

# **STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE GIRLS’ EDUCATION IN GHANA:**

**A Look at their Impact and Effectiveness**

**A Joint Study by Ibis, UNICEF, SNV and WFP<sup>1</sup>**

**Picture**

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**Final Summary Version**

*“All agree that the single most important key to development and poverty alleviation is education, which must start with universal primary education for girls and boys equally” (Wolfensohn, 1999).*

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<sup>1</sup> This final study report was compiled by Dr Leslie Casely-Hayford and Roland Akabzaa of Associates for Change with support from Justinaa Anglaare, SNV Ghana, Diana Jehu-Appiah, Ibis and Eunice Agbenyadzi, SNV Ghana. Initial analysis was conducted by Dr Seidu Alhassan.

## **Why is Girls Education Important?**

In the 1990's girls' education became recognised as the single most effective development investment for reducing poverty by ensuring that women were able to improve the lives of their families and the next generation of children. Educating girls is viewed as a “strategic investment” for the individual, the family, the local community and the whole nation for improving national development indicators. Socio-economic research on the impact education indicates that educated women are far better equipped than uneducated women to improve opportunities for themselves and their families by obtaining better-paid and higher-status jobs (Prah 2002). The developmental impacts of literate woman include: better environmental protection, improved health and nutrition for themselves and their families, lower child mortality rates, increased work productivity, and a tendency to marry later and have fewer children thus lowering the population growth rate (Casely-Hayford, 2002).<sup>2</sup>

However, the issues of gender equity and girls' access to education are yet to be fully prioritised and mainstreamed in poverty reduction programming and education policy formulation in many countries including Ghana. The Government of Ghana is constitutionally mandated to provide free basic education to all its citizens, and to gradually make secondary and tertiary education accessible to all; it has also signed several international agreements including the UN Rights of the Child Declaration and the Education for All (EFA) Action Plans. Poverty, socio-cultural challenges and poor quality of education are among the key factors that continue to constrain girls' access and participation to education across the country. Some key indicators below provide insight into the current situation of girls' education in Ghana:

- The out of school population in Ghana is about 650,800 children (53.4% are girls)<sup>3</sup>, the majority of who are in Northern Ghana (190,000) and spread across other poverty pockets of the country (Central and Western Region).
- Access, retention, completion and transition trends in education follow the same pattern as the poverty profile of Ghana, revealing that low educational rates are a direct outcome of poverty and deprivation (Thompson and Casely-Hayford, 2008).
- The MOESS 2008 performance report reveals the following enrolment rates for females in Ghana's public school system in 2007/08. It is clear from these figures that enrolment rates drop dramatically as one move up the schooling system.
  - Primary Level 93%
  - Junior Secondary School 75%
  - Senior Secondary School 44%

In 2007, Ibis, SNV, UNICEF and WFP embarked on a study to analyse the key strategies being implemented to improve the status of girls' education in Ghana. This policy brief is based on the larger study which emerged from this collaborative review *'Strategies to Promote Girls' Education in Ghana: A look at their relevance, impact and effectiveness'* and is available on: [www.associatesforchange.org](http://www.associatesforchange.org). This paper reviews the key findings from the study focusing on the main strategies, recommendations and conclusions at the community, regional and national levels in

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<sup>2</sup> Situational Analysis of Gender Issues in Ghana's Education Sector (2002).

<sup>3</sup> EMIS 2008

order to discern their potential to guide programming in the sub sector and highlight their limitations.

### *The Study Approach*

The main objective of the study was to examine the current strategies for promoting girls' education, particularly based on IBIS, SNV, WFP and UNICEF experiences, with the aim of assessing their relevance and effectiveness. The study also aims at providing key policy recommendations on how certain advocacy and lobby approaches could complement policy measures for achieving the MDG3.

Specific objectives of the study were to:

- describe the current situation of education in Ghana with particular reference to girls education
- identify existing girls' education promotion strategies
- analyse the relevance and effectiveness of the strategies
- examine community participation in promoting girls' education
- examine pupils' assessment of the pull and push factors which affect their educational attainment and achievement

The study took 16 months (August 2007 to December 2008) to complete including field work in the Northern and Central regions. A total of twenty-four communities were visited; interviews were conducted with teachers, pupils, community members, regional officers, District Girls' Education Officers and local NGOs. Development workers from the study institutions collected qualitative data using participatory research methodology, which included focus group discussions, interviews, and observation. The study design and analysis was carried out by dividing the education sector into the macro level (policy), meso level (implementation of policy) and micro levels of analysis (impact of policy).

## **Situating Girls Education within Ghana's Education Policy Environment**

Three major policy documents guide the education sector within the context of Ghana's development priorities. These include the Growth & Poverty Reduction Strategy GPRS II (2003-2009); the Government of Ghana's Education White Paper (2006), the Education Sector Plan (ESP) (2003-2015). The ESP, provides the overall policy direction for education in four broad areas which include: equitable access to education; quality of education; education management; science, technology and TVET. The Girls Education Unit (GEU) has also developed a National Vision Document for Girl's education in Ghana called the "Framework for action: charting the way forward". These documents outline the key targets which need to be met in order to achieve the MDGs of universal basic education and gender parity.

The Government through the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MOESS) has pursued several programmes specifically designed to promote girls' education in order to achieve these broad policy objectives outlined in the ESP. Various development partners and NGOs working alongside the government carry out these programmes.

**Examples of Generic Government Programmes:**

- 1) The Capitation Grant
- 2) Ghana School Feeding Program

**Specific Government Programmes include:**

- 1) Community mobilisation and sensitisation programs to create awareness of the importance of girls' education
- 2) Dissemination of materials communicating the value of schooling
- 3) Radio and television programmes advocating for girls education
- 4) Take home food rations linked to girls' participation in school
- 5) Scholarships and sponsorship programmes for girls
- 6) Formation of girls clubs and Annual Vacation Camps for Girls
- 7) Organisation of the Science Teaching and Mathematics Education Clinics (STME) for girls (MOESS, 2008)

While the capitation grant program abolishes school fees in public primary schools, the government school feeding programme provides one hot meal a day for pupils in selected public primary schools. Both programmes are designed to increase school enrolment and retention, for both boys and girls, particularly those in deprived rural areas and from poorer backgrounds. These programmes have been successful in stimulating enrolment in school. However, retention and completion rates especially among girls, is less promising due to other endemic structural factors.

The Girls Education Unit (GEU), established in 1995, is aimed to specifically address the gender disparities in education by designing and implementing programmes to attract and retain girls in schools. The work of the Girls' Education officers is mainly focussed on increasing sensitisation and advocacy activities aimed at raising awareness of the importance of education for girls. Evidence reveals that girls are often inhibited from fully benefiting from the education system due to socio-cultural factors that inhibit their participation and retention in school. Many initiatives have been designed to address deeply embedded cultural perceptions of girls' education, through educational advocacy at the community level and visits by Girls' Education Officers to communities and families where school participation rates among girls are low.

### **Development Partner Interventions**

The Girls' Education Strategy Study revealed that key development partners (DPs) working on girls' education work closely with the MOESS/GES with the aim of providing improved leadership and capacity support to promote girls' education at various levels including school community, district, regional and national levels. The DP's also promote a wide range of interventions to support girls across target districts, and work mostly through local partners (government and NGOs) to ensure that their programme goals are effectively pursued. The DPs often work towards the removal of levies and other barriers to accessing education, and provide support to education policy formulation at the national level. Some of their interventions include material support such as UNICEF's provision of bicycles to girls in low gender parity districts; School Feeding programme and take home rations by the WFP, and the supply of girl friendly school equipment and school infrastructure by DFID. Most of the support DPs provide is in the form of funding, technical, logistical and capacity building support.

***Strategies being supported by multilateral and bilateral donors:***

- Making schools more child-friendly
- Capacity-building of women at grassroots level
- School Health Education
- Improved leadership and capacity in advocacy for girls' education
- The Girls Ambassador Programme
- Supporting education staff through data collection and supervision of projects
- Bursary and material incentives to Girls

**International Non-Governmental Organisations & their Interventions**

The Girls Education Strategy Study also revealed that INGOs work directly with local NGOs, communities and key stakeholders. INGO's that have a gender education dimension to their programming were interviewed regarding their education work in the Central and Northern regions of the country. The girls' education activities carried out by INGOs and their partners ranged from:

***INGOs Girls' Education Activities***

- Research Advocacy and Community Sensitisation activities
- Sponsorship programs for girls;
- Formation of Girls' Clubs
- Provision of school infrastructure - libraries, classrooms and toilets
- Provision of teaching and learning materials
- Micro Credit Schemes for parents
- Community Mobilisation using Participatory Learning Approach (PLA)
- Training teachers to become Mentors and Role Models

The INGOs investigated in the study were mainly implementing educational programmes targeted at the girl child through child sponsorship. Through these sponsorship programmes, NGOs provided teaching and learning materials for the pupils; trained teachers, and improved school infrastructure and facilities. Community mobilisation and community sensitisation was seen as the most direct way to inform and advocate the value of girls' education at the community levels.

**Girls' Education Strategies of District Assemblies and District GES**

Despite the diversity of approaches across Ghana, net enrolment rates vary widely, with the northern region having 67% of girls of school age enrolled, compared to 98% of girls in the central region. However, whilst initial enrolment levels seem strong, it is retaining girls within school at the upper primary and JSS levels which remains a key challenge. Maintaining consistent academic performance among girls is also a key challenge to the districts. It is here that the quality of education is important, along with parental support and the presence of good mentors.

The Ghana Education Service (GES) has a major role in promoting education and supporting girls' education initiatives in Ghana. The MOESS and GES have developed various schemes for girls' education, which mainly address the access and participation area of the ESP. District Education Offices (DEOs) undertake workshops to educate communities of the consequences of rape, teenage pregnancy, defilement and other sexual health issues. Girls' Education Officers and other role models at district level contribute towards changing social perceptions and combating behaviour that prevent young girls from attending and staying in school.

The role of the District Girls' Education Officer (DGEO) is focussed mainly on visiting schools, collecting data on areas such as attendance and performance by gender, and then disseminating the findings in reports to the district. According to these reports, a more up to date training on girls' education strategies and approaches would contribute to building capacity at the district level. Another key finding from the Girls Strategy Study is that initiatives designed to increase pupil attendance, do not yet address the corresponding need for recruitment of additional teachers to maintain reasonable class sizes. Research findings by International NGOs are used for designing and implementing advocacy activities at the district level and for improving girls' rights at school.

## The Impact and Effectiveness of Key Girls Education Strategies

The policies and programmes implemented by the government, the GEU and other donors have all had positive impact on girls' education, and have led to significant increases in female enrolment particularly at the primary level. However, more progress is needed in the North of Ghana along with other endemic poverty zones in order to bring about significant and lasting change in the Ghanaian education profile. Analysis of MOE data over the last ten years suggests that there is an increase in female enrolment, retention & completion at every level; at the primary level, enrolment increased from 83% in (2003/04) to 93% in (2007/8). The JSS female enrolment rates also increased from 65% to 75.3% over the same period. Evidence reveals that the gender gap at the primary and JSS level has improved with the gender parity index increasing from 0.93 in 2005/06 to 0.96 in 2007/08. At the JSS level, the gender parity index declined slightly from 0.93 (2005/06) to 0.92 (2007/2008) respectively. However, the gap between girls' and boys' achievement and completion remains quite wide. Furthermore, this gap widens at higher levels of schooling particularly at SSS and tertiary levels of education. There is also less improvement in closing the gender gap in endemic poverty zones (such as the Northern Ghana and Western region). The table below shows key educational indicators as of 2007/08.

Table 1: Key Targets for Achieving MDG 2 and MDG 3 within the Educational Sector

Indicators	Targets	Achievement in 2007/08
KG GER	100% by 2015	89.9%
Primary GER	100% by 2012	95.2%
JSS GER	100% by 2015	78.8%
Primary completion rate	100% by 2012	88.0%
JSS completion rate	100% by 2015	67.7%
% Female in Universities	50% by 2015	34.0%
% Female in Polytechnics	50% by 2015	30.0%
% Female Enrolment in Tertiary	50% by 2015	34.0%
% Female enrolment in TVET	50% by 2015	16.7%

Source: MOESS, 2008

Several studies demonstrate that the capitation grant and the school feeding programme have improved enrolment and participation rates in schools. CREATE (2007) estimated that the capitation programme alone led to a 17% increase in participation in basic education nation wide. However, the capitation grant does not have specific gender targets or provisions for districts with endemic poverty and entrenched socio-cultural barriers. The school feeding programme is not yet covering all primary schools and may not be sustained given the high cost to Government. Thus these programs although improving results in short term enrolment are not addressing the deeper poverty dimensions and gender disparities in the educational sector.

The activities of the *GEU* and other organisations have made significant and positive improvement in raising awareness of the importance of girls' education at national, regional and local levels. The importance of education for the girl child and her whole community have been and are being transmitted via diverse media campaigns, girls' education officers, girls' clubs and mentorship programmes. The key challenges which remain are in regions and areas where social cultural practices including early marriage, child-fostering and family betrothal coupled with poverty continue to act as endemic barriers to girls' education. The absence of female teachers to serve as role models and the poor quality outcomes of education in these areas hinder progress towards the achievement of gender parity. Strategic approaches, which involve a holistic intervention approach to behaviour change, addressing poverty and parental livelihoods, improve educational quality and complement short term material incentives, are needed to close the gender gap in education in Ghana.

#### *Impact and Effectiveness of Development Partner Interventions*

Perspectives among development partners and international NGOs' vary in relation to the most important strategies and interventions in girls' education. Interviews with Development Partners reveal that the abolition of school fees was one of their most effective strategies for helping to reduce some of the barriers to girls' access to education. DPs also believe that initiatives that are targeting females through information and advocacy are positively contributing towards changing perceptions of girls' education and enable families and communities to understand the benefits of education. The DPs stated that their strategies and programmes had been effective in influencing policy and supporting the Government to implement policy change particularly in relation to the abolishment of school fees at the basic level.

Despite enormous empirical evidence emphasising the importance of girls' education for Africa, interviews with senior officials and development partner agencies in Ghana reveal that there is still a tremendous need to educate key decision makers on the importance of girls' education. Some key stakeholders have a strong belief that some educational strategies over-emphasise girls to the neglect of boys, and that girls' specific strategies are not necessary. Most of the DP programs and government strategies focus on improving access and participation in education with less emphasis on improving the quality of education. The Girls Education Strategy Study revealed that increasing the support to improving quality education will improve retention and completion rates in school particularly for girls. The study also found that there is weak development partner collaboration at the district and regional levels and declining support for girls' education among the DP community. The study also

revealed that girls' education needs greater financial support and consideration within the ESP framework. It has been suggested that "*gender budgeting*" should be used to monitor expenditures on girls' education within the ESP to ensure enough financial allocation for the smooth and sustained implementation of girls' education initiatives.

### *Impact & Effectiveness of INGOs*

The study found that the majority of INGOs are implementing small-scale interventions which do not cover the entire districts therefore making monitoring and evaluation of their girls' education strategies difficult. There was also weak collaboration among NGOs with very limited information sharing leading to duplication of NGO support and programming in the same communities or districts. For example, the study found that food rations, uniforms and bicycles were reaching the same girls and families, whilst other girls sometimes in the same community, did not receive any support. More work is needed to ensure co-operation and knowledge exchange amongst NGOs.

Sutherland Addy (2002) found that advocacy and community sensitisation of communities by NGOs was one of the most popular intervention areas of NGO's. A well-sensitised community and government commitment created the ideal environment for interventions promoting girls' education. Teachers and chiefs were among the focus for creating local committees at community level when aiming at increasing enrolment in rural districts. Furthermore, scholarship schemes were attracting females by influencing family decisions to support their girl child to enter into formal education. Girls clubs and female centred camps were improving pupil self confidence.

One of the key findings from the Girls Education Strategy Study revealed the very small-scale of activities being implemented among the NGO community with most programs not reaching more than 1,000 girls. Another finding was that apart from the girls clubs and STME the Ghana Education Service suggesting a lack of sustainability after NGO's withdrew their programming. Very few NGO programs were being mainstreamed by Government despite evidence of their effectiveness and lobby work by the NGO. The study also suggested that communities would benefit greatly from more counselling and mentorship programs along side sponsorship and scholarship initiatives since many girls were still becoming pregnant and abandoning school to engage in petty trading activities, despite being given material support.

#### ***Case Study: The Gyahadze Community and community level mentors***

Gyahadze is a rural farming community located along the fishing coast of the Central region not far from Winneba. Here there are more girls attending school than boys up until JSS, which is unusual for a rural community. According to the community, the appreciation for girls' education is attributed to the participatory activities that raise awareness and advocacy on educating the girl child. There is also a mentorship programme implemented by NGOs, which train local women to act as role models in the local community to supervise enrolment and support the education of a number of children assigned to them. This allows them to monitor the households which have children and to see whether they are attending school or not. The mentors are also able to maintain dialogue with parents of children not in school and encourage them to enrol their children. This activity is very effective in promoting and encouraging the education of girls. As a result of the efforts of the mentors, the programme has contributed to the increase in girls' enrolment and retention in the community.



There is the need to increase support for girls transitioning from primary to JSS level of school. Also, an increase in the numbers of Girls' Education Officers (GEO), guidance counsellors and mentors will help to improve girls' behaviour and redirect attitudes towards educational achievement. Advocacy must also emphasise alternative education strategies for children such as technical, agricultural, vocational and structured apprenticeships.

### *Impact & Effectiveness of District Interventions*

The GES strategies were found to be effective in helping attract girls to school but more work is needed to measure their success by using more specific evaluative indicators. The sensitisation initiatives have increased female attendance in schools; role models have also helped to inform and encourage education among girls; food rations brought higher attendance rates in the targeted schools and provisions of teaching /learning materials reduced financial burdens for parents. Sex education policies and male sanctions have helped to curb teenage pregnancy. Arguably the full effects of these schemes cannot yet be measured due to the limits of this study and nature of the data available at the district level.

The Education Office only provides one officer to serve as GEO in each district. This limits their effectiveness in supervising girls' education activities and constrains monitoring and follow-up visits often leading to poor reporting. DFID and UNICEF were among the organisations providing funds for building capacity of GEOs but more technical assistance is required in this area. The Girls' Education Strategy study revealed that the officers felt inadequate to advise the districts on up to date girls' education strategies, which have been well tested and effective in Ghana and worldwide.

Teachers reported that the material incentives such as food rations and basic school needs should continue, to keep children in school, although evidence from the study revealed that material support alone was not enough to ensure girls transition to upper primary and the completion of basic education. Teachers described the various interventions by other stakeholders as useful in helping girls stay in school. For example girls' attendance is regular and punctual due to the bicycles provided by UNICEF. Interviews with community members by contrast revealed that flexible school hours used in complementary education programmes, sensitisation programmes and initiatives aimed at improving the livelihoods of parents were key approaches to improving girls' education at the community level. The food rations and capitation grants were seen as helpful to support education financially but not a realistic strategy for sustained educational improvement in the long run.

## **The Last Word: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study revealed that there have been several concerted efforts over the years by government, DPs, international and local NGOs as well as civil society to address the issues of gender inequity in education. These efforts have yielded some positive outcomes as gender parity at primary and junior secondary school levels inches closer to parity. However, gender disparity in some regions and poverty zones have persisted and are eroding the impact of government and NGOs programmes in girls' education

in these regions thus threatening the achievement of gender parity (MDG 3) in the foreseeable future. The complexity of girls' education demands more innovative and multi-faced approaches along with prolonged commitment by all stakeholders to address the socio-cultural and poverty challenges against girls' education.

Girl child education in Ghana is still faced with structural challenges despite enormous empirical evidence of the primary role of girls' education in poverty reduction, and national development; policy makers and development partners continue to question the reasons for girls' education. Policies for improving the access and participation of girls will not be enough to ensure that MDG's are reached unless these are backed by targeted girls' education strategies and adequate budget provision. Food incentive packages and capitation grants need to be complemented with improvement in education quality, and poverty reduction strategies at the community level to ensure lasting change and sustainability, particularly in helping girls reach higher levels of education.

The current social context of Ghana suggests that in traditional rural communities more transitional approaches to girls' education which do not directly threaten the social values, and patriarchal systems but compromise with parents and children on flexible educational approaches, improve learning outcomes and which fit within their pattern of socio economic life are needed. Direct assistance such as food aid and sponsorship for girls in the short term does improve for girls' access at primary levels of education but where these interventions are not sustained girls drop out without the support of their families and peers.

There are several NGO's and DPs working to support girls' education across Ghana. They utilize a multiplicity of strategies which include sensitisation, girl child sponsorship packages, food ration and micro-credit focussed on short-term access targets and rarely on long-term performance outcomes. Some of these NGOs and DPs continue the implementation of these interventions with limited view to collectively investigating their effectiveness and relevance to improving girls' education. The lack of collaborative target setting, monitoring and learning among DPs, INGOs and Government in order to share lessons learned, and reflect on research internationally and nationally, has limited the effectiveness of girls' education strategies in Ghana. At the district level, local partners have not found the need to work together on girls' education, as a result there is duplication and some girls in the district are receiving multiple sponsorship packages. Some of the short term strategies also reinforce a "*welfare*" approach to development in the communities and threaten retention of girls in school after the programmes are phased out

A more rigorous assessment of the key girls' education strategies is needed to help guide policy and programming at the national, regional and district levels of education in Ghana. The study revealed the necessity in further investigating how parents and communities continue assisting their girl children in school when donor and NGO programmes are phased out of communities. Further research is needed to undertaken to study alternative strategies for empowering parents, which are linked to supporting the education of their children in school without the dependency on external aid.

For Ghana to reach the MDG 3 goal of gender parity in (basic) education requires a revisiting of the Girls Education Vision document, an analysis of the lessons learnt by

development partners and the integration of key strategies within the new ESP (2010 to 2020). Much more work is needed to bring together the stakeholders in the education sector working on gender equity to deepen their analysis and reflect on well tested approaches for charting the way forward for Girls' Education in Ghana. The Girls' Education Unit should be provided with the financial support needed to enhance its coordination and monitoring roles at district and regional levels. DPs should be encouraged to support evidence based research on best practice in girls' education in Ghana. Until a collective vision of girls' education is developed across the sector demanding collaboration in implementation among key stakeholders at every level, policies and programmes will not reach their full potential; international targets and national goals will remain unmet and programs will remain small scale particularly within the poverty zones of Ghana where girls' education strategies are most needed.