



**Consortium for Research on  
Educational Access,  
Transitions and Equity**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Access to Basic Education in Ghana:  
The Evidence and the Issues**

**Country Analytic Report**

**Kwame Akyeampong  
Jerome Djangmah  
Abena Oduro  
Alhassan Seidu  
Frances Hunt**

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**Centre for International Education  
University of Sussex**



## **Executive Summary**

This report synthesizes analysis of evidence on access to Basic Education in Ghana and uses this as a basis for outlining areas that need further research. Written as a critical analytic review it provides a background of shared knowledge, understandings and research evidence about access to basic education in Ghana. The review starts by assessing the impact past and present policies on basic education have made on expanding access and conclude with a number of recommendations for further research on access as well as issues for policy reformulation.

The report:

- Investigates the evolution of access to basic education in Ghana. This assesses the implications of primary enrolment trends over an extended period of time.
- Analyzes basic education policies and practices for insight into the effect they have had on access to basic education.
- Examines the conditions and factors that underpin access as both a process and outcome from which it develops preliminary understandings of the nature of exclusion from meaningful access.
- Reviews recent empirical and secondary analysis studies on access to basic education and maps out what the key challenges are to expanding access, particularly for poor and marginalized groups in society.
- Provides preliminary policy recommendations and identifies specific issues, themes, and agendas for further research in Ghana.

This Country Analytic Review (CAR) benefited from inputs from education officials and academic researchers in Ghana.

### **On the influence of basic education policies on access**

The current basic education structure and curriculum has its roots in Ghana's colonial past. Pre-independence education was characterized by attempts to create incentives for all children to attend school, as happened in Northern Ghana with the introduction of free education to improve access. The earliest sign of a plan to universalize primary education was in 1945 when the colonial government proposed a 10-year plan to universalize primary education in 25 years based on cost projections set within affordable limits.

The next significant basic education expansion initiative was the 1951 Accelerated Development Plan (ADP) for Education. This plan also aimed to achieve universal primary education (UPE) for all by abolishing tuition fees, although households were to be responsible for the cost of stationary, textbooks etc. After independence, the introduction of the 1961 Education Act continued the commitment to free basic education. All of these policies helped to expand access rapidly but they were generally not very successful in sustaining high enrolment and completion to universalize access for all children.

A further wave of education reforms took place in 1987 and 1995. Both reforms benefited from substantial investments, mainly from external donors and generally helped to improve access significantly. But these later reforms also faced similar challenges as previous reforms had; how to sustain early gains in enrolment and universalize basic education for all. Recent analysis of enrolment trends show that initial gains are reverting to predictable decline below universal levels. The evidence suggests the need for a mix of policies targeted at specific areas and a host of initiatives that can increase demand for basic education, especially in rural areas. The recent introduction of the capitation grants scheme is one such initiative that is clearly making an impact, but further research is required to understand its potential to sustain the surge in enrolments and improve completion rates.

An optional two-year nursery schooling for children aged 4 and 5 became part of the mainstream education system in 2002. This has extended basic education from 9 years to 11 years (GOG, 2004). Extending basic education to 11 years has huge financial and capacity implications. However, problems of access extend beyond financial constraints and considerations to include the non-financial constraints such as teacher supply, classrooms etc.

Clearly, ensuring that children start school early is one of the important issues emerging from the analysis of access data. But accessing schooling at the grade appropriate age does not guarantee that children will complete the full cycle of basic education as additional evidence suggests. Required educational inputs and facilities (non financial constraints) need to be present to mutually reinforce the effects.

One of the key lessons from previous education reforms is that rapid expansion must go in tandem with measures to ensure quality provision of education if initial gains are not to be reversed. Ensuring adequate teacher supply and improved school infrastructure facilities are important to this endeavour.

## **On trends and patterns of access to basic education**

### **Overall picture on enrolment**

Analysis of the 2003 Ghana Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) provided some insights into enrolment patterns. An estimate of enrolment in school for children aged 6-16 years, irrespective of grade, revealed that children between the ages of 8-13 (14 for boys) are most likely to be enrolled in school, and among children aged 6 to 8 enrolment rates increased rapidly but declined for 13 year olds, and children aged 14-16 years. But amongst girls aged 6-10 years the enrolment rate is not significantly different to that of boys. However, the gap widens for children aged 11-16 years, with girls lower by almost 8 percent than boys. The suggestion is that girls enrolling later than the official entry age are also more likely to drop out, especially as they approach adolescence. Because of late entry into schooling, Ghana's primary school population has a mean age of 7.5 years in primary 1 and a mean age of 13.3 years in primary 6. The junior secondary population has a mean age of 14.3 years in year 1 and mean age of 16.2 years in year

three. At the JSS level girls attendance rates are higher than boys especially in urban areas.

Rural children are significantly less likely than urban children to be enrolled in school, irrespective of the age-group. The existence and widening of the rural-urban gap in JSS may be explained by the relatively late age entry into primary school of rural children. Net junior secondary school enrolment rates amongst rural children are also significantly lower compared to the urban rate because of the significantly larger proportion of rural children who have never attended school.

An investigation into enrolment rates by welfare quintile also reveals that amongst children from the lowest welfare quintile the junior secondary enrolment rate amongst girls is lower than that of boys. However, amongst children in the fourth and fifth welfare quintiles the reverse is the case. Indeed, children from households in the lowest welfare quintile have significantly lower net primary and junior secondary enrolment and attendance rates compared to children living in households with higher welfare measures. Children from households in the lower welfare quintile are likely to enter primary school at an older age compared to those from households in higher wealth quintiles. They are also more likely to drop out of school whilst children from the wealthiest households are twice as likely to be in school as children from the poorest households. At JSS they are more than three times as likely. Household poverty seems to be an important predictor of access and participation in basic education.

### **Age to Grade Enrolments**

The official age for entry into primary schooling in Ghana is six years. However, only about a third of the primary 1 population in 2003 was aged 5-6 years old. The estimated mean age of 7.5 years included late entries, older-age entries, and repeaters. A slightly higher proportion of girls in primary 1 are 5 or 6 years old compared to the proportion of boys. However, the population of girls in primary 1 aged 5 to 8 is the same as that of boys. Children in primary 1 in rural schools were on average older than those in urban schools. The population of children from households in the lowest welfare quintile in primary 1 had an older age structure compared to the children from the highest welfare quintile. Whereas nearly 50 percent of children from the lowest welfare quintile in primary 1 were aged 5-7 years, this rises to about 69 percent for children in the highest welfare quintile. Children from more affluent households are likely to start school earlier. But, even among this group there is still a significant minority, about a third, who are starting school above the official entry age.

### **Gross Enrolment by Grade**

Analysis of GERS by grade reveals a constant decline in GER by grade. In effect, as children progress through school their numbers decrease almost at a constant rate. Although in absolute terms many more children are completing primary school the proportion of cohorts which start grade 1 has not changed very much over the years. The overall indication is that children are beginning school at a late age, repeating grades, or

dropping in and out of the school system. Thus, the real problem is not about getting more children officially enrolled (the evidence suggests that more are enrolling), but rather, it is about reducing early drop out or overage enrolments. Some evidence suggests that children are dropping out or attending infrequently because they feel the returns are low. Research conducted in a rural area of Ghana revealed that ‘most children do not follow schoolwork because they do not possess the understanding from previous work that is a prerequisite for the syllabus of the higher grades of primary school and junior secondary school’ (Pryor & Ampiah, 2003:25). Tackling the school quality and efficiency problem is undoubtedly one important way of ensuring that high enrolments stay up all the basic education cycle.

### **Promotion, Repetition and Drop Out by Grade**

Recent EMIS data shows that across all public primary grades the average rate of promotion, repetition and dropout rates vary considerably by grade. Grade 1 has the highest repetition and dropout rates, and the lowest promotion rates. Grades 2 to 5 show patterns of repetition ranging between 4 percent and 6 percent respectively each year, with an overall downward trend. Dropout is greatest in grade one, but peaks again in P4 and to a lesser extent P5. Promotion rates in P4 are also slightly down on the other grades. Grade 6 has the highest promotion and lowest drop out rates, which may be due to the prospect of completing primary and entering JSS. Repetition is relatively high in Northern Ghana, particularly in Upper East and Upper West regions and among girls.

### **Out of School**

Determining the out of school population is dependent on which methods are used in the calculation. Errors can either overstate or underestimate participation in school. Administrative data provided by EMIS suggests that there are about 1,500,000 children who are out of school. This seems rather high and inconsistent with other indicative analysis of enrolment trends of the 6 to 11 year olds based on household survey data. Errors in the population estimates or projection data may explain this rather high figure which perhaps has not taken into account those who have never enrolled and those who enrolled but dropped out. Until there is accurate population estimates, the out of school populations will remain difficult to pin down.

### **Transition to secondary**

Generally, the majority of children in Ghana who reach primary 6 continue to JSS. For those who enter junior secondary most are able to complete. The story is a little different when it comes to entry into senior secondary. Here there is a significant drop. Less than 50 percent are able to make the transition into senior secondary. Analysis of participation by household income and rural/urban clearly indicates that children from poor households are less likely to continue their education to the secondary level (to JSS and SSS). Participation also depends on location (urban or rural dweller). Richer households are substantially more likely to access JSS (and subsequently SSS). Thus, demand for basic education may be much less for low income families living in rural areas who may

be less inclined to invest personal energy and resources into enrolling their children and ensuring that they stay on to complete.

## **Summary**

The following questions are pertinent to the problem of access to basic education in Ghana:

- What factors, especially among poor population groups determines which children enroll, attend regularly, complete basic education, and make a successful transition to senior secondary?
- Why have patterns of access, participation and completion improved so slowly? Why does repetition in grade continue to be high compared to the other grades?
- Why is there, it would seem, such a high proportion of school-age children out of school, and why is attracting these children proved to be consistently difficult?

Providing answers to these questions will require investigations at the school-community level where pathways and processes of access and participation in basic schools can be studied more intensively.

## **On the zones of exclusion to access**

An indicator of trends in participation in education is the proportion of the population classified by age-group that has ever attended school. This is a crude measure of participation because it includes those who entered but did not complete basic education and does not provide any information on the current level of education attained for those still in school. Using this measure it is observed that there has been an increase in the proportion of the population that has participated in education in Ghana in the last fifty years. But, the urban-rural gap still persists, although there has been some narrowing of the gap in the last two decades. People in urban areas are more likely to attend or to have attended school, although other analysis suggests that this differential gap is closing (see World Bank, 2004).

### **Zone 1: Children who have never attended school**

Approximately 15 percent of the population of Ghana aged 6-14 years and 17 percent of the population aged 15 to 24 years had never attended school according to figures taken in 2003. The difference between boys and girls is not significant for the 6-14 year age group, but widens to 7 percentage points for the 15-24 year age group.

There is a significant urban-rural gap for age groups. Only 6 percent of urban children in the 6-14 age/group had never attended school by 2003 compared to 20 percent of rural children. Location also interacts with gender. Girls in rural households are more likely to have never attended school than girls in urban areas.

The proportion of the population that has never attended school amongst the age-group 6-14 years ranges from a mean of 5 percent in the Greater Accra region to a mean of 43 percent in the Northern Region. Amongst the population aged 15-24 years the mean ranges from 5 percent in the Greater Accra Region to 54 percent in the Northern Region. Thus location is important in trying to understand why some children never enroll. The North, for example, suffers higher economic and social deprivation compared to the South.

## **Zone 2: Children who drop out of school**

EMIS data estimates a primary school population survival rate of about 83 percent for the years 2004/2005. Overall, drop outs appear to be quite low, but this may be due to the fact that the CWIQ is survey and not census based. More rural children drop out of school than children in urban areas. Also the incidence of dropping out is higher amongst girls than it is amongst boys. The probability that children drop out of school increases with age, with the increase higher for girls than boys.

The effect of welfare on the drop out rate is not the same across the different age cohorts. Amongst children aged 6-11 years a positive relationship pertains between dropping out and welfare indicators. A similar pattern holds for the 12-14 year age group. However, for children aged 15-17 years, it would appear that the relationship is reversed, i.e. children from high welfare quintiles are more likely to drop out from school. This situation might be explained by the fact that more children from this quintile are actually still in school at this stage than other socio-economic groups, leading to the possibility of higher drop out rates.

Estimates from the 2003 CWIQ data suggest that more than a third of children aged 6-11 years who dropped out did so after completing primary 1. Grade 4 is the next grade at which primary children are likely to drop out, with the risk higher for girls than boys. Fewer than 2 percent of drop outs aged 6-11 had completed primary 6. Amongst children aged 12-14 years who had dropped out, fewer than half had completed primary 4. Approximately 13 percent of drop outs in this age group completed JSS3 before dropping out. Amongst drop outs aged 15-17 years, about 52 percent had ended their education at the end of JSS3. These figures are suggestive of high repetition rates between grades and/or late enrolments. A number of factors are thought to explain drop out before the end of the basic education cycle. These include the age at which a child starts school (with overage entries thought more likely to drop out as pressure to enter adult life and the workplace is increasing); low attainment; high absence; and high repetition rates.

## **Zone 3: Children at risk of dropping out**

A number of interlocking in-school factors are thought to increase a child's likelihood of dropping out and as such make children at risk of leaving school before completing a cycle of basic education. These include: low attendance, low attainment, and grade repetition. These factors interact with other socio-economic, household and context-specific features which also influence whether a child remains in school.

There is no national data on the frequency of school attendance in Ghana. However, case studies suggest the phenomena of interrupted school attendance may be widespread. One particular case study found that most children had temporarily withdrawn from school more than once over a twelve month period.

#### **Zone 4: Children who complete primary but not junior secondary school**

Transition from primary to JSS is less problematic than that between JSS to SSS. Of the sub-population aged 12-14 years about 30 percent of children who had completed primary school managed to continue to junior secondary. Of children aged 15-17 years, there is a significant increase in the proportion that complete primary school but do not continue to junior secondary. As a result of late entry most of the population aged 12-14 years still find themselves in primary school. This can partly explain the extremely low proportion of children aged 12-14 years in Northern Ghana who do not continue their education after completing primary 6.

#### **Summary**

The 2003 CWIQ data and other enrolment analysis reveals that basic education in Ghana is not available to quite a significant proportion of the population aged 6-17 years who have never attended school, enrolled late, or had attended irregularly, probably as many as 15 percent. There is also a relatively high drop out rate amongst the population group aged 15-17 years.

#### **On evidence from access related research in Ghana**

This section covers a range of topics linked to educational access: health; disability; HIV/AIDS; households; migration; child labour; educational costs; gender and access; educational inputs e.g. teachers; non state providers and schooling practices

#### **Health, nutrition and access to schooling**

One important piece of evidence from research in Ghana is that malnutrition, stunted growth are correlated with delayed enrolment in school. Health factors are important determinants of when a child goes to school. Differences exist in the health status of enrolled and non-enrolled children, with out-of-school children often more vulnerable to health problems. Studies also indicate that health status has implications for attendance, retention and drop out, with hunger, malaria, headaches and poor eyesight noted as major causes of absenteeism and dropping out (Fentiman, et al., 1999, 2001).

Health issues have also been found to be gendered, with girls reporting more health-related problems than boys. Painful menstruation, a lack of sanitary facilities and pregnancy has been found to lead to both absenteeism and drop-out of adolescent girls (Fentiman et al., 1999, 2001). Other research has noted that interventions targeted at infants and first years of primary schooling helps to improve enrolment to quite a significant extent (see Fentiman et al., 2001). Similarly gender-sensitive programmes that

focus on female adolescent health and specific strategies to reach out to those most at risk have potential to improve access and retention.

Not much research has examined the impact that food aid and school feeding programmes have on educational access (Pridmore, 2007), but in Ghana one study investigated the impact of food aid intervention on girls' enrolment, attendance and retention in schools in the East Gonja District of Northern Ghana. Generally, it found that although food aid is an incentive for girls to enrol, attend and remain in school till completion, creating more awareness of the importance and benefits of girls' education was equally important in improving girls' participation in basic education (Seidu, 2003).

### **Disability, special educational needs and access**

It is estimated that around 5 percent of the population of Ghana have some sort of disability with sight problems noted as most prevalent (around 59 percent), then hearing/speaking. But, there is the possibility of under-recording of disability in rural areas which would make disability a sometimes less-visible factor in educational access.

There are indications that access to education for many with disabilities in Ghana is an urban phenomenon although this could also be a result of under-reporting in rural areas. For example, a study in Accra and some rural areas in Eastern region revealed that majority of students with disabilities had not had their disabilities detected or identified by professionals (Obeng 2007). In a survey which involved 66 teachers/head teachers (plus 16 parents), 87 percent of teachers and head teachers were not aware of any existing policy for special education needs (SEN), and therefore had no arrangements in place for implementation of such policy in their schools (Asamani, 2000). Many teachers are often unwilling to have children with disabilities in their class, especially those with behaviour problems (Obeng 2007). Generally, there seem to be a lack of detailed analytical research into the scale of disability and SEN in Ghanaian schools and its relationships with educational access.

### **HIV/AIDS and educational access**

There is limited research on children, HIV/AIDS and educational access in Ghana. In comparison to some other Sub-Sahara African countries, Ghana is not seen as one of the high prevalence countries. It appears that in the coming years the percentage of orphans in Ghana is likely to remain largely unchanged (Bennell et al., 2002). There are a number of potential impacts on educational access if teachers become infected with the HIV/AIDS virus. For example, infected teachers might experience long and frequent absences from school, low productivity, financial hardships and non-completion of curricula. There are claims that the prevalence rate for Ghanaian teachers is higher than the national average (Tamukong, 2004). Further research is required to draw firmer conclusions on the impact of HIV/AIDS on educational access.

## **Household influence access**

Research in Northern Ghana has suggested that the likelihood of children's enrolment is based on a complex mix of factors which include the educational level of parents, particularly mothers, the ability to pay indirect/direct costs of schooling, and the types of livelihoods households pursue. In some cases the likelihood of a child's enrolment 'was an outcome of the different ways in which households were organised, the manner in which household members' time was occupied and the types of assets they invested in, including human capital' (Hashim, 2005:17). Other studies confirm the benefits of parental education to schooling access for children (Mensah, 1992, Lloyd and Blanc, 1996 cited in CARE International, 2003; Johnson and Kyle, 2001; Montgomery, Kouamé, Oliver, 1995), leading to the conclusion that parental education, particularly the mother's education has a big influence on children's attendance and achievement.

Household decisions on who gets access and why often favours 'those who are most willing, able and determined' going to school, while other children stayed at home to ensure the availability of the necessary labour to secure livelihoods and assets' (Hashim, 2005). 'Parents frequently aspire to educate their children. However, education is sometimes seen as one among a range of means of securing children's long-term welfare. Consequently, the ability and desire to educate all their children can be tempered by a child's perceived interest and scholastic ability, by parents' assessment of education as a viable livelihood strategy, and by the need to secure and protect the household's immediate well-being, which might require a reduction in expenditure, such as those associated with educating a child, or a need for labour to ensure subsistence' (Hashim, 2005:17).

In rural communities where schools are a distance away, children might be fostered into another community where there is a school (Pillon, 2003). Interestingly, in rural areas the enrolment rate for children residing without their parents is higher than that of the household heads' own children, an indication that some children are fostered in order to attend school. Conversely, in urban areas, children living without their parents seem to have lower enrolment rates than the household heads' own offspring. In the urban areas under-enrolment seems to affect girls more than boys, which might suggest that, girls are fostered in urban areas to provide domestic support to households rather than to access education.

## **Migration and educational access**

Migration is linked to issues of fostering and orphan-hood, but also includes the movement of household units. In villages specialising in out-migration, children frequently drop out of school before the completion of compulsory education to migrate to cities, although the earnings of these migrants might be used to pay for the education of a sibling. Increasing demand for educational access in the south seems to be a factor contributing to domestic labour requirements being filled by child migrants from the north. However there are examples of young people who rather than dropping out, migrate to acquire the funds to re-sit exams or further their education' (see Hashim,

2005). A study by Fentiman, Hall, & Bundy (1999:334) allude to the gendered aspects of child migration and the sense that girls seemed to be migrating more than boys with consequences on opportunities for access to schooling.

### **Gender and educational access**

Gendered schooling patterns are context-specific with research indicating differentiations across Ghana. Research suggests that while some general patterns might be found around gendered access, these might not be applicable across the board, and therefore the need to look at this issue from location-specific contexts is important.

Several studies have documented reasons why girls tend to have lower enrolment rates than boys, higher drop out and less transition to secondary. On the whole these reasons tend to be multifaceted and interrelated but with poverty as a common denominator (AED, 2002). Factors influencing female enrolments have been identified as: beliefs and practices and the perception of the role of girls by families and communities; costs; the opportunity cost of sending girls to school and girls having to travel long distances to go to school (see AED, 2002; Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004; Avotri, 2000). Using qualitative interviews with fifteen families in Accra and Koforidua (as well as observations), Yeboah (1997) found that there was some favouring of boys over girls, but also that gender only became an issue to families when they were obligated to make a decision about either a daughter's or a son's access to school. She notes that culture, quality of school, performance of a child, gender, sex role stereotyping, and perceptions of which child will most likely look after a parent were critical variables in family decision-making around girls' education.

### **Location and educational access**

Studies in Ghana have shown that access issues tend to be more pronounced in areas that are prone to a range of interlocking socio-economic factors. For example, high levels of illiteracy, low levels of human resource development, low levels of economic development, low levels of democratic participation, high levels of infant and child mortality and morbidity, and low levels of general family health, among others (see Ministry of Education, 2002a). Most of these areas are more likely to be found in the northern Ghana. Hashim (2005) found that the issue of access in the North was not static but evolved with perceptions and expectations of childhood playing a role in how demand for education is constructed by households. Education was not implicated in 'normal' childhood in the same way, and the inability to attend school was not perceived as an opportunity denied. Transformations were occurring in the meaning of education as a result of the changes in the lived experiences of individuals ... in particular due to the manner in which the labour market has changed and the increasing importance of the 'modern' sector economy. However, education was not fully implicated in the construction of childhood but rather viewed as a new form of recruitment to work, representing the possibility of alternative livelihoods' (Hashim, 2005:18).

### **Schooling costs and access**

Several studies conducted in the 1990s and early 2000 suggested that a major obstacle to educational access was economic. The high cost of schooling pushes children into the labour market to enable them to afford school or pulls them away from school as they cannot afford it (Canagarajah & Coulombe, 1997). With the recent introduction of the capitation grant scheme into basic education, theoretically the issue of costs as a barrier should be eliminated or reduced to its barest minimum. Future CREATE studies in Ghana will test this assumption and explore the complexities surrounding household decision-making, in relation to access.

### **Child labour and access**

Depending on the nature of the work (and the type of educational opportunities available), child labour can: increase pressure to or cause drop outs from schooling; or provide financial support for the child's schooling and/or that of siblings, many children both work and attend school. In terms of age as a child grows older, the opportunity cost of their time often increases (Glewwe & Jacoby, 1995 in Fentiman, Hall, & Bundy, 1999:340; Canagarajah & Coulombe, 1997; Blunch & Verner, 2000). This can be seen for example in the migration habits of children, often from economically poorer communities who provide employment and domestic support (increasing quite significantly after the age of 13). Pressures on children to work might be seasonal in some contexts with implications for attendance at school. In one study, rural children were over twice as likely as urban children to engage in child labor. Girls were more likely than boys to be involved in child labour as were poor children. Finally involvement in child labour was found to be related to self-employment, family ownership of land and livestock, and the distances to the nearest primary and secondary school.

### **Non-state provision of basic education and access**

Private schooling in Ghana is mainly an urban phenomenon and run mainly on for profit basis. There has been some evidence which suggest that many 'unrecognized' private schools and schools managed by charitable organizations, operate in low income urban periphery areas. These schools are perceived to be providing better quality primary education (largely to poor households), than state providers (see Tooley, 2005). But their popularity could be attributed to the perception that they provide the mechanism for social mobility, and partly because of falling quality in public school education (LaRocque, 2001). Private schooling might also be plugging gaps in supply, with poor quality private and religious schools growing in number to accommodate students who cannot find access to state schools. Both the claims about the contribution of private schooling to access particularly for poor households as well as the scale of such provision will be investigated in the CREATE work in Ghana.

## **Summary**

The research reviewed suggests that there is a range of interlocking supply and demand factors which influence access to schooling in Ghana. These work in context-specific ways, interacting with each other and external influences, to ensure that each access situation in Ghana is distinctive. However, it is possible to make some general observations about educational access from the research reviewed. Generally, children living in the rural north have less access than those in urban south; girls' in northern and rural areas have less access than those in the south or urban and peri-urban areas. Poverty explains why girls often leave school to migrate out of communities or remain within households, to work. Age and the labour market interact to influence access – children are more likely to be involved in child labour the older they are. Accessing school at an older age increases chances of dropout and pull towards the informal labour market, and is also influenced by a child's health in their early years. Generally, undernourished and stunted children are likely to start school late.

## **On new agendas for policy and research**

There are a number of issues that have emerged from this country analytic review of access to basic education that have implications for policy and further research. Significant issues with implications for policy dialogue and re-formulation concern the following:

- **Costs:** The introduction of capitation grants linked to fee-free provision provides the opportunity for children from poor households to access basic education. But other factors can compete to deny access. The cost barrier is important for policy to address, but is one of many other equally important factors that shape access to basic education. Issues about early child nutrition and health are critical to when a child starts and completes schooling. Overage enrolment is a fundamental problem that remains deeply rooted in basic education in Ghana, affecting attendance and completion. Policies on access must therefore be judged on the extent to which they tackle not only the supply side problems of access, but also the extent to which they interact with early childhood health and nutrition initiatives.
- **Social returns to investment into basic education** suggest that the problem of access should also not be construed simply as a choice facing parents, although this is equally critical. Because of the micro and macro social returns, community level participation in the enforcement of access policies, as well as in management, and delivery of education provision is a key to sustaining high enrolments right from grade 1. This also means that the setting of enrolment targets and support to achieving them must be bottom-up, where local education authorities, schools, communities and parents work together to provide access to quality basic education.
- A consistent policy agenda of basic education reform has been the attempt to make it 'free and compulsory'. However, as the analysis in this report has shown, indirect costs and other factors are equally important if free basic education is to mean

equitable access for all. Indirect and opportunity costs of education are clearly significant and therefore making basic education free of direct costs to parents, and compulsory, is only one half of the battle. Other strategies are needed to encourage demand. Besides, it is important to establish if basic education, even under the capitation scheme, is really free in terms of the indirect costs. CREATE studies in Ghana will provide some insights into this.

- What we know is that lack of access is concentrated mostly among poor rural areas, especially in Northern Ghana, as well as among densely populated urban poor. About 39 percent of the 138 districts in Ghana are classified as educationally deprived. This means areas with a high incidence of poverty and where access to good quality basic education is particularly problematic. There are also pockets of population groups for whom sending a child to school is a difficult choice because of the consequences this has on economic survival. There are others, including a few poor, who feel private schooling offers the best chance to post-basic education and a brighter future. Whatever challenges families face in deciding whether to send their child to school (state or private), the decision reflects investment choices as well as what they believe are the returns. Thus, access to basic education is not simply a supply issue, but is increasingly becoming an issue of demand, or at least a mixture of both supply and demand.
- Finally, policies intended to expand access and completion of basic education need to provide the kind of non-pecuniary incentives that are likely to make the prospect of basic education attractive. Quality of provision (i.e. teacher supply, school management, teaching and learning resources) and meaningful access (i.e. regular attendance, improved learning achievement), are key to the proposition that basic education is fundamental for personal and social development irrespective of the location and welfare status of all in society.

## **On key research areas and questions for Ghana**

Based on the insights that have been developed from this analytic review the following key research questions have been identified for future phases of CREATE work in Ghana:

### **Researching zone 1**

#### **1. Researching barriers to enrolment**

- What are the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of Ghanaian children who never enrol in school? What is a good estimate of the size of this group?
- What conditions within the family or community acts as barriers to enrolment?
- What is the share of school-aged children in Ghana enrolled in alternative schools, special education schools, NGO non-profit schools etc.)?
- What routes exist for children in alternative basic schools to access public basic schools?

- What strategies have been used by alternative providers to enrol out of school children?
- To what extent can alternative schools provide sustainable access to basic education for children who unlikely to enrol in state basic schools?

## Researching Zones 2, 3 & 4

### 2. Tracking attendance and participation

- What factors shape patterns of enrolment, attendance, drop out and completion of primary and junior secondary school?
- What school level characteristics correlate with high or low attendance e.g. is there a relationship between teacher attendance, characteristics of school management, school/classroom size, health status of children, and pupil enrolment and attendance?
- What individual<sup>1</sup> and household characteristics<sup>2</sup> correlate with high or low enrolment, attendance and progression in primary and JSS education?
- What factors account for lack of access to JSS after successful completion of primary?
- Does attendance at pre -school (kindergarten) improve attendance and completion of primary schooling?
- At what age and grade level are children in rural and urban areas most likely to enrol or drop out of school? What factors account for any age and gender differentiation in drop out?
- What happens to pupils who drop out from school in early, mid and late stages of primary education?
  - Where do they go, what do they do and how do they evaluate their school experiences?
  - What proportion of drop outs re-enter and at what grade level do most re-enter?
  - What challenges face drop outs who re-enrol?
  - What policies do schools have to reduce drop out and address the problem of poor attendance of pupils and teachers?
  - What conditions hinder other drop outs from re-enrolling?
- What are the *key determinants* of high and low enrolment in schools in rural and in urban poor areas?
- What whole school management practices increases the risk of low attendance and drop out?
- What professional characteristics and practices of teachers increase the risk of low enrolment, irregular attendance and low completion of primary school?

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<sup>1</sup> Individual characteristic include labour status of child, health status, gender, age, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Household characteristics include family income, education of father & mother, etc. – will use similar household characteristics as used by the Ghana DHS