

**THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF POVERTY ON  
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT: Lessons from the  
North**

**Part II**

**By Dr Leslie Casely-Hayford**  
Associate Researcher,  
Centre for Social Policy Studies,  
University of Ghana

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## 1.0 Introduction

This article explores the relationship between child poverty and educational attainment based on fieldwork conducted in Northern Ghana between 1996 and 2000 and probes deeper into the community and family perspectives. Findings from the national analysis reveal that children from poor families have less chance of completing primary school than those in non-poor families (Casely-Hayford, 2002). Children living in deprived rural areas had poorer results when considering the Criteria Reference Test Results (CRTs) and do not perform as well as children from regions with a lower incidence of poverty.

- The Core Welfare Indicators Survey (CWIQ) revealed that there were marked differences between drop out rates (0.9%) in rural and urban households (0.5%) in Ghana
- Almost 40% of Ghanaians never attended school (45% of whom lived in rural areas and 26.1% in urban areas)
- The proportion of those who never attended school declines, as one's socio-economic status stabilizes. (GLSS4)

The following article explores some of the approaches parents from resource-deprived areas of Ghana use to make educational investment decisions, the reasons for poor quality and lower educational achievement levels. The research employed an in-depth case study to investigate the challenges facing children from deprived rural communities in order to inform policy and the educational change processes. The research explored how schooling was and could be used as a vehicle for human development in an area with a high poverty incidence.

A series of pilot studies in deprived districts in Ghana's northern region was used as a basis for study. One district was selected to carry out ethnographic fieldwork and

verification using a multi-case study approach. The study considered the following factors in the analysis of child poverty:

- Socio cultural context of the community
- Livelihood Patterns which affect children
- The attitudes towards children
- Quality of Schooling
- The impact of Community and School factors in relation to educational attainment within the community.

### **1.1 Methodology**

The northern region has the lowest trained teacher population at 65.7% and the lowest number of female teachers at 26.4% (World Bank, 1996) in the country. Savelugu is a newly created district and relatively deprived in relation to the national educational profile, with low enrolment of girls, poor teacher student ratio and poor infrastructure.<sup>1</sup> Savelugu has relatively better educational status than other districts in the Northern Region such as Tolon and Gusheigu Karaga and was not affected directly by the ethnic conflict of March 1995, except for a small influx of internally displaced people.

The choice of Savelugu District was based on its moderate educational status in relation to the overall education profile within the region. Indicators such as girls' enrolment, educational provision and teacher-pupil ratios were considered as well as common characteristics identified within the district itself.

Five rural communities were selected with representative characteristics-- all communities were rural and of approximately similar population sizes having between 600 to 900 inhabitants; they were all located in different parts of the district; the majority of inhabitants were Muslim and from the Dagomba ethnicity with some Ewe and Fulani inhabitants. One community was used for an in-depth ethnographic study. A predominantly qualitative orientation was taken employing Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods such as: community mapping, family tree diagramming, social survey,

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<sup>1</sup> The full name of the district is Savelugu/Nanton District

focal group and in-depth discussions. Apart from these participatory techniques the usual ethnographic techniques of living with, and participating in the lives of people in the community were carried out over a two and a half year period. Two intensive phases of fieldwork were conducted between June to December 1996 and March to August 1998.<sup>2</sup>

## **1.2 Location and characteristics**

The Savelugu district is contained within a larger traditional ethnic area called the Dagbon, where the Dagomba, the largest ethnic grouping within the northern region, reside. Opong (1971) and Blakemore (1976) concluded that the Dagomba were showing signs of resistance to formal education. In both studies, livelihood patterns and dependence on child labour were major factors for the restricted participation in formal education. Opong (1965, 1971) also argues that the Dagomba already had a strong indigenous educational system, which was meeting their educational needs. This researcher found similar trends during the field work (Casely-Hayford, 2000).

The context of schooling in Savelugu District demonstrated the complexity of sustaining and improving education in a deprived rural area. Out of the 100 primary schools in the district only 24 were constructed as standard classroom blocks and 61 with "sub standard blocks" made of mud and thatch roofing. The remainder of the schools were under trees. A high percentage of children were out of school in the district. According to the 1996 district development plan there are at least 66% of school age children out of school.

Although enrolment trends between 1996-98 revealed increasing growth, surveys conducted by this researcher found that only 31.5% of the school age population were in school and 68.5% were out of school (MOE, 1996; Casely--Hayford, 2000).

Despite the increases in enrolment, no significant difference was made in reducing the number of out of school children due to the high population growth rate recorded in the

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<sup>2</sup> Based on seasonal variations and the school calendar

district at 3.8% within the same time frame. The figures also revealed a particularly severe problem for access of girls to the basic education system and a high drop out rate. The district reports stated that at least 50% of girls drop out of school at all levels of the basic education system (MOE, 1996). Findings from the study reveal that: the socio-cultural context, livelihood patterns, attitudes and beliefs prevent children from accessing, completing and remaining in the formal education system due to their poor socio-economic and traditional cultural context.

### 1.3 Access and retention in School: a village perspective

The vast majority of children in the village studies were found out of school. For instance in the ethnographic case study only 14.6 % of the children in the ethnographic community were attending school and these trends were repeated throughout the other case study communities in the district.

Figure 7.1: In School and Out of School Population in MCS Sites

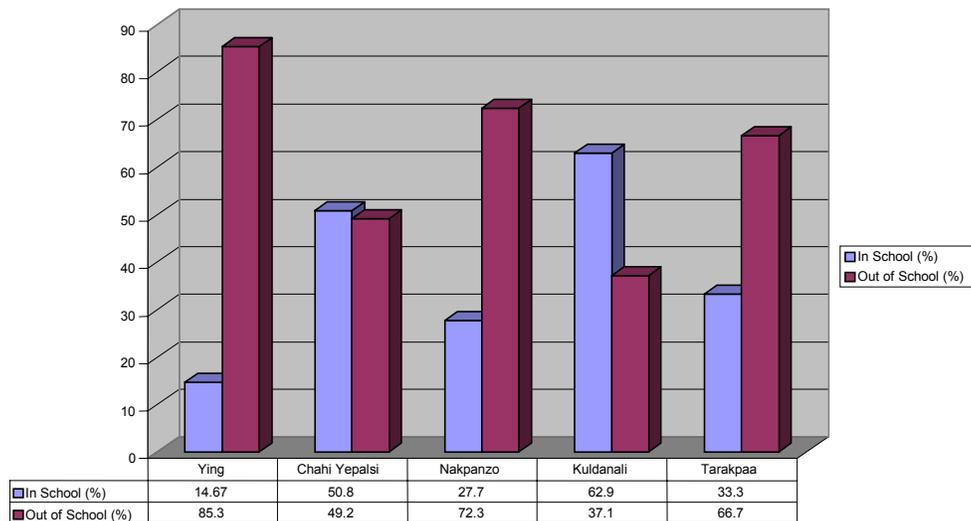


Figure 1

## Livelihood patterns and problems

The livelihood patterns of children revealed that parents were training their children to engage in a sustainable livelihood and overcome "hardship" experienced in the community. Parents also needed their children to secure food for the family by working regularly on the family farm (boys) or taking care of younger siblings (girls).

Food crop farming is the main livelihood requiring intensive labour in Northern Ghana. Most people had large families with several wives with some families rearing cattle, goats and sheep. Seasonal variations in the farm labour needs corresponded to the patterns of attendance of children in the school. When there was a high intensity in farming activities both boys and girls were found out of school. Some children would be returned to school after the farming season but others remained out of school. The research also revealed that parents would send the very young children often below school going age during intensive farming seasons as a way of ensuring some supervision and care for the child while they were on the farm.

Table 1 reveals the trends and changes taking place at the school level were based on the community socio-cultural patterns.

**Table 1: Summary of trends in enrolment and retention**

	<b>Enrolment P1-P2</b>	<b>P3- P4- P5-P6</b>	<b>JSS level</b>	<b>SSS</b>
<b>Girls</b>	Young girls are enrolled and often fostered out to aunts	Few girls enrolled Most removed by parents.	Drop out at this level relates mainly to the costs of education or a death in the family	Few Children reaching this level drop out
<b>Boys</b>	Boys are enrolled later but they are likely to continue their education	Rarely drop out unless high absenteeism of teachers or a death in the family	Death in family or costs of education	Few Children drop out

The socio-cultural beliefs in the community had a negative impact on the girl child's ability to access the education system. There was a consistent pattern within the community primary school. Initially the girl child was often sent to attend lower primary classes; once old enough she was withdrawn to work in the household and begin training

with the mother or the auntie. Mother's explained that "girls are to be trained with hardship" and discipline in order to bring honour to the family once married. Girls were also fostered out of the family to maintain social cohesion and ensure labour for the elderly and/or aunties within the wider Dagomba community.

### Child labour needs

Most families were highly dependent on child labour, relying on children to provide essential services within the home and on the farm. A list of the services performed by children is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Seasonal Pattern of Adult and Children's Work**

Seasons:	Women's work	Girls' work	Men's work	Boy's work
Dry season (Nov to March)	Collect firewood  Kayayo <sup>3</sup>  Shea butter extraction	Collect firewood Household chores  Kayayo  Assisting with shea butter extraction	Building roofing for houses and mats/ ropes to sell	Rat hunting and fruit picking  Cutting and weaving of grass for thatch roofing
Rainy Season (April to October)	Shea nut collection  Planting and sowing of crops Ground nut harvest: rice Etc	Collect shea nut Household chores  Planting and carrying food to the farm  Ground nut harvest	Prepare land Sow crops	Watching the animals  Weeding and assisting planting  Carrying water on the farm

(Based on focal group discussion with girls and boys, seasonal calendars and observational data, 1998)

According to the family mapping survey within the community, all families use child labour to assist with the family farming activities. Only households where the labour needs have been met can afford to send a child to school. Interviews with younger and older men in the community revealed that their main priority is to secure food for the family and that only when enough food is available would the children be allowed to attend school.

<sup>3</sup> Kayayo means "head carrier". In the last few years young girls and women have begun migrating to the cities on a seasonal and yearly basis to find work and improve their income. Girls interviewed stated that they went on "kayayo" to "have their eyes open" and also buy the necessary items for marriage.

The ethnographic study revealed that newly married young men resisted sending children to school since they have no "children to spare" and have not secured enough labour to support the farming activities. The man's priority and responsibility was to secure enough food for the family<sup>4</sup>. This was found to have direct implications for the formal schooling of children particularly when active farming times were in the morning when children were to be in school.

### **Securing a large labour pool**

Findings from the community study revealed that families needed to secure a large labour pool before they could decide to send a few children to school. Figure 2 reveals the large labour pool, needed before a few children were released to attend school. This pattern continued throughout the series of community case studies.

Women are often responsible for training the girl children and depend on their labour to assist with the performance of household duties and income generating activities. For instance during the shea nut and ground nut seasons girls are a particularly lucrative source of income for the mother or "auntie" since they can increase her labour power and ultimately the amount of shea nut she picks. These trends were confirmed in the family tree survey conducted in the village.

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<sup>4</sup> Traditional Dagomba farmers learn to survive on the provision of family and communal labour, which includes children.

Figure 2 : Household Workers Compared to Child Status in the compound

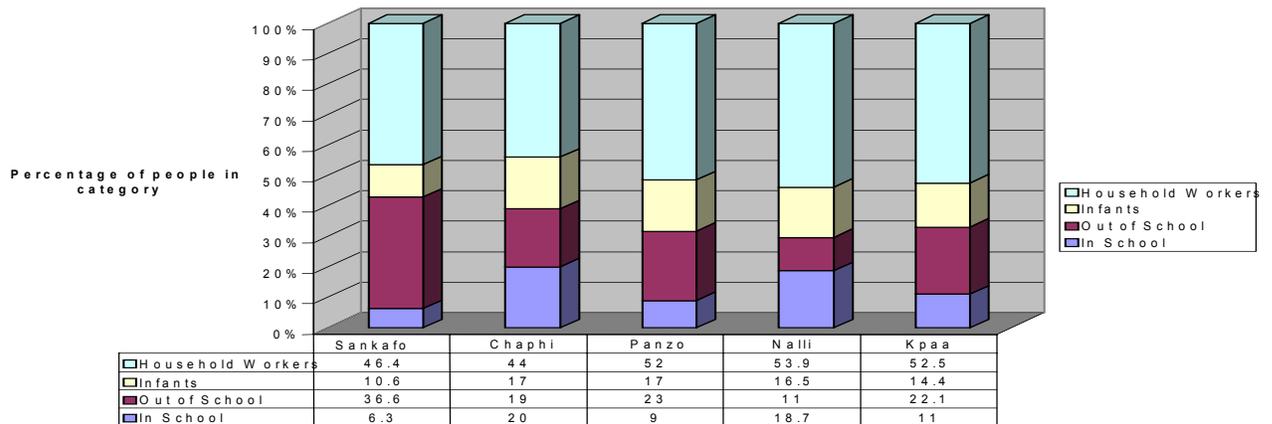


Figure 2

### Selection of children for school

The data from the community and family tree survey in 1998 reveals that families with children at school have a large labour pool to fall back on. For instance, the family of Salmvelnaa, Yepalsinayilli and Daanayilli have large productive units containing several smaller family units, with adult, youth and children to use for labour. These households were the first to send a "pioneer child" to the formal school in Sankafo (the ethnographic case study) when the school was opened in 1988. They are also the only families to experiment with the formal system.

Table 3: Family Tree analysis of Sankafo (July 1998)

Name of Household	Household population	Number of farm and family labour	Number of out of school		Number in school		Infant children O-5
			G	B	G	B	
Yayoyilli	8	3 adults	4		0	0	1
Gasablanayilli *	17	6 adults 5 youth	1	2	1 <sup>5</sup>		2
Belisinayilli	7	3 adults	1	1	0	0	2
Salmvelnaayilli*	40	12 adults 7 youth	6	3	4 <sup>6</sup>		8
Wulanayilli	8	3 adults	1	2			1

<sup>5</sup> Vocational school pioneer boy

<sup>6</sup> P3 Pong Tamale, P6 Sankafo, JSS3 and SSS2

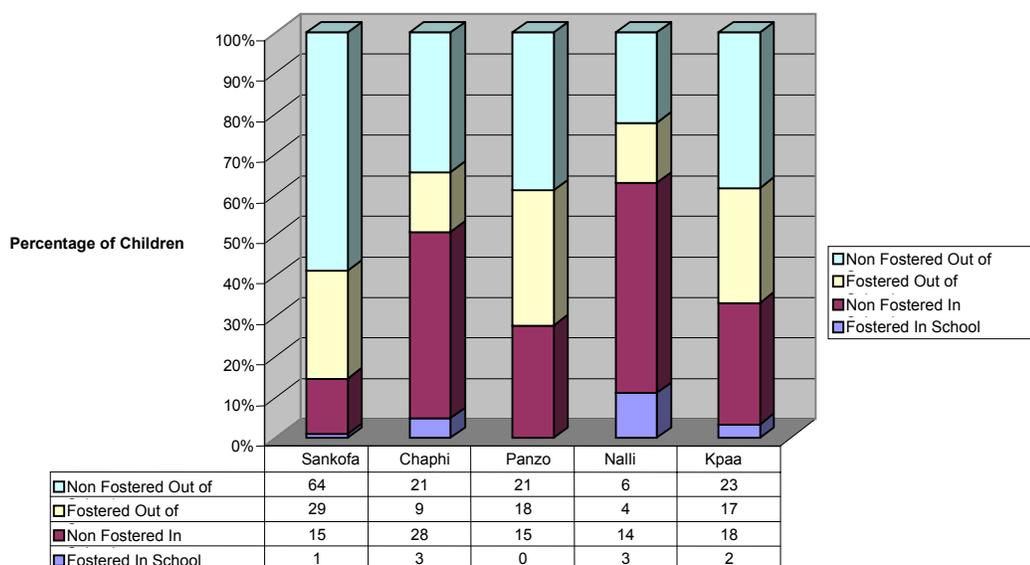
Name of Household	Household population	Number of farm and family labour	Number of out of school		Number in school		Infant children O-5
			G	B	G	B	
		1 youth					
Yepalsinaayilli*	28	11 adults 0 youth	4	7	0	2 <sup>7</sup>	4
Danaayilli	58	24 adults 1 youth	12	13		4 <sup>8</sup>	4
Zoonayilli	33	12 adults 4 youth	10	3	0	3	1
Total	264	125	50	46	0	16	27
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>47.34</b>	<b>36.64</b>		<b>6.06</b>		<b>10.22</b>

\* signifies the pioneer children within the community.

### Child Fostering

Child fostering was another means for securing the family labour pool, which often prevented children from attending school. Figure 3 presents fostering trends for children

Figure 3 :Fostering Status in Sankofa and the Multi-Case Study



in and out of school in the multi case study sites and the ethnographic site (Sankofa). 'Fostered' refers to children who are sent to an extended family relation for training; most often the father's sister. 'Non-fostered' refers to children who remain in the household

<sup>7</sup> One boy in JSS3 and the other in vocational school

<sup>8</sup> Three boys in primary school and one in JSS3

and are often trained by the parents. The family tree data from Multi-Case Study (MCS) households reveals a similar trend found in Sankafo regarding the fostered status of children and their access to formal education. The findings reveal that most families do not enrol fostered children and fostered girls are rarely enrolled in school. The only communities out of the entire sample where fostered girls were sent to school was in Chahi and Nalli communities. Panto had no fostered children attending school.

### **Retention and Staying in school**

The reasons for non-attendance are multidimensional and often related to securing enough food within the compound house. This meant that most parents required labour within the household in order to ensure that there are enough farm hands. Most people were living a traditional subsistence lifestyle, which meant that their household management plans were based on seasonal livelihood patterns and immediate need. The times of schooling prevented the vast majority of parents in the case study area from using the school and education as a source of development due to the necessity to secure food for the family; Findings suggest that a more flexible system was needed to allow more children who were working on the family farm and helping to secure food for the household an option to the normal schooling pattern.

The most common phrases repeated when asked why only a few children attend school are " those on the farm feed those at school" or " how can we send all the children, who will feed the family?" Household heads have to first ensure that there is enough children taking care of the animals and providing labour on the farm before sending a child to school. If the man does not fulfil this responsibility the family will suffer, causing tension and sometimes jealousy within the compound. Many of the newly married men remarked that " they did not yet have enough children to send to school" or any " extra children to spare for the school."

Parents also do not want to risk sending more than one child in case it becomes too great a burden on the family. Despite the heavy dependence on child labour the vast majority

of families are not able to secure enough food during the farming season to provide for family needs throughout the year.

#### **1.4 Impact of food insecurity on child education**

The hunger season was a yearly event, lasting between four to six months (April to September) depending on the timing of the rains. Families interviewed were increasingly relying on off-farm activities to sustain themselves. These included women's shea butter processing and the sale of animals when available.<sup>9</sup> Interviews during the drought season revealed that when families were under severe economic stress, tension was created within the family compound particularly between the wives of the household head, preventing school going children from attending school. Extras such as schooling were not easily accepted by women in polygamous relationships whose children were not attending. During the drought season women also complained that their children would often go to school hungry due to lack of food in the household, while other children who remained at home could forage and hunt for food.<sup>10</sup>

Child hunger in the classroom was manifested during several classroom observations where children were found sleeping on benches almost immediately after the class started. Very young children would be found lying on benches at the back of the classroom while the teacher attempted to sustain the attention of the children at the front few rows. This pattern was observed in several community schools over the period of fieldwork. The teachers explained that most children were not given food to bring to school and therefore felt hungry around 10:00 am or after the break. Communities in the remote rural areas were not attractive to food vendors who would often be found selling food in nearby towns. The problem of classroom hunger severely limited the attention span and contact hours the teacher had to engage the child.

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<sup>9</sup> The trend of food insecurity was well documented in the last two farming seasons due to poor and unpredictable rainfall patterns. Kate Abu in a study of the Dagomba farming areas confirmed that the majority of families were not able to secure enough food for the year during the farming season. (K Abu, GCAEP Target Group Survey, 1992)

<sup>10</sup> Similar patterns were documented in the Ghana Human Development Report 1997.

### **1.5 Expectations of an educated child and Schooling Potential**

Families in the study area explained that they wanted their child to move to higher levels of education all the way to University; parents did not want the child to go through the basic system and then fail to reach the Senior Secondary School. Education for even one child was a heavy investment for any family especially for those under the poverty line. For the few families who invested in education it meant making a firm decision to support the child through the entire formal system all the way up to Senior Secondary level. The educational investment in a child is considered very carefully since the child would no longer be "trained" using the traditional knowledge to achieve household food security and rural livelihoods.

The education of the boy child was seen as direct long-term benefits to the family as compared with the investment in the girl; boys labour and production continued to be "owned" by the family and the family head even after marriage. The girl, once married becomes the property of the husband and will often work for her husband's extended family unit. Boys were often observed performing public and private duties for the household head such as running errands to the nearby town, and reading letters. Elders and household heads showed pride in educating at least one boy child in the formal system and expected that this child would be of benefit to the family in future. Some families expected that an educated child or "krakye" would eventually work in the towns and cities channelling resources back to the family.

### **1.6 Educational Quality**

The expectation that the child would progress up to the secondary and tertiary levels of education was not met due to the poor quality of schooling in the rural areas. The study found that parent's expectation's created unrealistic pressure on the children from poor rural schools who were unable to receive a high quality of education compared to their peers in the towns and cities. Teachers in the five case study areas were often found reporting very late to school and would leave early. Teachers in the case study sites were rarely found teaching on market days particularly in areas close to the main market

centres. There were three teachers posted to the Sankafo school but only one teacher attended regularly. The other two teachers "came the day before pay day".

Teacher absenteeism and lateness substantially reduced contact hours and created an inequitable playing field for rural children competing within the National education system for places at secondary and tertiary level institutions. Children from these poor rural environment were already faced with grave challenges in coming to school hungry and tired due to the many house chores they performed before coming to school (i.e. carrying of water, shea butter collection or the other labour responsibilities at the home). Lack of water in the area meant that most girls were engaged in water collection from early morning hours often arriving late to school if at all.

Teachers were also deterred from working in school/communities with severe water problems. Teachers complained that they would not drink the "village water" and had to bring their own water to drink at the school since there was no clean water in the community. Despite the presence of head teacher bungalows teachers refused to live in communities where there was no clean water.

The poor quality of education had several ramifications for children and their parents. Only two girls in the ten years of Sankafo primary school had ever managed to get to Junior Secondary School (JSS3) and one dropped out just before graduating due to a labour need at the family. The poor quality of education was the major factor in preventing the first batch of "formally educated children from the community" (the pioneer children from entering the senior secondary school in the town. Children from Sankafo were often repeated several times in the town school P6 level before they were able to enter the JSS1. The private costs of education on the family with the added years of schooling a child from a poor quality education system were tremendous particularly for families, which are already impoverished and had struggled to invest in their child's education. Table 4 presents the trends experienced by the "pioneer children in Sankofa.

**Table 4: Pioneer Children's Experience of Formal Education Between 1995-1998**

Pioneer Children (Households)	Gender	95/96	96/97	97/98
Alhassan (4)	Male	Completed JSS	Passed BECE but did not obtain entrance to SSS.	Reregistered for JSS 2/3
Mohammed (28)	Male	Completed JSS	Passed BECE--Admitted to SSS1 after results	SSS2 and NFED facilitator
Alhassan (23)	Male	Completed JSS	Passed BECE but did not obtain entrance to SSS.	Went back to the farming
Yahaya (6)	Male	Completed JSS	Passed BECE but did not obtain entrance to SSS	Went back to farming
Abdulai (1) Chairman's	Male	Completed JSS	Passed BECE but did not obtain entrance to SSS	Started vocational training and dropped out.
Abdella(8)	Male	Completed JSS	Passed and was admitted to SSS1	SSS2
Shahadu (24)	Male	Completed JSS	Passed BECE but did not obtain entrance to SSS	Registered for vocational but not attending regularly
Tahidu (10)	Male	Completed JSS	Passed BECE but did not obtain entrance to SSS.	Attending vocational training regularly in second year

(Based on field notes, interviews and observation)

### **Social Capital:" Parental ability to work the system"**

Poor quality education was not the only deterrent preventing children from attaining higher levels of education. Knowledge of how to “work the education system” was another challenge parents faced in the multi case study sites:

- The majority of the poor in the study case sites did not know what were the procedures and processes in helping their children enter the SSS level or even the JSS level. Parents relied on the primary school teachers to instruct them as to where to send their children after completing JSS<sup>11</sup>.
- Most of the Ewe communities sent their children back to the Volta region where they could receive a higher quality of education.

<sup>11</sup> People needed to have "cultural capital": an understanding of how to work the education system to their advantage.

Children from poor rural areas in the Northern study were found to repeat several primary levels as a result of not knowing how to work the system to their advantage. Table 5 reveals that very few children from the original “pioneer batch were admitted to SSS and most of the children remained “back on the farm” after completing JSS.

**Table 5: Transition figures for Sankafu between Primary and SSS**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Primary to JSS1</b>	<b>JSS to SSS1</b>	<b>Comments regarding JSS to SSS transition</b>
1994- 1995	At least 8 promoted		This is the pioneer cohort.
1995-1996	At least 4 promoted		
1996-1997	At least 1 promoted	2 admitted	'Pioneer' cohort and six do not get accepted to SSS but pass the BECE exam
1997-1998		2 admitted	Four children dropped out in JSS 3

(Based on School and Community Mapping Data 1996 and 1998)

The study found that the modern education system was failing children from poor rural farming families in northern Ghana. Pioneer families and children who were the first to experiment with the education system had to prove that education was valuable and could change people’s lives. Pioneer children were expected to be able to obtain a good job or at least sustain themselves after completion of school. Rural families expected that by investing in the child, he/she would grow up to take care of them in old age. Perceptions and aspirations of parents were unrealistic in an environment, which could not sustain a good quality of education for their children. The parents in these areas were beginning to realise that the school within their small rural community was substandard to that in the towns and some were beginning to send their children directly to the town schools.

Teachers, district directors and other education officials in the case study area admitted that rural education was of very poor quality due to the high level of teacher absenteeism, lateness and low moral. The cycle of poverty was sustained through the poor quality of schooling and the socio-cultural context of children. Parents from deprived rural areas did not have the cultural capital needed to "work the system" to their benefit (i.e. helping children get to SSS)

Poor quality education in a resource poor environment further frustrated and disempowered rural households from continuing to experiment with the formal education system.

## **2.0 Conclusions**

The scope and depth of the out of school problem in northern Ghana has not been properly monitored over the last ten years in Ghana. Despite efforts made to improve access and participation data, the number of out of school children by district is increasing at an alarming rate. Crude estimates of population based on the 1984 census have been used to track the numbers of out of school children at national level. This proves difficult in districts where population growth rates are neither known nor reliable and deter planning, which targets the growing number of out of school children in some areas. Studies in rural Ghana suggest that the divide between rural and urban households is growing (GSS, 2000)

There is growing evidence to suggest that parents are negating their fundamental responsibilities toward their children. Interviews with district education directors, officers, teachers and parents themselves confirm that in rural deprived communities children are not always provided with their basic needs such as food<sup>12</sup>. The children's early transition to work life is a growing phenomenon in communities where parental migration is high, subsistence agriculture is widespread and social problems including alcoholism are apparent. Children in Ghana are becoming adults at a very young age sometimes as early as P4 and P5; they become responsible for their own up keep.

The lack of parental care also causes late or non-enrolment in school.

### **Quality in the basic education system**

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<sup>12</sup> Areas of the country where there is a high incidence of poverty: coastal and savannah areas and dependent on subsistent food crop farming.

An ongoing challenge for the education sector will be the persistent tension between improving access and quality at basic level. Studies conducted in Ghana suggest that rural parents are further disadvantaged when poor quality in education prevents children from achieving basic literacy and opportunities for higher education. Lack of decent structures, lack of books and the persistence of teacher absenteeism continue to characterise rural education in Ghana despite major achievements through the QUIPS and WSD programme.

More emphasis should be placed on strategies, which directly target children from deprived rural areas (particularly girls) and those, which build longer-term mechanisms to sustain the family through improving rural livelihoods and agricultural production. The Poverty Reduction Strategy promises to address these issues through a more holistic approach to targeting children across the sectors. More emphasis should be placed on collaboration between GES and the private sector. NGO programmes, which are currently running in the northern region, are showing results in reaching the out-of-school child and improving access to Basic Education.<sup>13</sup>

### **Impacts of Child Poverty on Educational Attainment**

The high and increasing numbers of children out of school in the northern sector (over 50% in some areas), the low performance in the education system based on CRT scores particularly in rural areas and the low retention rate of children completing basic education represent a crisis in the education system in Ghana.

This study has presented a macro and micro level view of the complex relationships between formal education, poverty and community in Northern Ghana. It has attempted to synthesis some of the major findings to illuminate the complex and difficult environment faced by children in places where the majority of people live in extreme poverty and education is of very poor quality. The study has found that:

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<sup>13</sup> The ESSP did envisage a full review by Basic Education Division of ' Best Practices" to achieve higher levels of Access and Participation. More collaboration at District level between the DEPT and the NGO community was also highlighted.

- Socio-economic and socio-cultural context are key factors in the child's inability to use the education system as a means to human development. The parental or schooling context is significant to the learning outcomes and performance of the child. Their ability to move through higher levels of education and achieve higher levels of educational attainment depends on the "cultural capital" and knowledge of parents.

Schools, which are located in resource poor communities often, exhibit characteristics of poor quality, which are detrimental, and often perpetuate child, family and community poverty. Schools in deprived rural areas of Ghana do not always provide a basic standard of literacy, ensure equitable opportunity for rural children in moving to higher levels of education and continue to perpetuate underdevelopment by using scarce family resources and generating false hopes in children attending formal schools. Improving the provision of basic social services for teachers and community members will help to improve educational quality, retention and achievement of children (i.e. health, water and sanitation facilities).

## **2.1 Options for Improving Education in areas with a high incidence of poverty in Ghana**

The Government of Ghana must make some radical decisions in order to attain the goal of achieving Education for All by the year 2015. Countries with similar educational scenarios have been providing more flexible alternatives to basic education in order to reaching children in resource poor areas (i.e. Mali, Nigeria and Bangladesh). Programmes such as School for Life and the Sheppard school system have demonstrated that children can achieve basic literacy and numeracy schools in one to two years using more flexible and community driven approaches to basic education.

The following table outlines some of the approaches providing effective in reaching children in resource-deprived areas of the country.

Options for improving access and participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Empower parents to improve their own livelihood pattern (fertiliser farming implements or loans particularly relation to need for labour on the farm)</li> <li>➤ Subsidise the family through sponsorship schemes and food aid at schools.</li> <li>➤ Provision of water and sanitation facilities (girls)</li> </ul>
Option for improving quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Teachers incentive and retention programmes in rural deprived areas</li> <li>➤ Hiring of pupil teachers from the areas (Rural education volunteer scheme)</li> <li>➤ Flexible school systems (e.g. School for Life and Sheppard School systems)</li> <li>➤ Simpler systems of supply (i.e. one classroom schools with multi-grade teaching)</li> </ul>
Options for improving retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Counselling and Guidance for children</li> <li>➤ Providing role models (Ghana National Commission on Children)</li> <li>➤ Mentor children particularly girls</li> </ul>

Some of the strategies have been well tested and contained in the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS, 2002). Poverty remains an entrenched phenomena in the lives of many rural Ghanaians -- their traditional patterns of subsistence farming, and securing a basic food stuffs for the family make it difficult to experiment with the formal schooling. Many northern Ghanaian communities still suffer from grossly sub standard educational facilities/human resources within their rural contexts, which prevent children from escaping the poverty cycle and using the system to their benefit.

For rural education to be a means to human development more emphasis must be placed on the flexible schooling system, which can meet the needs of children and their families on more equitable terms. Models such as the Shepherd School System and School for Life approaches should be adopted on a larger scale in Northern Ghana in order to ensure a higher quality of education for children in resource deprived areas of the country.

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