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EDUCATIONAL ACCESS IN GHANA

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This Policy Brief describes and explains patterns of access to schools in Ghana. It outlines policy and legislation on access to education and provides an analysis of access, vulnerability and exclusion. It is based on findings from the Country Analytic Report on Access to Basic Education in Ghana (Akyeampong et al, 2007) which can be found on the CREATE website. [Full references for citations given in the following pages can be found in the Country Analytic Report.]

Why educational access is important in Ghana

Access to education in Ghana is seen both as a fundamental human right and an essential element in the national development strategy to promote growth and ensure adults are prepared for a productive adult life. Ghana's aspiration to become a middle income country by 2020 rests in large part on her ability to improve educational access to the point where it has a highly educated population which can provide the human resource base for accelerated development.

Access to education has social and economic benefit to both the individual and wider society. Any effort to improve health, nutrition, agriculture, industry, commerce and environmental conditions in Ghana has to enhance equitable access to both basic and post-basic education. Without this poverty will remain intractable, disadvantage will continue to be transmitted across the generations, and economic growth will be compromised by shortages of knowledge and skill in the work force. No country has become a major player in the global economy without a critical mass of literacy and numeracy in the population and substantial access to post basic education.

This policy brief summarises the state of affairs in relation to key indicators of educational access and recent policy initiatives. It outlines the barriers to improved access and the implications for future policy interventions and research designed to inform policy dialogue.

CREATE's Zones of Exclusion (see box) are applied to enrolments by grade in Ghana to illustrate how access declines, especially at the post basic level (Figure 1).

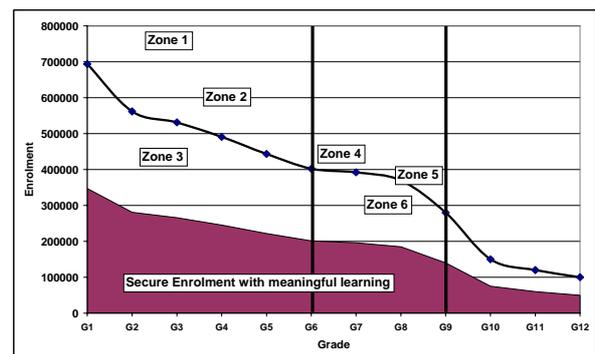


Figure 1 Zones of Exclusion to Access

The Ghanaian policy context

The concept of basic education for all children in Ghana first took centre stage in education development with the introduction of the Accelerated Development Plan in 1951. This plan laid the foundations for six years of free and

compulsory primary education and produced massive increases in primary enrolments. After independence in 1957, the new government introduced the 1961 Education Act which extended free and compulsory education for a further four years into middle school.



What is educational access?

Meaningful access: requires more than full enrolment; it requires high attendance rates, progression through grades with little or no repetition, and learning outcomes that confirm that basic skills are being mastered.

Zones of exclusion: educational access is described in terms of 6 zones of exclusion:

Zone 1 children include those who have never attended school.

Zone 2 consists of children who have dropped out before completing the primary grades.

Zone 3 relates to children enrolled at primary level at risk of exclusion and non-completion.

Zone 4 focuses on children below the age of 15 who fail to make the transition into lower secondary schooling or its alternatives.

Zone 5 contains those children who drop out of secondary grades and fail to complete the cycle.

Zone 6 includes those at risk in secondary schooling who attend irregularly fail to learn at appropriate levels and who are at risk of drop out.

Zone 0 includes those with no access to pre-school.

The next major initiative to expand basic education occurred with the introduction of education reforms in 1986. The reforms set out to improve access to basic education, but also emphasized measures that would improve quality, efficiency, and equity in the education sector. In the late 1970s, participation in basic education had suffered sharp declines due partly to a downturn in the national economy and to a degree of political instability. These resulted in poor educational performance, indicated by falling enrolment and poor completion rates. Thus, in 1975 there were more than 2.3 million children in primary school in Ghana, but by the early 1980s this number had dropped by over one million (World Bank, 2004). Tackling the decline in educational performance led to a restructured education system which required all children aged 6 to 14 to attend six years of

primary school, followed by three years of Junior Secondary School (JSS).

The 1986 reforms resulted in increases in public investment in education to improve access and quality of basic education. There have been real gains, but educational attainment falls short of national norms, and growth in participation has remained uneven, inequitable and supported by inadequate learning resources.

In 1992, nine-year basic education was made mandatory under the new constitution, which called for the provision of free, compulsory and universal education. Shortly afterward in 1995, the 'free compulsory universal basic education' (FCUBE) reforms were introduced. FCUBE aimed to achieve UPE by 2005, and to improve girls' enrolment. The programme did have an impact but also met with several problems and constraints. Management weaknesses at school and system level undermined its impact (Fobih et al., 1999) and weaknesses began to appear on the demand side of participation, especially with older children. Two important lessons from FCUBE and other educational expansion policies are the need to (i) ensure that basic education is provided in ways that motivate children and parents to participate through to the end of JSS, and (ii) promote school and system management to enhance efficiency and affordability.

Two particular policy initiatives stand out in the more recent attempt to universalize basic education in Ghana. The first is the push for education decentralization and management, and the second is the introduction of capitation grants. Decentralisation is intended to improve the operational efficiency and promote a more responsive approach to education service delivery at the district, community and school level. Although decentralisation has provided a good framework for improving educational performance in general, some analysis suggests that it has, in some instances, caused further disparities in provision. For example, it may have encouraged wealthier communities (typically in urban areas) to provide the kind of support and resources required for educational improvement in their areas (including opting into private schools) and left less affluent communities (usually in rural areas) with poor schools.

The second initiative is the capitation grant scheme, introduced in 2004 as part of a wider strategy to decentralize education provision. Currently, the capitation is on average ₵GH3 (approximately \$3) per enrolled child. Initial

evidence indicates that its introduction led to massive increases in enrolment (overall about an additional 17% rise at the basic education level, mostly concentrated at grade 1 level). However, the level of capitation is small in comparison to the amounts some schools previously collected and this places a stress on non-salary school budgets. It may also be insufficient to provide the motivation to sustain higher enrolments, and the initial effects may dissipate over time. CREATE studies in Ghana will explore policy options that could make the capitation grant scheme more effective and sustainable and which could give it a stronger pro-poor flavour to support fuller enrolment of poor and marginalised groups in Ghanaian society.

Patterns of educational access in Ghana

Despite the appreciable gains which have resulted from previous reform policies, analysis of access indicators undertaken as part of the baseline for CREATE work in Ghana suggests that a number of key problems still remain. Indicative patterns of educational access highlight the following:

Enrolment: Net primary enrolment rates using household information from the Ghana Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ, 2003) are estimated at about 70%. An estimate of enrolment in school for children aged 6-16 years, irrespective of grade, reveals that children between the ages of 8-13 (14 for boys) are most likely to be enrolled in school. Generally, there is a rapid increase in enrolment rates amongst children aged 6-8, and a significant decline for older children particularly from 13 years and over.

Overage enrolment: The official age for entry into primary schooling in Ghana is six years of age. However, only about a third (31%) of the grade 1 population in 2003 was 5-6 years of age. The mean age of a grade 1 child in 2003 is estimated at 7.5 years, and this includes late entries, older-age entries, and repeaters. Overall, the age profile of children in Ghanaian schools is characterised by a large age-range within each grade. This adds to the difficulty of providing quality education as it poses challenges for teachers attempting to facilitate learning for children of very different learning abilities, interests, maturity levels and peer relationships.

Promotion, repetition and drop out: The average rates of promotion, repetition and dropout are 91.0%, 6.0% and 3.2%, respectively, according to Ministry of Education figures for 2006. These official figures, however, may

underestimate repetition and drop out, and the rates vary considerably by grade. These trends are consistent with other years and have therefore not improved significantly over the last decade. For every 1000 children who enter grade 1, only 559 progress through the primary school system to grade 6: 159 drop out, while 283 of the children who remained in the schooling system repeat at least one year of primary school (see MOESS, 2006).

Gender: While gender parity has largely been achieved in Ghana in terms of initial access to primary education, boys are still more likely to stay longer at school. The enrolment rate of girls aged 11-16 years is lower than that of boys by almost 8 percentage points. Thus, girls enrolling in primary school later than the official entry age are more likely to drop out, particularly as they approach adolescence. This emphasises the importance of ensuring that children – and especially girls – start school at the appropriate age. Unless this can be achieved, school enrolment patterns will continue to follow the predicted pattern of decline, especially in the early grades. Although there was a steady rise in primary enrolments between 1980 and 2005, transition and retention patterns for both boys and girls have remained largely unchanged throughout the primary grades during that period.

Previous studies have noted a number of factors which influence female enrolment. These include poverty, traditional beliefs and practices about gender roles and aspirations, costs of schooling, the opportunity cost of sending girls to school, and distance to school. Poor parents faced with affordability and cultural constraints tend to prioritize boys education over that of girls. Thus, household poverty affects girls much more than boys when it comes to accessing schooling in Ghana.

Welfare: 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 children from households in higher wealth quintiles, and are also more likely to drop out of school. Children from the wealthiest households are twice as likely to be in school as children from the poorest households, and at JSS they are more than three times as likely to be in school. Improving meaningful

access therefore requires policies that specifically target the poorest in Ghanaian society.

Geographical disparities: Repetition rates in primary schools in the North are generally higher than the national average and the phenomenon of out of school children is also particularly acute there. Rural children across the country are also significantly less likely than their urban counterparts to be enrolled in school, irrespective of their age-group.

Physically and mentally challenged children: The net primary enrolment rate of children with sight problems is estimated at about 77%. Children having fits, behavioural problems and 'feeling' (numbness) difficulties are particularly disadvantaged in terms of access. The net junior secondary enrolment rate is significantly lower than the net primary enrolment rate for all categories of physically and mentally challenged children in Ghana.

The causes behind exclusion

There continue to be difficulties in reaching universal basic education provision in Ghana. CREATE Baseline analysis suggests that although improving quality and quantity of education infrastructure (i.e. classrooms) is an important strategy, it is not by itself adequate. Introducing demand-driven initiatives and incentives which target the poorest is more likely to ensure equitable access to quality basic education.

Indeed, level of poverty is a key determinant of access-related exclusion in Ghana. In contexts where poverty is high, access is low. Many children who drop out do so for economic reasons that go to the heart of individual and family survival needs. Many poor children contribute to family income whilst attending school, and for most quitting their 'jobs' to concentrate on schooling is not a simple choice. It could seriously threaten family incomes, and at the same time jeopardize their chances of completing basic education (see Ghana Child Labour Survey, 2003). Exclusion has roots in this typical cycle of the Ghanaian school-age child: child labour, late/overage entry, and eventual dropout.

Research gaps

The Country Analytic Report for Ghana highlights the need for research to focus on the following:

- The factors among poor population groups that determine which children enrol, attend regularly, complete basic education, and make a successful transition to senior secondary.
- Developing a deeper understanding of (i) whether repetition at early primary grades hinders meaningful access and/or is the result of schools' inability to offer effective instruction at the early stages of schooling, and (ii) whether the introduction of compulsory pre-school makes a difference to access, especially for the poor.
- Identifying the causes of the rise in dropout in later primary grades and JSS, and suggesting interventions to reverse the pattern.
- Exploring in detail why a high proportion of school-age children continue to be out of school and why, after several education policy initiatives, the proportion of out of school children has proven resistant to change.

Research into these areas will enhance policy initiatives to improve educational access in Ghana.

This policy brief is based on:

Akyeampong, K., Djangmah, J., Seidu, A., Oduro, A. and Hunt, F. (2007) *Access to Basic Education in Ghana: The Evidence and the Issues*. Available at www.create-rpc.org.

It has been developed by the authors and the CREATE team.



CREATE in Ghana is managed through the University of Education at Winneba and the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. To contact the CREATE team in Ghana, email **Professor Jerome Djangmah** (jsiauid@yahoo.co.uk).

CREATE in Ghana is currently working on school community level studies on access in Southern and Northern Ghana. A series of reports will be issued from these studies in 2008.