

**A Social Appraisal of the Education Strategic Plan for
Ghana
(2004)**

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Associates for Change: Working Document 1
November 24th, 2004**

Executive Summary

The attainment of Education for All (EFA) continues to be a major challenge for educational stakeholders within Ghana. The aggregate GER fell from 75.9% between 1994 to 72.1% in 1997. Between 1997 to 2002, the primary GER rate increased to 79.5%, which accounted for a 3.5% increase between 1994 to 2002; female GER grew at a faster rate of 5.3% over the same period but the MDG gender parity target is unlikely to be achieved by 2005¹ (MOEYS, 2004)². Ghana's primary education completion rate as of 2002 was 65.9%³. Reaching the target of universal primary completion (UPC) by 2015 will require a concerted effort to ensure that 34.1% of children who drop out of school are retained and complete the full six years of primary schooling.

Achieving UPC in Ghana will also require a much greater focus on net enrolment rates in planning and educational targeting⁴. The latest Ghana Statistical Service data suggests that the national NER is 69.9% which varies widely between regions; this means that reaching UPC by 2015 will require a substantial enrolment increase of 31.2% within the school aged population (GSS, 2004)⁵. The NER data for 2002/2003 also suggests that between 40-55% of children across the three northern regions of Ghana remain out of school. The largest proportion of these children are girls living in the northern region which due to poverty, parental neglect and socio-cultural practices fail to enter and stay in the formal education system (see annex 3).

Closing the primary gross enrolment, completion and gender gap particularly among poor children and girls will depend on improving educational quality particularly at primary level, ensuring equitable resource distribution and ensuring that there are no reasons for poor parents to restrict their children from educational access which includes the removal of all school fees and making educational provision more flexible (shorter and compressed).

The Ghana Government through the Education Strategic Plan (ESP), and Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) has demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting the poor particularly in remote rural areas. The ESP and GPRS recognise that a large number of children remain out of school (over 500,000) and suggest that children living in hard to reach areas be supported through more innovative programmes including: Sheppard schools and flexible more accelerated educational programmes such as School for Life⁶. The ESP is also designed to target some of the most vulnerable groups including children with special needs, children living in areas of extreme poverty⁷, out of school children and girls. More support for private public

¹ Female GER increased from 70.5% in 1994 to 75.8% in 2002.

² Based on Proposal for Inclusion into Education for All Fast Track Initiative.

³ The Primary completion rate is calculated as non-repeaters in P6 as a proportion of the population aged 11.

⁴ The net enrolment rate is calculated as the correct age enrolments as a proportion of the population aged 6-11 years.

⁵ Latest data from MOEYS (2004) suggests that the NER was closer to 58.8%.

⁶ The number of out of school children is closer to 1,300,000 based on current NER data.

⁷ The Ghana Living Standards Survey as living in "extreme poverty" defines families earning less than 700,000 cedis per year.

partnerships is needed to ensure that these vulnerable groups are reached under the ESP through innovative approaches to educational delivery⁸.

The Ghana Government has also demonstrated a significant commitment towards girls' education with a number of policies and programmes directly targeting girls. In 2003/2004 alone over 8.7 billion cedis was earmarked for girls' scholarships at the primary and JSS level of education. Scholarship funds were dispersed using a formula, which weighted girls living in the most deprived districts for extra support. More work is needed to ensure that girls remain the primary focus of MOEYS schemes in order to ensure that the intergenerational aspects of poverty are addressed and a critical mass of girls attain higher levels of education⁹.

Despite the positive efforts within the education sector over the last five to ten years educational trends remain modest particularly when considering the net enrolment rates across the country. Many of the interventions and activities outlined in the ESP are based on well tested approaches to supporting girls and poor children through the system; some of the ESP activities include: capitation grants, girls' scholarships, food incentives and feeding programmes, provision of bicycles, community sensitisation, counselling/guidance, provision of sanitation and potable water facilities at the school. On the supply side the improvement of the school environment is key to attracting, retaining and sustaining poor children particularly girls; this includes ensuring teachers are gender sensitised and attracted to work in deprived rural areas through incentive schemes, and most importantly, provided with adequate provision of textbooks and teaching and learning materials.

In order for the poor to increasingly get a fair share of the national educational budget the ESP will need to increase and sustain its efforts at national level in resource targeting which includes the constant assessment of deprivation criteria and formula designed to target the poor and reach the most needy deprived districts for educational investment (e.g. GETFUND, SESP, PRSC, EdSeP). More work is needed to ensure that districts also adopt similar approaches to setting deprivation criteria, identifying needy areas through school mapping and target educational resource allocations to these areas in their district educational plans.

District education offices were compelled to target the disadvantaged under DFID's support through the ESSP; measures such as training and district level guidelines should continue to be implemented through the ESP in order to provide education services to the poor in rural areas. This will also mean that district education offices, which are unable to reach the poor with educational provision, should partner with civil society agencies in designing and implementing sustainable and cost effective approaches for education in these areas.

The Government must also be explicit in its intentions to provide "fee free" education at all levels of government including district and school levels. The MOEYS should

⁸ There is need for more GES partnerships with the civil society sector, which is currently leading educational innovation within the most deprived areas of the country.

⁹ The most pressing challenge for girls' education in Ghana remains issues of retention and transition from primary to junior secondary and senior secondary levels of education. Gender disparities are much wider at the upper levels of education where girls must attain in order to ensure that poverty is prevented for the next generation of children.

continue to encourage District Assemblies to create bi-laws, which remove all district and school levies and find ways to finance sports/ cultural fees and examinations, which are necessary aspects of education provision. Improving the quality of education at the primary level should also be a key focus area for government by ensuring the provision of text books and the attainment of core text book ratios particularly in the most deprived areas; a review of teacher selection, deployment and retention strategies is also necessary in order to ensure that teacher trainees are prepared and committed to working in remote rural areas.

1.0 Background

The Education Strategic Plan was designed based on findings from two comprehensive sector reviews: the Presidential Report on Education (2002) and the Education Sector Review (MOEYS, 2002). A social appraisal of the basic education system was part of the Education Sector Review, which supported the design of the ESP by identifying approaches to mainstream issues of gender equity, poverty/vulnerability and social protection.¹⁰ The Ghana Poverty Reduction Study was also used as a basis for assisting the MOEYS prioritise policy objectives and activities under the ESP. The ESP therefore embodies many of the GOG policy programmes related to education and embraces Ghana's Poverty Reduction educational targets.

The Education Strategic Plan has placed a high priority on the needs of vulnerable groups such as special needs children, girls and children living in deprived rural areas. The ESP also focuses its strategic objectives directly at improving equitable educational opportunities for the poor (EA7), prioritising the disadvantaged in society (EA9), promoting gender equity in enrolment and retention (EA 12) and prioritising female education at all levels of education (EA13). District planning reports reflect the high level of awareness and commitment towards supporting girls' education and needy children as well as improving the quality of teaching and learning at the school level through the ongoing in service and cluster based training process.¹¹

Targeting

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports has taken tremendous steps over the last two years in targeting deprived rural areas and needy children. Last year alone the MOEYS provided over 8.9 billion in scholarships for girls across the country. Despite the fact that only 60% of these scholarships went directly to girls, this is tremendous improvement from previous years. The MOEYS has also developed deprivation criteria in order to select and target needy districts for increased financial resourcing.

The MOEYS uses the following deprivation criteria to rank all 110 districts and select the top 40 most deprived districts for increased investment and budgetary support. The criteria involves weighting enrolment at 30%, no of schools at 10% and disadvantaged criteria at 60%. The disadvantaged criteria include input criteria such as: seating places

¹⁰ Consultancy Area Report on General Education, Gender and the Disadvantaged (Casely-Hayford, 2002)

¹¹ The Education Sector Support Programme (ESSP) funded under the DFID financing also made considerable advances in ensuring that the MOEYS was able to target its financing at district and community level. The Whole School Development programme (WSD) along with the ESSP programme as a whole, assisted districts take into consideration gender equity and vulnerability issues within their planning processes.

per pupil, core textbooks per pupil, percentage of qualified primary teachers, per student budget at primary level and PTR at primary level. The access criteria include taking into consideration GER and percentage of girls enrolled in school. The achievement criteria include consideration of the BECE English pass rate and the BECE maths pass rate. The GER and the PTR rank are given a double weight in calculating average ranks across all the criteria. The MOEYS is in the process of assisting the GETFUND develop a similar formula, which will enhance equitable resource distribution and target the most needy areas.

Apart from the very positive efforts by government to target girls and needy districts there are several overarching policy issues, which continue to create barriers preventing Ghana from achieving equity and universal primary education for all its children. The first of these is related to the district and school levies charged in basic public schools across the country. Interviews conducted across 6 districts in the three geographic zones suggest that between 15-55,000 cedis are being charged by districts for the following costs: sports/ cultural fees, and examination fees; in some cases, districts are adding levies for constructing sports stadiums and subsidising security personnel at school/district level¹².

Another area, which needs further investigation, is the degree to which equity can be monitored and tracked within the current budget and disbursement system. The Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) system does not allow easy tracking of expenditures particularly when considering outcomes such as increased gender equity, and targeted support for deprived areas. More work is needed to ascertain the degree to which budget inputs are tied to actual expected outcomes within the education sector in order to ensure MOEYS financial resources are equitably distributed and targeted to the poor. More training and support are also needed at district level to ensure that targeting of resource allocations are based on approaches such as school mapping, which identify the neediest schools for support.

1.1 Key Educational Trends

The latest assessment of education sector performance indicates that the gross enrolment rates have made modest improvement over the last five years. Between 1997 to 2002, the primary GER rate increased to 79.5%, which accounted for a 3.5% increase between 1994 to 2002. Analysis of the GER by region and district suggest that there is a wide gap between GER's in the north and other areas around the country. According to the Ghana Living Standards Survey and research conducted under the MOEYS, the main reasons for not achieving universal primary education relate to poverty and socio-cultural factors– which continue to deter a sizeable proportion of the school age population from attending school particularly in the north.

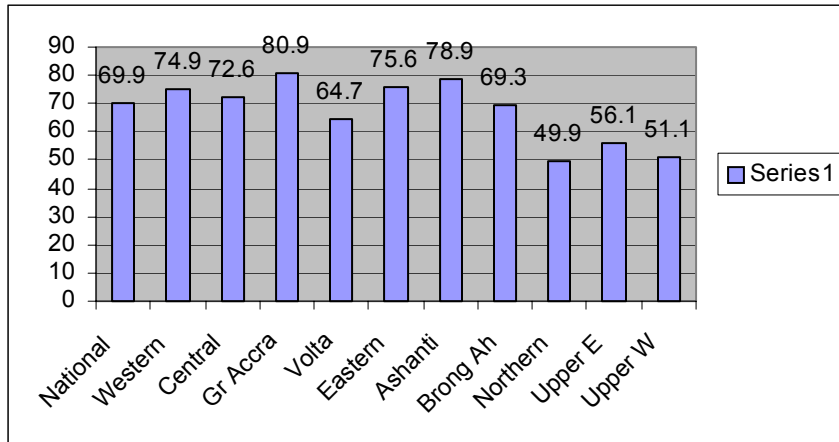
NER rates based on CWIQ survey data (GSS, 2004) suggest that at the district levels there are a very high proportion of children, especially girls, out of school across the three northern regions¹³. The latest Ghana Statistical Service data suggests that the national NER is 69.9% but NER varies widely between regions and districts (see table 1.0 below); this means that reaching UPC by 2015 will require a substantial enrolment

¹² Based on fieldwork interviews by SESP design team across three geographic zones.

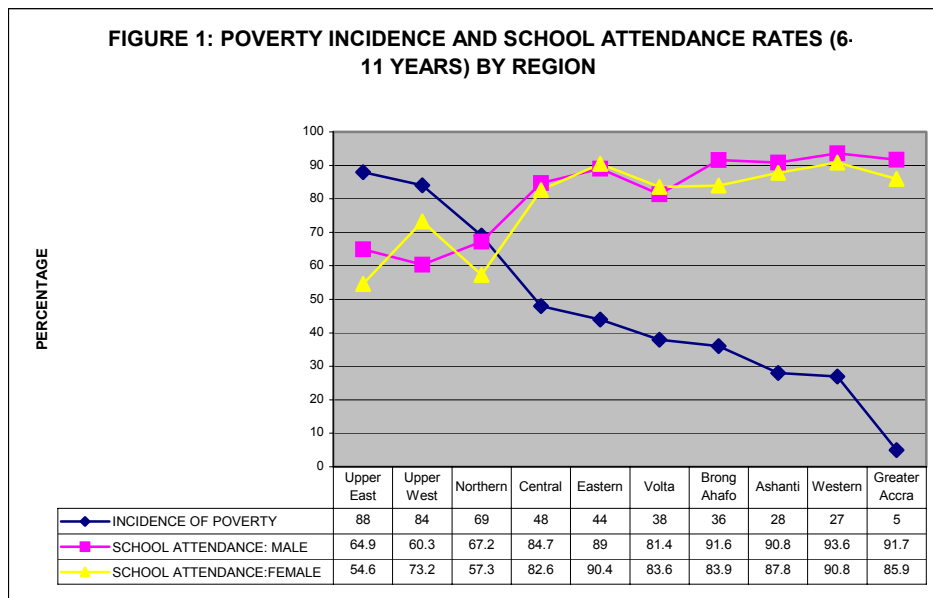
¹³ Net Enrolment Rates (NER) data for 2003/2004 are not currently available from MOEYS.

increase of 31.2% (GSS, 2004)¹⁴. The NER data also suggest that between 40-55% of children across the three northern regions remain out of school. The largest proportion of these children are girls living in the northern region of the country which due to poverty, parental neglect and socio-cultural practices fail to enter and stay in the formal education system¹⁵.

Primary Net Enrolment Rate by Region (GSS 2004/CWIQ)



Participation in education is problematic for children in the northern regions of the country (i.e. Upper East, Upper West and Northern Region) where high levels of poverty prevail. Analysis of the relationship between poverty and access to education reveals a very close correlation between income and educational access. Figure 1 reveals that regions with the highest incidence of poverty have the lowest child enrolment rates (e.g. Upper East, North and Upper West Regions).



(Casely-Hayford 2002 based on the GLSS 4 data)

¹⁴ Latest data from MOEYS (2004) suggests that the NER was closer to 58.8%.

¹⁵ Some of the socio-cultural practices, which impede girls' access and retention, include: early marriage and fostering of children to their aunts.

Recent research conducted in Ghana also suggests that poor quality education does not assist poor children escape the poverty cycle (World Bank, 2004; Casely-Hayford, 2002 and Prior, 2002). Extremely low scores on the National Criteria Reference Tests (CRT) demonstrate the poor quality of education in particularly rural areas of Ghana. The CRT reveals that only 8.7% of children at primary six level can read and write within public schools and 4.0% of children are able to master numeracy (World Bank, 2002; MOE, 2000). It is therefore essential for the ESP to quickly develop and sustain a comprehensive assessment system for tracking pupil performance; the development of a timely and sustainable system of assessment is not new to Ghana but should be sustained over the life of the ESP and beyond in order to measure performance at pupil, school/community and system levels¹⁶.

2.0 Gender Appraisal

Overall gender trends such as the gender parity index, enrolment ratios and percentage girls' enrolment figures suggest that the gender gap is gradually closing within schools across Ghana. For instance, the gender gap narrowed from one boy to 0.7 girls in 1998 to one boy to 0.9 girls in 2001--- with nine girls for every ten boys in school in 2001 (MOEYS, 2002/2003). However, analysis based on Net Enrolment Rates (NER) across districts reveals that even though the Gender Parity Index (GPI) may have improved in some schools a significant number of children especially girls remain out of school particularly across the three northern regions.

Available MOEYS statistics indicate that between 1997/98 academic years, and 2002/03, percentage enrolment of primary girls, within public and private schools, grew from 46.7% to 47.6%. Percentage enrolment of girls at JSS level grew from 44.1% to 45.8%. Over the six-year period (1997/98 to 2002/03), percentage primary enrolments grew by 0.9% and at JSS by 1.7%. The gender gap considering national level data is not very wide, but there are wide variations within and between regions and districts particularly in areas where the incidence of poverty is high; the gender gap also significantly widens in favour of boys as pupils move up the educational ladder.

A situation analysis of girls' and boys' education in the country reveals disparities in retention rates (Casely-Hayford et al, 2004). At the national level, for every 1000 girls that were admitted into Primary One in 1991/92 only 526 remained in school by the time the cohort reached the last stage of JSS in 1999/2000 academic year compared to 606 boys. There is a need to accelerate efforts and interventions, which address the high, drop out and poor retention rates among girls if targets set in the ESP are to be achieved.

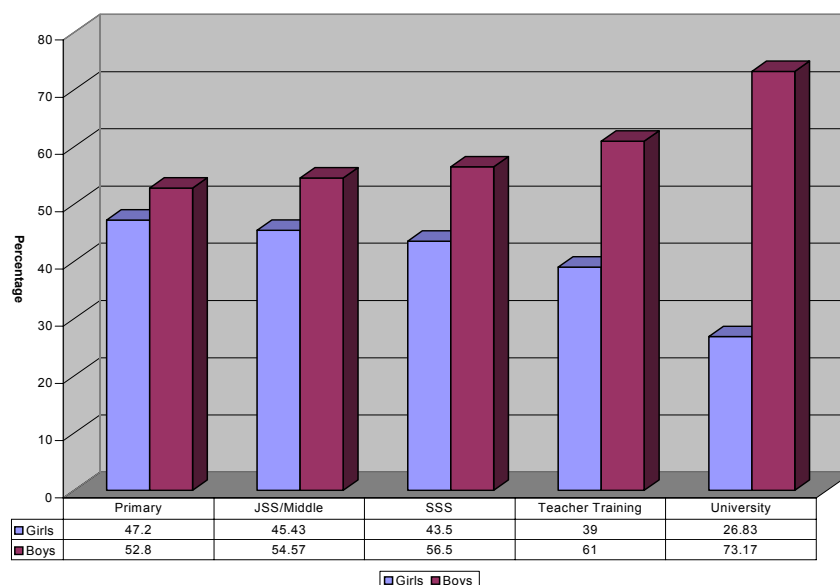
Transition data from EMIS (MOEYS, 2002/2003) also reveal the growing gender disparities as one moves from the primary to the tertiary levels of education. Less than 27% of the university population is female in the five publicly funded universities. Less than 40% of the entrants to teacher training college are women and less than 44% of those entering senior secondary school are girls. The completion rates across these

¹⁶ The CRT is no longer being supported and a new system of assessment is being introduced which will be piloted over the next two years (BECASS).

levels of education are far worse for girls in the northern regions of the country with only 20-25% of girls completing JSS.

Poor transition rates particularly among girls relate mainly to socio-cultural and economic factors, which prevent parents from supporting children particularly at the upper primary

Figure 3: Participation Rates by Gender at Various Educational Levels (2000/01)



level of education. Many parents prefer to support the boys due to the belief that the boy's education is an investment for a lifetime since boys will assist them in their old age while girls' belong to "the husbands family". Research in Ghana suggests that girls tend to drop out in the upper primary and JSS levels and are rarely supported at higher levels of education such as Senior Secondary School (Casely-Hayford, 2002; 2000). In some regions, girls are perceived as too vulnerable to attend SSS since there is little supervision and they "may fall victim to teenage pregnancy". Transactional sex among girls and boys is also becoming more predominant at the higher levels of education, which presents a growing challenge to protecting Ghana's youth from HIV/AIDS (Casely-Hayford, 2002; 2000)¹⁷.

2.1 Socio/economic context and equity challenges for educational delivery

Poverty continues to deepen in many communities particularly in Ghana's three northern regions where high levels of *extreme poverty* are growing¹⁸. Over 39% of the population in Ghana are under the poverty line and 27% are under the extreme poverty line---the vast majority of the poor live in the north of Ghana where over 80% of the population experience a high incidence of poverty (World Bank, 2002). The most prominent signs of the growing divide between rural and urban contexts are the persistent levels of

¹⁷ Girls at SSS and Tertiary levels of education find it difficult to support themselves financially without support of their parents; girls are forced to use sex as a way of paying for their basic needs at SSS and Tertiary levels of education.

¹⁸ Extreme Poverty Line is equivalent to 700,000 cedis per annum (less than 100 US dollars) based on the minimum nutritional requirements of a household.

deprivation whereby rural communities continue to lack the most basic needs such as water, sanitation facilities, and *quality education* (UNICEF, 2004; GSS, 2004).). The lack of basic facilities and the growing concern over food insecurity particularly in the northern regions of Ghana creates a challenging context for ensuring the achievement of universal primary education (UPE).

During the 1990's, Ghana's per capita GDP grew at an average of 1.3% with over 39.5% of Ghanaians remaining under the poverty line, 68% of whom were within the extremely poor category¹⁹. There was a 19% rise in extreme poverty across the three northern regions of the country based on GLSS 4 data. With a growing number of Ghanaians unable to meet their daily food requirements, high levels of malnourishment persist among children and youth (GSS, 2004; UNICEF, 2004). Over 25% of children in the northern regions die before the age of 5 and over 37% of children under five experience moderate to severe stunting rates compared with only 18-20% of their southern counterparts (UNICEF, 2004).

Recent studies in Ghana suggest that children between the ages of 11 and 15 continue to experience malnourishment from childhood into pre-youth (UNICEF, 2004). The Ghana vulnerability mapping exercise underpins the problems of malnutrition and food security particularly in Northern Ghana. The study found that rates of stunting among children in the northern regions ranged between 21.7% in Tamale District to as high as 48.2% in Savelugu District²⁰. The issues of malnourishment in northern Ghana have direct implications for children's learning capacity, and retention in the classroom (Casely-Hayford et al, 2004).

Food insecurity at household level is also a major factor preventing girls from entering and staying in school. Research in Northern Ghana links the household pressures and growing burden of women on sustaining the family, which are often transferred to the girl child. The girl child is often under the direction and care of the women in the household and in a situation of stress is responsible for assisting the mother or "auntie" undertake household responsibilities (i.e. cooking and child rearing); the girls child is also engaged in income generation and food security responsibilities (i.e. shea nut and ground nut harvesting). It is during the harvest seasons where her labour is indispensable and of great value to the family and female members of the household (Casely-Hayford, 2000).

More emphasis on the contextual realities of schooling particularly in northern Ghana are needed to realise universal primary education; child nutrition and health status should be carefully considered by the MOEYS when targeting educational support and aiming at increased learning outcomes particularly in deprived districts in the north. Recent studies on food assistance programmes in northern Ghana suggest their tremendous impact on improving enrolment, attendance and retention of girls (Casely-Hayford et al, 2004).

The direct and indirect costs of formal education play a significant role in whether a family are able or willing to send all their children to school. The Ghana Living Standards Survey found that the main reason parents give for not sending their children

¹⁹ Earning less than 700,000 cedis per day (approx. USD 80 at current rates of exchange)

²⁰ Rates in the Upper East ranged from 8.5% in Bongo district to as high as 37.9% in Kassena Nankana District. The Upper West was similar with 9% stunting in Lawra District to as high as 34.8% in Sissala District (Casely-Hayford et al, 2004).

to school relate to the direct costs of education (e.g. levies and user fees). Families in the northern region have between 4-6 children on average and carefully weigh their decisions of who to send to school (GSS, 2000). Women and girls are particularly vulnerable in situations of high poverty incidence and due to their low social and economic status within the community and extremely low level of literacy often are unable to complete for basic educational attainment. Only 13.7% of women considered “rural poor” and 28.2% of women in the rural areas are literate (GSS, 2004). A large majority of these women are teenage girls who were never given the opportunity to attend school nor attain basic literacy skills while in school.

Another particularly acute problem relates to the inequalities in quality and standards, which restrict a large proportion of rural children from competing at higher levels of education. The transition between JSS and SSS in deprived regions of Ghana such as the Western, Central, Northern and even the Volta regions where high levels of poverty persist and the high costs of higher education are unattainable by most children. Figure 2 reveals the percentage of children passing their BECE and attaining entry to SSS from regions across Ghana.

Growing evidence also suggests that the poor transition rate of children to higher levels of education is a key deterrent to parents considering sending more children to primary school. The poor quality of education within the rural deprived areas creates an unequal

Figure 3: Regional Percentage of BECE Candidates Qualifying to Enter SSS by Sex (2001)



playing field for children aspiring to enter secondary and tertiary levels of education in Ghana. Recent studies by Addae Mensah (2000) suggest that 18 senior secondary schools alone provide over 60% of entrants in the five publicly funded Universities. These 18 schools are considered the “elite” public boarding schools, which receive special subvention funds from MOEYS and are often patronised by the urban elite.²¹ The Education Sector Review found high-income earners place their children in privately

²¹ The Education Sector Review (ESR; 2002) report found that children from high socio-economic backgrounds are placed in privately operated primary and JSS schools and then shift to occupy places in the best publicly funded senior secondary schools (i.e. boarding schools).

funded primary and junior secondary schools in order to compete for places in the best public boarding schools at senior secondary school level (MOEYS, 2002).

2.2 Socio-cultural context and challenges for educational delivery

Social problems such as socio-cultural attitudes preventing girls' education, the persistent and growing levels of child labour, youth unemployment and youth migration are evidence of the depth of the social challenge facing education in Ghana. The growing incidence of streetism and prostitution especially among girls from the north and increasing signs of insecurity within urban centres are clear signs of social unrest. The growing unrest among rural youth has its roots in the education system, which often fails to meet their expectations and that of their parents. Recent studies in Ghana suggest that over 11% of the population is out of work (Ministry of Employment and Manpower Development). There is also a large proportion of the Ghanaian population who are considered "under employed" particularly within the agriculture sector.²²

The inability of parents to finance their children's basic education is the main reason why children do not enrol or remain in school, according to the Fourth Round of the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 4). Other reasons relate to the low priority parents place on education and the distance to school (GSS, 2001). Several studies also suggest that parental neglect, the socio-cultural attitudes and outmoded cultural practices prevent many girls from access, retention and completion of basic education in Ghana (Casely-Hayford, 2002).

The regional disparities in education are consistent to trends related to gender inequality in education and women's status in the workforce (Nikoi, 1998). The socio-cultural and traditional attitudes towards girls' education and the preference for investment in boys' education are a complex dilemma in which only a few educational programmes have been able to address. Most parents living in the traditional rural communities view the girl-child as an economic asset particularly for her husband's family. In northern Ghana, the girl child is prepared for marriage at an early age by the "auntie" who fosters her from the age of 6; marriages often take place at puberty (13-16 years of age). As poverty deepens, the economic utility of a child increases particularly for the girl-child. Boys and girls in the north are caught in an immediate crisis of helping the family survive through their farming and marketing activities and the opportunity cost incurred by parents for allowing a child to attend school (Casely-Hayford, 2002). Poverty and lack of parental care often lead to early pregnancy, and the inability of girls to purchase their basic needs (i.e. food, sanitary napkins, panties) often forcing them to engage in "transactional sex".

The socio-cultural barriers to female education have been well documented. Some of the main barriers include:

- The socialisation of girls at the home and in the community which stresses marriage and motherhood as the primary goals of a girl's life --- " A woman's honour is from her husband" (Akan Proverb cited in Prah, 2002)

²² "Out of work" refers to those without employment in the formal or informal sector. "Under employed" are people who may be carrying out productive work on a seasonal or part time basis but not fulfilling their full potential as workers.

- Girls receive less encouragement to embark on higher education (Avotri et al, 1999)
- Girls are expected to provide labour particularly in the home and in relation to child rearing duties (Casely-Hayford, 2000)
- Parents place a lower value on girls' education since, "a woman belongs to the kitchen and that girls will become married dependants of their husbands" (Prah, 2002)

There are also several school based factors which result in gender inequality including:

- Lack of girl friendly learning environments including guidance and counselling services
- Poor quality education systems
- Lack of sanitation facilities
- Low levels of awareness concerning appropriate and supportive gender sensitive teaching methods.
- Lack of encouragement at the school level.

Studies also suggest that classroom teaching is pivotal to girls' self- esteem and their ability to learn through asking questions and listening. Girls are particularly sensitive to the behaviour and feedback from teachers and their peers. This has particular importance to the ESP where gender sensitive teaching strategies at teacher training level and cluster-based inset should be supported.

Poverty, gender and HIV/AIDS are closely related. As families fall below the poverty line women find it more and more difficult to cope with education and health costs. The inability of children to access and complete school makes them particularly vulnerable to child poverty and HIV/AIDS. Girls end up being lured or having to "sell" themselves to older men in order to pay for their basic needs at school (Casely-Hayford, 2002b). Pre teen females between the ages of 11 and 14 are four times more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS compared to their male counterparts (UNAIDS, 2001). Studies on gender violence in African countries also suggest that girls are often unable to negotiate the usage of condoms with their sexual partners. Empowering women to say no and negotiate safe sex is inextricably linked to the realisation of the principle of equality and improving girls' self esteem at school and community level.

In order to achieve gender equity within the ESP and ensure that the spread of HIV/AIDS is prevented particularly among Ghana's pre youth --- *the window of hope* --- will require a concerted focus on making Ghanaian schools more child and girl friendly. This means that the provision within the ESP to supporting the building of sanitation and water facilities and training teachers in gender sensitive approaches ensuring they are aware of the child rights and protection should be of high priority. It also means that MOEYS should adopt clear guidelines for disciplinary action for teachers who commit sexual offences against students. More emphasis is needed to ensure that guidance and counselling services are provided at all schools through partnerships with civil society agencies.

2.3 Vulnerability appraisal of ESP

Closing the primary gross/net enrolment, completion and gender gap particularly among poor children and girls will depend on improving educational quality particularly at primary level, ensuring equitable resource distribution and ensuring that there are no

reasons for poor parents to restrict their children from educational access; this includes the removal of all school fees, making schools more child friendly and making educational provision more flexible (shorter and compressed).

Improving the quality of education particularly for the rural child is the most pressing need in order to sustain and continue to achieve universal primary completion based on the current research in Ghana. Poor parents are beginning to prevent their children from attending poor quality schools; research carried out in the northern region suggests that despite enrolment and IEC campaigns parents measure the quality of education through the performance of their children. Rural parents are waking up to the inequalities between their schools and those in the urban areas (Casely-Hayford, 2002; Pryor, 2002). Providing each child with a text book in the three core subjects and a teacher who is committed and willing to work in a rural deprived area are not easy inputs for any government to provide but are probably the most important inputs for improving quality within the current Ghanaian system (World Bank, 2004).

There is no doubt that the MOEYS and GES will need to develop a partnership approach in achieving many of the plans and programmes outlined within the ESP. These partnerships will be especially important in achieving universal primary education, improving gender equity and ensuring quality education across the country. Already public and private partnerships have begun to emerge at the district level with programmes such as the rural education volunteer scheme, which seeks to increase the numbers of teachers willing and able to serve in rural deprived areas²³. Another example in the north is the School for Life programme which is gradually working with district education offices to hand over its ongoing literacy efforts in reaching out of school children in deprived districts.

NGO's and civil society agencies have been active in several areas for reaching children in "hard to reach areas", out of school children and/or areas which are often cut off during the rainy season. These non-governmental agencies have provided education where public education was unavailable often to extremely poor marginalized groups where the public sector was unable to venture. The provision of complementary flexible education means that children and their families are able to continue working to provide for their most basic needs (i.e. food and water) while the education system adjusts to the often harsh contextual realities of these families making education more accessible in its fullest sense and assisting them to sustain themselves in often harsh rural environments. The Sheppard School and School for Life programmes are the most common models in northern Ghana; they have both undergone extensive evaluations; findings suggest that the models are highly effective in reaching deprived rural children with cost effective alternatives to formal education (Casely-Hayford, 2003).²⁴

Reaching vulnerable groups will also require clear policy directives particularly when it comes to teacher selection and deployment policies. Teacher selection policies should be reviewed to ensure that the most committed and capable teachers are selected for training college particularly those willing to serve in rural areas. A clear policy for "fee

²³ The Rural Education Volunteer Scheme attracts SSS graduates to serve as teachers in deprived areas where trained teachers are unwilling to serve. The REV scheme started through Action Aid and is now being supported by several District Assemblies across the three northern regions of Ghana. Over 700 teachers are involved in the scheme (Casely-Hayford, 2003).

²⁴ Please find the evaluation of complementary approaches in CARE, 2002 and Casely-Hayford, 2003.

free education particularly in deprived districts is also necessary. This is partly underway under the PPS support through the World Bank, but requires more wide scale support in order that districts create bi-laws, preventing district and school level levies from being charged.

Although the ESP does mention the need for partnership particularly within the school health section and alludes to the alternative education models mentioned above, it does not present clear strategy for supporting private public partnerships nor civil society agency engagement. The creation of a *Basic Education Partnership and Innovation Fund* will help to facilitate this process and provide a modest channel for MOEYS to explore the opportunities of working with civil society in achieving universal basic education.

Conversely, civil society also has a significant role to play in ensuring that the ESP is achieved in a transparent, timely and cost effective manner. Already education stakeholder coalitions are being created at the district level; mechanisms for dialogue between civil society and government are needed; the ESP will require heightened levels of transparency in order for government to share its plans and budgets with non state actors in order to ensure that they are held accountable for their work. Increased transparency will be required at the school/community level in order to ensure that all stakeholders are fully involved in the process of improving education and given a voice in designing school improvement programmes. This heightened level of transparency and inclusiveness required by government and its agencies at the district level will require some level of training and direction from the top.

2.4 Conclusions and Key Social Issues for consideration by the ESP

The ESP has demonstrated some important focuses on reaching the disadvantaged and attempting to improve equity within the system. The focus on girls' and special needs education through providing needy girls scholarships, increasing the numbers of female teachers through access courses for females to training college and support to volunteer teacher schemes, strengthening inclusive education policies and strengthening the girls education unit are all laudable; more emphasis is needed on guidance and counselling and gender sensitisation of teachers in order to ensure that these goals are achieved.

Structurally the MOEYS will also have to look at prioritising its own policies and ESP activities when it comes to improving equity and ensuring that "poor" children obtain quality education and thereby are given a fair chance at higher levels of education. Improving quality and allowing more flexibility will be needed for poor rural schools to attract greater numbers of children who remain out of the system. Ensuring that the ESP goal of attaining a core textbook ratio of 1:1 for the three core subject areas is one of the most important outcomes for equalising the educational playing field. Another key input is the need for a comprehensive review of teacher selection processes in order to ensure that dedicated and committed teachers are brought into the system. Teacher deployment and retention strategies will be a significant ingredient in improving equity within the system.

In order for the poor to increasingly get a fair share of the national educational budget the ESP will need to increase and sustain its efforts at national level resource targeting which includes the constant assessment of deprivation criteria and formula designed to

target the poor and reach the most needy deprived districts for educational investment (e.g. GETFUND, SESP, PRSC, EdSeP). More work is needed to ensure that districts also adopt similar approaches to setting deprivation criteria, identify needy areas and target educational resource allocations to these areas in their district educational plans.