

Fosterage and Access to Basic Education in Northern Ghana

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Introduction

- Many children in Ghana and in West Africa generally are cared for by carers other than their biological parents
- GLSS (2005/6) data indicate that 10% of children in Ghana do not live with their biological parents or grandparents
- While for some, fosterage alleviates family crises and may provide for educational opportunities, for many others fosterage is associated with disadvantage in terms of educational access

Findings: National and Regional

- Analysis of GLSS data showed that in **four regions of Ghana** fostered children were less likely to have ever attended school than biological children or grandchildren.
- In the Northern Region fostered children were **19%** less likely to have ever attended school
- The negative effect is **twice as large** as the effect of female gender in a region with wide gender disparities
- The negative fosterage effect was **larger for boys** (22%) than for girls(15%) but combined with the negative effect of female gender fostered boys and girls had similar probabilities of ever attending school

Findings: Savelugu-Nanton District

The issues were explored further through interviews with education professionals and household caregivers in Savelugu-Nanton District in the Northern Region.

- Fostering was found to be almost **twice as common** as in the Northern Region as a whole.
- Fostered boys in the district are **more over-age for their grade** and fostered girls are **more likely to drop-out**
- Fostering was identified by head teachers and circuit supervisors as a cause of low enrolment, drop-out and poor performance in the district, especially among girls.
- Fostering was also identified as a contributor to migrant labour, known as *kayaye*, especially for girls who seek to acquire items required for marriage.



Why are children fostered in Savelugu-Nanton?

- Fosterage knits the extended family together more closely
- It involves childcare by experienced and mature relatives, rather than inexperienced parents
- It alleviates family crises, provides children for childless women and older relatives
- The services of a foster child are valuable to the foster family in terms of performing tasks in the compound (for girls) or caring for livestock and running errands (for boys)



What are the mechanisms by which fosterage impairs meaningful access to education?

- The dominant reason for low access in the district is difficulty meeting schooling costs for all children in the household (uniforms, materials, food etc.)
- Foster parents may not be able to meet these costs and may not receive support from biological parents
- Foster children (especially girls) often have greater work responsibilities so that their schooling presents a greater opportunity cost for families
- These factors reduce initial access and potentially decrease attendance and increase drop-out, impairing meaningful learning and school performance.

What interventions might improve the 'access chances' of fostered children?

- Fosterage per se need not be a problem and fostering children to relatives best able to support a child's education can be an advantage.
- But fostered children often suffer multiple disadvantage – large families, poverty, rural location and labour-intensive livelihoods.
- Interventions targeting the effects of these disadvantages may benefit fostered children disproportionately. For example:
- Measures aimed at reducing over-age enrolment (e.g. quality pre-schooling and improving nutrition)
- Measures aimed at reducing cost barriers (e.g. school feeding)
- Flexible schooling alternatives more easily combined with work (e.g. School for Life)
- Measures to encourage shared responsibility for schooling expenses between foster and biological parents (e.g. sensitisation and advocacy)



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Thank you