not have the means to demonstrate it, which is often the case. EASE expects that many of the children sponsored will have illiterate parents who are self-employed in small-scale businesses. It is very rare that these "petty traders" keep bank accounts or any official documentation of their annual income. Requiring proof of need by way of such documents will therefore be detrimental to EASE's cause.

#### **4.3 Reducing Loopholes for Misappropriation of Funds**

Our approach ensures that money meant for the education of a child indeed goes into the education of the child once it leaves the coffers of EASE. The Board of Trustees issues a check to the school with the consent and knowledge of the parents. Heads issue a receipt to the Board of Trustees, which sends these receipts, along with brief biographies of the sponsored child to EASE-MIT. There is no loophole for misappropriation of funds at this level since all expenditure can be fully accounted for.

The Board of Trustees, which oversees the disbursement of funds, has been carefully selected from a pool of individuals who occupy positions of trust in their communities, and in our hearts. These are people who are closely related to some members of the EASE-MIT team, do not have a conflict of interest, and have agreed to abide by the EASE code of conduct with respect to student selection and funds disbursement. (Please see *Section 3.1.1* for the criteria for



selection to the EASE Board of Trustees.) It is therefore highly unlikely that these individuals will misapply EASE funds.

#### **4.4 Improvements over Existing Solutions**

EASE is a big improvement over existing aid organizations operating in Ghana. Not only have we carefully structured the program in the interest of the targeted group, by making it easier for them to take advantage of the “EASEy” solution, we have also cut costs that result from unnecessary operation overhead. EASE does not require that parents submit financial documents to demonstrate need. This not only reduces bureaucracy as an obstacle to efficiency, but also removes the problem of assistance being denied individuals who do not have such documents. EASE has not adopted the common practice of aid organizations to sponsor their own workers to the community they are trying to help even if the cost of doing so greatly outweighs the benefit. EASE presents the members of the communities we’re assisting as individuals who are capable of working to improve their lot if they are given the needed financial assistance. By so doing, we open the doors for say, Ghanaian companies to contribute to EASE rather than depending solely on funds raised in the US.

## **5 Impact**

JSS expands the basic education given students at the primary level and focuses more on the practical aspects of life. Students get the opportunity to develop their interests in both theoretical fields such as science and mathematics as well as vocational fields such as catering and woodwork. It is a complete set of classes that are meant to equip students with the necessary vocational and intellectual skills to make them self-dependent and useful citizens of their community. With the education students receive from JSS, they should be able to start their own local enterprises if they are unable to further their education.

JSS is also essential for continuing education at the secondary level. Students are required to take an examination at the end of their 3 yrs on material that was covered during those years. This exam cannot be taken successfully without regularly attending school. Thus most JSS students who go to school on a sporadic basis tend not to gain anything too useful from school and often end up on the streets. JSS is thus a necessary educational requirement for almost any useful citizen of Ghana.

EASE intends to fund the entire 3 yrs of JSS for needy students who cannot further their education via any other means. These students will thus be assured of the complete set of 3yrs of JSS education. They would not have to miss school because of unpaid fees or balances. They will be free to attend all classes to gain the essential knowledge they need to be useful citizens of their communities. These students can then make a difference in the lives of their families and friends even if they are unable to continue on to SSS.

We hope that other groups can look at our model and implement similar programs in other African countries. We are also hoping that the government can adopt this model for the SSS level so that some of our students with ambitions of continuing their education can benefit. The members of EASE do not reap any tangible benefits from this program and do not intend to gain any such benefits in future. Our singular aim is to expedite access to standard education!

Any positive impact our project has on the lives of our beneficiaries and their families, no matter how miniscule, is rewarding enough to make us dedicate ourselves to its pursuance.

## 6 Budget

### ESTIMATED EASE EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2002-2003

Item	Purpose	Estimate
Communication	To communicate with Board of Trustees In Ghana. Also covers mailings for EASE-Adopt	\$ 100.00
Publicity:	Brochures to distribute to potential donors, Posters for Cultural Expo	\$ 100.00
African Artifacts*	These will be used to enhance the Cultural Expo. Most of them will be auctioned off at the EXPO, together with artifacts donated by individuals. A few small, cheap ones will be used at our donation booths as incentive for those who give beyond some specified amount.	\$ 500.00
Food For Cultural Expo	The food will be sold at \$10 a plate in lieu of charging admission fee to the EXPO (Expecting about 200 people)	\$ 400.00
Dance Group for Cultural Expo	To hire a local dance group to perform and teach simple African dances to children at the Expo.	\$ 300.00
Shipment for Library project	Tentative cost of shipment to Ghana	\$ 300.00
Camcorder	One of the members of EASE-MIT will spend next summer in Ghana on a personal trip. She will talk to corporate sponsors and other stake holders in Education about EASE. The camcorder will be used to record statements from beneficiaries of EASE for use in future fund-raising campaigns. We looked into the possibility of renting from MIT AVS but that will cost us \$800.	\$ 300.00
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$ 2,000.00</b>

\*EASE was given \$300 by IDEAS as material grants to purchase these artifacts. However, we had to forfeit the funds since the artifacts will not arrive in time for them to be sold and the results used in this application. \$300 worth of artifacts have already been ordered.

#### Anticipated sources of funding:

Source	Anticipated Grant Amount
MIT Finboard	\$ 300.00
MIT ASA Funds	\$ 400.00
MIT PSC (seed money for Artifacts)	\$ 500.00
MIT CCRC (Funding for Cultural Expo)	\$ 400.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 1,600.00</b>

PROJECTED INCOME FOR THE YEAR 2002-2003	
(these are funds that can go directly into EASE projects)	
Source	Estimate
Food sales	\$ 1,500.00
Lobby 10 Booth	\$ 500.00
Artifact Sales	\$ 1,250.00
Donations	\$ 1,500.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 4,750.00</b>

## 7 Biographies

### *Members of EASE-MIT*

#### *Monami Chakrabarti (Libraries Coordinator)*

Monami is a junior at MIT, majoring in Management. She has been involved with human rights advocacy work for three years at MIT. She is the President of Amnesty International, and she is serving as a director for EASE library project in Ghana. Monami's responsibilities include researching the feasibility of shipping books to Ghana and finding partner NGO's, both in the US and in Africa, that can assist EASE with this project.

#### *Arthur Musah (Donor Relations)*

"I have had the opportunity to live in the southern, northern and central parts of Ghana because my family moved a lot while I was growing up. I attended a number of public primary and secondary schools. Even though my parents were committed to my education and I never had to stay out of school, I witnessed several situations in which my classmates had to leave school, for short and extended periods, because they could not pay school fees. The problem that EASE is trying to tackle is a real one in Ghana, but it is also one that I believe can be solved."

Arthur is the current secretary of the MIT African Students Association. He serves as the chair of Donor Relations in EASE-MIT.

#### *Muhammad J. Noor (Treasurer)*

I am very interested in community service and development projects in third world countries. Consequently, I have become part of the EASE team. I'm particularly keen about financial planning for such projects, and I am and have been involved in finance development with nonprofits. My service experience also includes MIT's Public Service Center's Fellowship in summer of 2001. I worked as the chief finance manager for a nonprofit startup. With this experience, I will take the responsibility of treasurer and fundraising event coordinator for EASE.

***Regina Sam (Coordinator – EASE-MIT)***

Regina is a senior in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at MIT who is also pursuing the Master of Engineering degree. She was motivated to start EASE after she read a very touching BBC documentary about the effects of IMF policies on Ghana, which showed children having to miss school in order to work for money to pay their fees. Prior to starting EASE, she was chair of the HKN Guide to 6A companies, a publication which gives EECS students who want to join the 6A internship program an “inside” view of the various companies in the program. Regina is currently serving as Coordinator of EASE-MIT and the project lead for the JSS sponsorship program. Her responsibilities include managing the administrative details involved in running EASE and coordinating with members of the Board of Trustees in Ghana about the sponsorship program.

***Curtis Vanderpuije (Fund-Raising)***

Curtis Vanderpuije is majoring in Mechanical Engineering at MIT. He received his high school education in SOS-Hermann Gmeiner International college (HGIC) in Ghana, where he pursued the International Baccalaureate Diploma course. He experienced various African cultures while studying in HGIC as he lived and studied with students from all over Africa. He has participated in various community service projects ranging from school building to teaching arithmetic and writing to children in villages in Ghana. Curtis oversees fund-raising activities in EASE-MIT.

***Penny Rosser (advisor)***

Penny is the Acting director of the International Scholars’ Office at MIT. She also serves as Regina’s host mother through the MIT Host to International Students Program. Penny was the brain behind the cultural session on Ghana at the Carlisle Primary School, which gave birth to EASE. She has since been supportive of the program, offering moral, logistical and material support. EASE is pleased to have her serve as advisor to the program.

## ***The Board of Trustees***

### ***Mrs. Sally Honny –Central Regional Board Of Trustees***

Mrs. Sally Honny is a clinical pharmacist in Cape Coast. She is also a member of the Holy Child Past Students' Association (HOPSA), which often undertakes small-scale aid projects including JSS and SSS sponsorship. As a pharmacist, she often works hand-in-hand with needy parents of sick children, suggesting cheaper alternatives to treatments and even offering free treatment where needed. Mrs. Honny is currently working with researchers at the University of Texas in Houston to develop herbal alternatives to the treatment of common diseases in sub-Saharan Africa. EASE is delighted to have her serve as Coordinator of the Board of Trustees for the year 2002-2003.

### ***Mr. Joseph Daniel Sam –Central Regional Board of Trustees***

Mr. J.D. Sam is the father of one of the members of EASE-MIT. He is a high school teacher in Cape Coast. Mr. Sam has served on the board of governors for his school for 10 years. He recently went to Japan to part-take in a study on the educational system in Japan and what aspects of it the Ghana Education Service could adapt. He was recently appointed to oversee scholarship funds in Cape Coast and is working to revamp the process. He will serve as Treasurer of EASE-Ghana for the year 2002-2003.