



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

**Understanding the Social and Economic Lives  
of Never-enrolled Children: A Case Study of Communities  
in Northern and Southern Ghana**

**Joseph Gharthey Ampiah  
Christine Adu-Yeboah**

**CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS  
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**University of Sussex  
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## List of Acronyms

BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examinations
CREATE	Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity
GLSS	Ghana Living standards Survey
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
KG	Kindergarten
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MOESS	Ministry of Education Science and Sports
MOE	Ministry of Education
NFE	Non-Formal Education
SES	Socio-economic Status
UIS UNESCO	Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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## **Preface**

In 1957 Ghana became independent at the beginning of a period when Macmillan the former British prime Minister predicted a “wind of change” blowing through Africa. The accelerated development plan provided for universalising access to education and eliminating the differences in participation between the North and the South. Ghana had what was generally recognised as one of the highest quality education systems in Africa, and an optimism infused development thinking that independence would see all children in school. The gains were substantial but the differences in participation between North and South proved stubbornly resistant to change. Early progress was stalled in the 1970s and 1980s by periods of political instability and global recession. Most recently there is evidence in other CREATE studies that momentum has been regenerated since 2005 and participation is again increasing and the North South gap diminishing.

Despite this significant numbers of school age children remain out of school. In some communities it appears that it is still the case that more than 10% are unenrolled and thus excluded from opportunities to access Junior High School and modern sector labour markets. The never enrolled do have different characteristics to those who enrol but drop out before completing primary school, though necessarily there are some similarities. This study reports on a sample of never enrolled children drawing on interviews at household level and in the communities to understand more about why it remains the case that universal enrolment remains elusive. Direct and indirect costs remains a common reason for never enrolling despite fee free access after the capitation grant programme in 2005. Child labour and participation in revenue generating activities in households remains an issue with complex nuances, and fosterage and kayaye contribute to never enrolment for some children. The paper makes a number of suggestions about how to reduce the numbers of never enrolled children. These complement findings from CREATE that show how important this is. National data indicates that once children are older than 10 years the chances of them ever enrolling fall rapidly to insignificant levels. Never enrolled status amongst school age children is a one way ticket to educational and social exclusion.

Keith Lewin  
Director of CREATE  
Centre for International Education  
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## Summary

Evidence suggests that human skills and abilities, developed through education, translate into individual social and economic benefits that increase employment opportunities and incomes, national economic growth and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2002; David, 2009). For this reason, through a number of interventions, the Government of Ghana has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that all children of school-going age are in school. However, many Ghanaian children of school-going age are still not enrolled in school. This study therefore sought to understand the household and community conditions that might be accountable for children's non-school attendance in selected communities in the northern and southern parts of the country. It used an interpretive research approach to elicit the stories of children who have never enrolled in school. Among others, it found that household factors such as fosterage, parents or guardians' inability to meet the direct and indirect costs of schooling, certain socio-economic activities peculiar to the communities and the need for child labour are accountable for children's non-school enrolment. To get some of the never-enrolled children back to school, the study suggests that (a) parents/guardians and communities be sensitised about the benefits of education, (b) the academic calendar in some communities be changed to suit the economic/farming/fishing activities of communities where children's involvement in economic activities is paramount to the survival strategy of their families and they therefore find it very difficult to enrol in school.



# **Understanding the Social and Economic Lives of Never-enrolled Children: A Case Study of Communities in Northern and Southern Ghana**

## **1. Introduction**

In many countries, the situation of basic education has received a lot of attention for the fact that it is a fundamental human right and a foundation for accelerating economic growth and reducing poverty. For the past few decades since the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed the right of everyone to education (UNESCO, 1998), various efforts have been made on the international scene to address its access and participation-related problems. For example, at the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All, the nations of the world collectively affirmed the urgency of making quality primary education accessible to all (UNESCO, 1991). Moreover, the Millennium Development Goals, particularly goal 2, makes it mandatory for every nation state to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Ghana's strategy of focusing on basic education as a powerful and necessary condition for accelerating economic growth and reducing poverty falls within the framework of the Jomtien Declaration of Education for All and the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education by 2015.

Since basic education was placed high on the development agenda, some progress has been recorded worldwide. For example, in 1997, a UNESCO report indicated that some 10 million more children attended school each year, and the total number of primary school pupils was reported to have increased from an estimated 500 million in 1975 to more than 660 million in 1997 (UNESCO, 2001). In 2007, the administrative data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) reported that in 2002, the worldwide total of out-of-school children was about 115 million of which sub-Saharan Africa accounted for about 43 million. The worldwide figure reduced to 77 million in 2004, with that of sub-Saharan Africa changing to 38 million in 2004 (UNESCO, 2007).

The UIS data groups out-of-school children into three distinct groups, namely those who were previously enrolled in primary school but dropped out, those who have not yet enrolled but are likely to do so later and those who will never enrol. Those who are unlikely to enrol are estimated at 46.6 million (about 61%) (UNESCO, 2007). Sixty percent of out-of-school children in sub-Saharan Africa and in Ghana are expected never to enrol in school. In Ghana, more than 20% of all children of school-going age (6-15 year olds) have either dropped out or never enrolled in school (MOESS, 2007).

The Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) data shows that since 1991, exclusion from ever attending school ranged from 3 to 15% in most regions. The northern regions of the country had the highest proportion of never-enrolled children, between 33% and 42% by 2005/6, compared to only 3% in the Central Region. In the Upper East region, as many as two-thirds of children have never enrolled in school (Rolleston, et al., 2010). These disparities mirror the economic conditions and the demographic pressures especially in the three northern regions of Ghana. These levels of non-school enrolment point to the difficulty of achieving universal primary education in Ghana.

Oduro's (2007) examination of the distribution of the Ghanaian population that has never attended school however reveals that the share of the population aged 6-14 and 15-24 years that has never attended school is significantly lower than the population in the older age brackets. This indicates that instituted policies and strategies aimed at widening access to

basic education such as fee-free education, the capitation grant and the school feeding programme which is currently being piloted in one school in each of the 138 districts in Ghana are recording some successes. The most recent data from the Ghana Statistical Survey (GSS) shows that enrolment in primary school currently stands at around 90% (GSS, 2005).

These figures notwithstanding, there are still indications that non-school attendance remains substantial (MOESS, 2007; Rolleston, 2009). A Ministry of Education report indicates that while a little over 4.1 million children are enrolled in primary and junior high school, nearly a million are still out of school (MOESS, 2007). The report also estimates that more than 20% of all children of school-going age have either dropped out or never enrolled in school (MOESS, 2007).

The situation seems to suggest that certain contextual conditions may be accountable for non-school enrolment, in spite of the fee-free education and the Government of Ghana's policy of free and compulsory basic education enshrined in the Education Act, 2008, with fines for parents who fail to comply. These contextual factors however, must be unpacked to explain why in spite of provision put in place for children to enrol in school, there continue to be high proportions of never-enrolled children in Ghana. This forms the basis of this study, which tries to identify children of school-going age who are physically excluded from basic education, and to understand the barriers that exclude them. This study describes the circumstances that surround children who have no access to conventional schooling, and through an interpretive research approach focusing primarily on the real-life experiences of children, who have never enrolled in school, explains why they have never enrolled in school. It focuses on zone 1 of The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE)'s zones of exclusion (Lewin, 2007); that is children who are denied access to conventional schooling or non-formal education (NFE).

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section presents a survey of the literature on the subject under study. The second section describes the research design and context, leading on to the third, which is the presentation, analysis and discussion of the data from which the conclusions and recommendations are drawn in the final section.

## **2. Why Children Never Enrol in School: Perspectives from the Literature**

In this section, we review factors associated with non-school enrolment identified in international literature. Many of the reasons given in the literature for children never enrolling in school also explain the situation of school dropout (Rose, 2001, cited in Hunt, 2008). The use of the term 'never enrolled' in this paper is limited to those who have never been enrolled in school even though they are of school going age (6-15 years).

Formal education is widely acknowledged as having both economic and social benefits. Hence, governments and international development agencies have promoted and emphasised the importance of formal education for children in developing countries (Jensen & Stokes 2010:295). The second of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), on achievement of universal primary education, seeks to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. This means every child of school going age must first have his/her name recorded in an enrolment register. However, the 2000 Population and Housing Census (GSS, 2005) shows that in northern Ghana, 38.8% (42.1% males and 57.9% females) of the population of 6 years and older has never been to school, 72.3% (46.1% male and 53.9% female) of these children being in the Northern Region.

However, it is likely that many of the 6-year olds in this group will one day enrol in school. Late enrolment in Grade 1 is one of the main causes of over age children in schools in Ghana, along with repetition and absenteeism. The situation of over age children in class leads to serious problems of progression, retention and achievement (Ampiah et al, forthcoming). The proportion of children who have never enrolled in school is likely to fall after the age of 6, so that by age 11 there may be a much smaller proportion of children who have never been enrolled. Those children who at age 11 have never attended school are likely to remain excluded from education (Lewin, 2007:25). Children of school age who have never been enrolled can be divided by age into two groups – those that are out of school, but will one day probably be enrolled late, and those that are out of school and are likely to remain out of school for reasons that we will examine in this paper (UNESCO, 2007). Lewin (2009) divides the never enrolled into those that 'should be' in school, who live in areas where education is available and those whose location, lifestyle, health or social exclusion means that they are excluded. In this paper, we are primarily discussing the former group, as research was based in communities served by both public and private schools, in a peaceful, if poor, country.

CREATE's conceptual model of zones of exclusion which describe educational access for children of school going age describes never enrolled children as being in zone 1, with children who drop out from school in zones 2 (primary) and 5 (secondary) children who are silently excluded in zones 3 and 6 and children who finish primary but are excluded from progressing to secondary in zone 4 (Lewin, 2007). The reasons why many children have never been enrolled vary depending on age, location and context. The reasons for never enrolment include both the supply and demand of education. Variables reflecting demand for education include household income and parental education whilst in the case of supply, they include institutional structures, processes and practices and general educational quality. The discussion that follows looks at these in more detail, starting with the factors relating to demand for education.

## **2.1 Education Demand Factors in Never Enrolment**

Enrolment in Grade 1 of appropriate age (age 6) has shown increasing trends in recent years with the largest increases having been made between 2004/05 (26.2%) and 2005/06 (61.7%) and between 2006/07 (69.1%) and 2007/08 (74.3%) (MOESS, 2007). The big leap from 2004/05 to 2005/06 could be attributed to the introduction of the capitation grant policy (\$3 per child per year) in addition to the free compulsory universal basic education policy. This seems to suggest that poverty is a factor when it comes to eliminating the incidence of never-enrolled children in school. The data shows that in 2007/08 academic year for example, at least 35 out of every 100 children of 6 years of age did not enrol in school (bearing in mind that underage children in primary schools is rare). This is happening in spite of the free compulsory universal basic education policy of 1996 and the introduction of the capitation grant.

The Ghana Education Act, 2008 made it compulsory for all children to attend school. In fact, there is a penalty for any parent whose child is not enrolled in school to appear before the social welfare committee of the district assembly for appropriate action, including a fine. Where a parent cannot genuinely afford to educate a child, section 2(6) of the Education Act states that district assemblies may provide the support necessary for the education of the child. Such compulsory legislation appears not to be the solution to getting children enrolled in school (Little, 2008; Akyeampong, 2009) as there are still never-enrolled children in Ghana.

Household income determines access to education in Ghana and many other countries (Lewin, 2007, Hunt, 2008, Rolleston, 2009). Due to their inability to meet the costs of schooling, children from poor households attend school less, later, and for a shorter time than those from richer households (Filmer and Pritchett, 2004; Nesselrodt and Alger, 2005; Akyeampong, 2009; Rolleston, 2009). Hartwell et al.'s (2006) analysis of the literature similarly reveals that especially in poor households with many children, as a result of pressing economic needs, and dependency on child labour, the ability to pay for education is low and the opportunity costs to the households of sending children to school are high. Akaguri's (2010) work on the costs of education in Ghana found that for the poorest households, enrolling just one child in the cheapest form of education, would cost 16% of annual household income (Akaguri, 2010:2).

Poverty is a cause as well as a consequence of limited educational access in both rich and poor countries. Hunt (2008) analyses the relational aspects of poverty in terms of physical, social and psychological disempowerment and finds that all these dimensions affect the demand for schooling. In high and low income countries including Ghana, poverty and the community/traditional culture with loose family structures allow children to be left on their own, be saddled with family duties or be involved in child labour to support the family income (Grimsrud and Stokke, 1997).

Household work patterns and structure especially in poor households also determine the possibility of children being enrolled in school. Girls are assigned duties ranging from taking care of younger siblings to selling to contribute to the family income while boys run errands, look after the cattle or do some odd jobs for money (Nestvogel, 1995; Hunt, 2008). Caring for sick relatives can be a significant responsibility for children leading to never enrolment, dropout or absenteeism (Ananga, 2011, Orkin, 2011). The extra money or productive labour brought in by children sometimes represents a household's survival strategy (Grimsrud & Stokke, 1997). This is particularly strong in households where mothers have no education and

gainful employment, or where they are engaged in informal employment. In a study on dropout in Mfantseman District, Ananga (2011) found that children in these communities regularly work, that this contributes to dropout and that the times of day and of the year when children's work is most in demand do not fit well with the school timetable. The necessity of child labour for the survival of some households, and cultural practices surrounding fosterage and child labour contribute to never enrolment. Analysis of GLSS data for the Northern Region of Ghana by Rolleston (2011) shows that being fostered has twice the effect of being female in terms of being never enrolled. Fostered children are 19% less likely to ever attend school than biological children (Rolleston, 2010).

Parental education is also an important factor in demand for education, and the ability to afford the costs of education in Ghana (Akeyampong et al, 2007). United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) data shows that on average, a child whose mother has no education is twice as likely to be out of school (including being never enrolled) than a child whose mother has some education (UNESCO, 2007). In poverty-endemic communities and households, even where policies and strategies such as fee-free education and capitation grants have been introduced, there is evidence that parents are unable to cater for other educational costs such as buying books and uniforms and other basic school items for their wards (Nestvogel, 1995; Hunt, 2008; Ampiah and Adu-Yeboah, 2009, Akaguri, 2010) and these can act as barriers to enrolling children in school. In such cases, lack of financial and material assistance increases the opportunity cost of education. These problems are greater in large families and there is evidence that families with larger numbers of children have higher rates of never enrolment (Akeyampong et al, 2007:54)

In terms of location, children in rural areas are more likely not to be enrolled in school than those in urban areas, as it is known that the poverty levels in rural areas are higher than in the urban (UNESCO, 2007). Hartwell et al. (2006) found in their survey of the literature, that in some poor communities and households, parents perceive few benefits from education, and thus keep their children out of school. In Ghana for example, stories from students from less-endowed areas reveal that in those communities, students perform poorly at the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) and for that reason, are neither able to further their education nor go into farming which is the main occupation of the community, apparently because they feel they are 'educated' and not fit to go into farming (Adu-Yeboah and Wie-Addo, 2009). Therefore, parents consider education as a waste of resources and unrewarding and thus do not feel motivated to spend on their children's education or enrol them in school (Pryor & Ampiah, 2003). Additionally, in some communities in northern Ghana, distance from school and corporal punishment often discourage children from going to school (Ampiah and Adu-Yeboah, 2009).

## **2.2 Education Supply Factors in Never Enrolment**

With regard to supply factors, the physical availability of school facilities, unattractive schooling conditions which make schooling unproductive and lack of access to quality education together, weaken commitment to education from both parents and children (Nestvogel 1995; Filmer and Pritchett, 2004) and contribute to non-school attendance or non-enrolment in extreme cases. Particularly in the case of Ghana, Akeyampong (2009) suggests that the decline in the availability of trained teachers especially in rural areas, very low time on task and high teacher absenteeism contribute to the decline in the demand for education among poor households.

In addition, practices in schools such as making children do agricultural work for teachers, corporal punishment, bullying and sexual harassment also lead to negative perceptions of schooling by children and parents and can lead to dropout and never enrolment (Alhassan and Adzahlie-Mensah, 2010; Dunne et al. 2010). Lack of availability of schools and poor facilities can also be factors that discourage people from sending children to school (Akeyampong et al. 2007).

Hadley (2010) and Ananga's (2011) work showed the impact that inflexible and inappropriate school timetables have on access to education. Children who work or migrate seasonally, as many do in both Savelugu Nanton and Mfantseman Districts, find it difficult to attend school at certain times of year or day. In Mfantseman District, where fishing is the main economic activity, the times that boys participate in work connected to fishing clash with the school day, and the times of year when some children migrate with their families for fishing clash with the start of the school year (Ananga, 2011:26).

In spite of the fee-free education policy and school-feeding programme being currently practised in Ghana, the country still faces the challenge of achieving universal enrolment especially from poor households, in order to achieve education for all by 2015 (Akyeampong, 2009). It is therefore important to understand from children who have never enrolled in school their demographic and socio-economic characteristics, and conditions within their family and community that act as barriers to their being enrolled in school.



### **3. Method of the Study**

#### **3.1 Research Sites**

This study is based on two districts: Savelugu-Nanton district in the north (Northern Region) and Mfantseman district in the south (Central Region) of Ghana. Savelugu-Nanton district is the fourth most deprived of the 53 deprived districts, and although Mfantseman is not considered to be a deprived district, the Central Region was the 4<sup>th</sup> poorest region in Ghana at the time of data collection.

#### **3.2 Description of Communities in Savelugu-Nanton**

Savelugu-Nanton district has a population of 91,415, made up of 49% male and 51% female (MOE, 2002). There are 149 communities, out of which 143 are in rural locations where 80% of the population resides. The average household size is about 9. The district has a land area of 1,790.7 square kilometres, with a population density of about 61 persons per square kilometre. The main occupation is agriculture with about 97% of the active population (18–54 years) involved in farming staple food crops such as groundnuts, maize, rice, yam, cow pea and soya beans. These characteristics, especially farming and scattered community settlements, make the district particularly vulnerable to factors which promote non-enrolment in school.

The district was selected for the study on the following reasons: (1) its status as a deprived district, (2) livelihood and demographic characteristics that pose challenges to enrolling in school, and (3) its accessibility in terms of location. In the semi-urban communities, subsistence farming and trading activities are the main occupations of community members and in the rural areas it is mainly farming. There are also public and civil servants, such as teachers, who have farms and engage in petty trading to supplement their incomes, especially in the semi-rural communities. There is migration of both children and adults to Tamale, the capital of the Northern Region, and to the southern part of Ghana, especially Kumasi and Accra, the two largest cities in Ghana. The communities selected are typical of other communities in the district.

#### **3.3 Description of Communities in Mfantseman**

Mfantseman district, located in the Central Region of Ghana is one of the 170 administrative districts of the country. The district is easily accessible from Cape Coast, the regional capital. Its gross enrolment rate is below 60%. The district is noted for its vibrant fishing activities, child labour and a popular market centre at Mankessim for its commercial activity. These activities could be a major contributory factor in the low gross enrolment rate in the district.

According to the 2000 population and housing census, the district had a population of 152,264 comprising 69,670 males and 82,594 females located in 168 settlements. Only 2.4% of the population lives in areas classified as urban. Fishing and farming are the main economic activities. The occupational distribution indicates 51% fishing folks, 30% farmers and 19% commerce. The district is noted for poor school enrolment, high school dropout and low standards of educational achievement. About 33% of the total population had never enrolled in school with about 20% of these between the ages of 6-14 years. Compared to other districts in the region, Mfantseman has the highest proportion of children of school-going age who have never enrolled (GLSS, 2005).

In this study, the people in the rural areas in the southern part are mostly farmers. In one village where there is a palm oil extracting machine, the people deal mainly in the production of palm fruits. Some also engage in petty trading. In another, the mainstay is subsistence farming in maize and cassava. The rural areas normally have a single school (either public or run by faith-based organisations) or sometimes none at all. Communities are predominantly Christian and engage in monogamous marriages, with a few being traditionalists and traditional worshippers.

The semi-urban areas have more basic schools: public and private schools and some faith-based schools. Here again, the people mostly engage in farming and trading. However, along the coast, the economic activity of the people is fishing. Normally during bumper catch in June/July, the fish are smoked and transported to the nearest towns, where there are big market days, for sale. When it is out of season, some of the fishermen migrate with their children to other fishing communities to engage in fishing activities. Therefore, migration is a common phenomenon among the coastal communities.

### **3.4 Participants**

The study was able to identify 6-17 year-olds (the school-going age) who had not enrolled in school and were still in the communities at the time of the study. Some of the younger children may well enrol in school in the future. However, at the time of this study they were not enrolled in school and hence formed part of our sample. Snowballing sampling methods were employed to recruit participants for the study. Two researchers made initial contacts with a small number of participants by visiting lorry stations and market places and establishing contact with other children in each community. One hundred and forty (140) participants in the north (72 boys and 68 girls) and 39 in the south (26 males and 13 females) were contacted by this method within a period of 21 days and this constituted the participants for the study. Each researcher interviewed about 8 children each day.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

On the first day of data collection, researchers arrived in each community at about 8 o'clock in the morning when children of school-age would be expected to be in school. This made it easy to identify school-age children loitering as absentees, dropouts or never enrolled children. The study however, focused on only the never enrolled children.

Consent was sought from older relatives or household heads/caregivers by explaining the purpose of the study before they were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. If they were self-dependent their consent was also sought before interviewing. None refused to be interviewed. The interviews were completed within two weeks. The first interviewees helped identify other never enrolled children by showing interviewers where they could be found. This approach was used in each community to recruit and interview the participants. This snow-balling approach proved very effective as often these never-enrolled children formed a community with a common set of circumstances that bonded them.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The data showed observable similarities between the communities in the northern and southern parts of the country in terms of their living arrangements, parents' education/literacy level and their interest in education and socio-economic characteristics. The sections that follow highlight and discuss these differences.

### **4.1 Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of Children in Northern Ghana**

#### **4.1.1 Age and Family Background**

In all the four communities in the northern part of Ghana where data was collected, the 140 never-enrolled children who were interviewed were between the ages of 6 and 17 years. Their average age was 11.2 years. However, in each of the communities, more than 60% of the children were between 9 and 15 years.

One of the family background characteristics that showed up in the data was fosterage. Thirty-five out of the 140 children interviewed (25%) were fostered. GLSS data from 2005/6 show that around 10% of children in the Northern Region are fostered (Rolleston, 2010). Although this is a small sample in a district where fosterage is common, our findings, like those of Rolleston (2010, 2011), suggest that fosterage is associated with never enrolment. There were more girls (22) fostered than boys (13). The fostered children, who were found in all the four communities, were between the ages of 7 and 17 years, with most of them in the 11 to 15 age bracket. They either lived with their aunts/uncles or grandparents. Where any of their siblings was in school, the reason was either that they lived with their parents or that the foster parent was educated and therefore wanted that child to go to school. In some cases, parents were able to send their children to school when they had given some of them up into fosterage.

Some of the children (22%) who were not fostered lived with single parents. Single parenthood was the result of death or divorce. However, most of the children (66.1%) were not living with any of their relatives and hence looked after themselves. Polygamy is another family characteristic feature which was evident in the data. It is known to be practised widely in the northern part of Ghana and accounts for large family sizes which the parents cannot support. On this issue, one interviewee intimated thus: 'we are many; my parents gave birth to too many'. The result is that children either had to assist in the family's economic activity (farming and animal rearing), which the boys in this study described as a daily activity for them, or lived with other family members elsewhere, which was common among the girls. In one of the semi-urban communities for example, the females who were fostered appeared to be house helps as their stories about their daily house chores suggested.

#### **4.1.2 Educational Background of Family Relations**

About 34% of the 140 never-enrolled children interviewed in the four communities did not know the educational backgrounds of their parents. The rest were sure that their fathers or mothers did go to school. However, most of the children could not tell the level of education their parents had attained. It can therefore be seen that the majority of the never-enrolled children interviewed had illiterate parents. Also, 47.1% claimed that none of their family members living with them in the same household was educated. The children were asked

about who took the decision that they should not go to school. One hundred and thirty-three (133) were able to give a response whilst the other 7 could not tell. For those who could tell, 44.4% attributed it to their parents; 48.2% to foster parents and 7.4% to themselves. Out of 137 children, the majority (56.9%) did not know whether they will ever go to school whilst 37.2% were emphatic that they will go to school one day. The rest had no response. Out of 33 children aged between 6-8 years in the sample, only 39.4% were sure of ever enrolling in school. However, only 27.9% out of 138 children claimed someone had spoken to them about going to school and in most cases it was people other than their parents or relatives.

Some of the children expressed knowledge about what happens in school and the importance of education. They indicated that learning took place in school, and mentioned some of the subjects they knew about such as mathematics, English and science. They were also aware that 'schooling makes livelihood easy and prepares one for the future'; 'school makes people's lives better' and that 'people earn a lot of money when they have education'. They also knew about the effect of lack of education, and thought that without education, they would not have good jobs and would not be responsible adults in future. They knew that the other children who were in school would have better lives. Consequently, 92.9% of them expressed the desire to go to school, except in the cases of some of the older interviewees who, given their circumstances and ages (mostly 15 and 17) and the poverty level they were acquainted with, did not see that in the near or distant future they would ever go to school.

## **4.2 Family and Community Conditions that Act as Barriers to School Enrolment**

### **4.2.1 Socio-economic Characteristics**

Though the interviewees did not indicate their parents or guardians' occupation, their stories about their daily activities revealed what their parents were engaged in. Whilst the boys were engaged in farming and animal rearing with their fathers, the girls assisted their mothers or foster parents to do the house chores or farming. Some also sold various items for their foster parents. The older girls learnt trades such as dressmaking and hairdressing and the boys learnt bicycle repairing, corn milling and tailoring, among other trades, but the majority of them were farmers and cattle breeders/herders. Others also indicated that they were engaged in other activities such as selling fuel, butchering, and using donkeys to fetch water to sell.

Only 5 girls (9 and 15 years) and 7 boys (between 9 and 15 years) revealed what they earned from the jobs they did. Each of the girls worked for about 8 hours a day and was paid Gh¢2 and Gh¢3. Two boys worked as butchers and were paid Gh¢2 each in a week for working 3 and 6 hours a day respectively. One earned about Gh¢2 each week from fetching and selling water on a donkey. In one of the semi-urban communities, 4 out of the 21 boys interviewed indicated that they were bicycle repairer-apprentices, sometimes alongside farming activities and were paid Gh¢2 each week.

The socio-economic activities described above by the boys in this study (farming and cattle rearing), indicated what their families and communities were noted for. However, here again, the family and community conditions varied. It was only in one of the rural communities that the boys talked about migrating. It did not feature in any of the stories from the other communities. Most of the boys claimed that they migrated, maybe to graze their cattle. In the other rural community, many girls (and in a few cases, boys) talked about babysitting, in addition to learning various trades such as dressmaking and hairdressing. The boys also indicated that they were engaged in other activities such as selling fuel, butchering, fetching

water with a donkey to sell, among others. Interestingly, it was only in this community that many of the children (even as young as 7 and 8 years) went to video shows and dances in the evenings, indicating that it may be a vibrant commercial community, unlike the other communities.

#### **4.2.2 Reasons for Non-school Attendance**

Table 1 shows that most of the children (55.8%) could not point to any critical event that prevented them from enrolling in school. Out of the 62 children who claimed that their inability to enrol in school could be traced to some critical event, the majority (48.4%) mentioned their involvement in economic activities. According to the participants' stories, poverty is the main reason as they were involved in economic activities mostly to help their parents/guardians or themselves. Therefore, their parents (in the case of the boys, their fathers) decided that they should assist in the family's economic activities, which is usually farming or animal rearing. Fostering mostly with grandmother or aunt was the second highest reason (24.2%) for non-school enrolment, which appeared to be related to poverty and cultural practices. Family shocks such as the death of a parent, or the break-up of a family due to divorce were also commonly cited reasons.

**Table 1: Reasons for Non-school Enrolment in Northern Ghana (N=62)**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Economic activities	30	48.4
Fostering	15	24.2
Family shock (loss of parent, divorce, loss of household income)	14	22.6
Migration	1	1.6
Serious illness	1	1.6
Trauma	1	1.6

### **4.3 Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of Children in Southern Ghana**

#### **4.3.1 Age and Family Background**

In all the four communities (two rural and two semi-urban) the ages of the never-enrolled children interviewed were between 6 and 15 years. The majority of the children (65%) were however, between the ages of 9 and 15 years. The 39 children were made up of 26 boys and 13 girls. A third of the children lived with both parents, whilst 35.9% lived with their mothers. The rest lived with their aunt/uncle or grandmother. Their stories revealed that single parenthood was mostly due to divorce, death of one parent, re-marriage (step parenting) and fostering. However, only 7 children lived with foster parents.

#### **4.3.2 Educational Background of Family relations**

Similar to what was found with participants in the northern part of Ghana, more than 64% of the children did not know about the education level of their parents. Those who knew mostly indicated that their parents did not go to school. Only two of them indicated that their fathers had had some education, but they did not know what level they attained.

The children's stories show that most of them (64.1%) had siblings who were enrolled in school. Some of the siblings had just enrolled in school in KG, Grade 1 or Grade 2 though they were overage at the time of the data collection (e.g. 12 years in Grade 2; 9 years in KG;

11 years in Grade 1; 18 years in Grade 2). It appears that they had been enrolled because of the capitation grant and school-feeding programme. About 26% did not have any siblings enrolled in school. Six of the children could not say who decided they should not go to school. The rest attributed their non-enrolment in school to their parents (23.1%), foster parents (34.4%) and themselves (28.2%). Children at this age should not be allowed to take the decision not to go to school. However, this happens because of lack of parental responsibility and control. When children are allowed to take care of themselves at such a young age, parents/guardians have very little control over them.

The children knew about the importance of education and the consequences of non-school enrolment. Some of these were expressed as follows:

You can go abroad when you are educated;  
Schooling is good; it will take me very high in society;  
If I don't go to school, I will have no job and no money;  
Life will be hard;  
I will suffer in life.

Although they knew what they could obtain from education, some of them (17.9%) thought they had missed it forever. This feeling was expressed thus:

... school is more important than fishing, but because I did not get help at the beginning, I don't think I will enjoy it now; I have taken to fishing; I will not be able to learn when I go to school (12-year-old boy).

For such children, they had resigned themselves to what they knew would be detrimental to their lives because they were helpless. However, the majority of the children (76.9%) said they will go to school if given the opportunity. Unfortunately, only eight of the children indicated that someone from their household had ever had contact with a school about getting them enrolled.

#### **4.4 Family and Community Conditions that Act as Barriers to School Enrolment**

##### **4.4.1 Socio-economic Characteristics: Their Parents'/Guardians' Occupation**

In Mfantseman, the children's fathers were mostly fishermen and their mothers were fishmongers. The jobs the children said they wanted to do in future demonstrate what they are familiar with in their immediate locality. Whilst the girls wanted to smoke fish, braid hair, sew or sell, the boys wanted to be fishermen or learn a trade such as carpentry, tailoring or driving. In one of the semi-urban communities for example, all the five boys indicated that they go fishing. The normal practice was that their share of the fish was given to their relatives, mostly their mothers, aunts or grandmothers to smoke and sell to take care of the family.

In such situations, it was the boys' fishing that brought income to the family. A 14-year-old boy for example said that he slept with the fishermen in a hut at the beach so that when they were going fishing around midnight, they would take him along. Sometimes, they migrated to other towns when fishing in their own town was not booming. They stayed in other towns for about a month. While there, they sold their share of the fish and sent the money to their mothers.

Only 6 of the girls earned money from the work they did. The amounts were meagre, the maximum being Gh¢5 a day. The rest of the girls however, earned nothing from the work they did. In one instance, a 9-year-old girl who said she assisted her foster mother to smoke and sell fish in addition to other house chores was not paid. Others sold for their mothers and hence were not expected to be paid anything.

#### **4.4.2 Reasons for Non-school Attendance**

Most children could not explain why they were not enrolled in school. Those who could give reasons cited family shock as the main reason for non-school enrolment, and in most cases this led to single parenthood. Especially in the case of single parenthood, some of the children were enrolled while others waited for their turn. Fishing seemed to be the economic activity that engaged the children's attention. They spent the whole day loitering around the beach, sometimes waiting to help the fishermen to drag their nets so that they would be given some fish to sell. Even on non-fishing days, the children hang around the beach with the fishermen as they mended their nets. Consequently, like the dropouts in Ananga' (2011) research, the interviewees for this study were found there. But they saw this as a consequence of not being enrolled in school rather than the cause of it. Non-enrolment was therefore mainly due to poverty and lack of parental responsibility and control.

Table 2 shows that in contrast to the Savelugu-Nanton sample, fosterage did not emerge as a major reason given for never enrolling in Mfantseman, but migration did, perhaps as it is connected to the fishing industry. Family shock was the most frequently cited cause of never enrolment.

**Table 2: Reasons for Non-school Enrolment in Southern Ghana (N=11)**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Family shock (loss of parent, divorce, loss of household income)	6	54.5
Migration	3	27.3
Economic activities	1	9.1
Trauma	1	9.1

In a few cases, a lack of interest in education was cited as a reason for never enrolment. One girl (12 years) said, 'I have never been interested in schooling. I think I will not understand anything I will be taught in school'. Another boy said 'I saw someone punished severely at school'. Consequently, when asked what he thought happened in school, he mentioned 'caning'.

## **5. Issues Emerging from the Data**

### **5.1 Individual/Household Factors**

#### **5.1.1 Household Education, Employment and Socio-economic Status (SES)**

The literature provides evidence to show that socio-economic and occupational groupings are typically found to be associated with school participation (Dreze & Kingdon, 2001). Particularly in Ghana and generally in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, there is also evidence that parents' education is a strong determinant of children's schooling, and may be considered to reflect 'preferences' for education or child labour (Sackey, 2007; Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1997; UNESCO, 2005). In this study, as was indicated in the data, the education level of the family of the children who participated in the study was very low. Most of the respondents who lived with their own parent(s) in both the north and south of the country indicated that their parents (especially the mothers) had had no education.

This situation seems to confirm what Pal (2004) and Dumas et al. (2004) found in Peru and Senegal respectively that primary and secondary education of the father as well as that of the mother significantly enhances the likelihood of primary education of children, with the mother's education having a more positive impact on children's education. Where mothers had obtained some appreciable level of education, knew about the importance education and wished it for their children, their SES became the limiting factor and seemed to determine their 'preference' for other things rather than the education of their children.

Data in this study shows that some children had never been enrolled in school mainly as a result of single parenthood, bereavement, divorce, remarriage and/or large family size. This has a link to parental responsibilities and capacity to send their children to school. Family issues such as these are difficult to predict, legislate for and measure, but clearly are having a significant effect on access to education for some children. Ananga's (2011) work in Mfantseman found similar effects for some regarding dropout, bereavement or family problems, which were found to have contributed to some cases of drop outs. Caring for sick relatives can also be a significant responsibility for children leading to never enrolment, dropout or absenteeism (Ananga, 2011, Orkin, 2011).

#### **5.1.2 Significance of Opportunity Cost of Schooling and the Need for Child Labour**

Lavy (1996) and Akaguri (2010) found that in Ghana, costs have a significant negative effect on enrolment. As a result of poverty, parents and/or guardians are unable to meet the direct and indirect costs of schooling, thus, resulting in the opportunity cost of schooling. Since 2004, efforts have been made by the Government of Ghana to improve access and retention through the fee-free education (capitation grant) and school-feeding programme, and reduce some of the direct and indirect costs of schooling. However, in poverty-endemic communities and households such as the eight communities (north and south) in this study, even where policies and strategies such as fee-free education and capitation grants have been introduced, there is evidence that parents are unable to cater for other educational costs such as buying books and uniforms and other basic school items for their wards (Nestvogel, 1995; Hunt, 2008; Ampiah and Adu-Yeboah, 2009, Akaguri, 2010). In such cases, lack of financial and material assistance increases the opportunity cost of education.



Data in this study shows that majority of the children never enrolled in school due to poverty. The reasons they gave that were connected to economic activities (i.e. farming and fishing), which occurred in rural and fishing communities, and blaming their fathers for non-school enrolment were all the result of poverty. This is illustrated by the story of Kofi in one of the communities in the Mfantseman district shown in Box 1.

**Box 1: Life Story of Kofi**

Kofi was born in the Mfantseman District of the Central Region of Ghana. He is 10 years old. His father did not send him to school but his mother had promised to send him to school when she gets money. However, his mother had not made any contact with the school where they stay. His parents had divorced and the father had remarried. His father has children with his second wife and they were in school. He does not know and could not imagine what school will be like or what really happens there. He could not say what he hopes or expects to be in future or how he will be affected in future for his lack of schooling. He spends most of the day at the beach helping fishermen to pull their nets. Even when there are no activities at the beach he still hangs around the beach doing nothing.

In poor households, pressing economic and basic human needs seemed to compel parents to opt for child labour rather than education even when they saw education as important. Indeed, some of the children in this study were often expected and encouraged to contribute to their families' subsistence by providing labour on farms or in fishing for their parents and other relatives, and working for others to generate income for their own upkeep as quite a sizeable number of children looked after themselves. In this study, the children's non-enrolment can be attributed to priority given to the immediate survival of their families and the children themselves other than the future benefits of schooling. In effect, poverty does not only translate into the opportunity cost of schooling and the need for child labour but also determines the strategy to adopt to ensure the survival of the family (Grimsrud & Stokke, 1997; Liddell, Henzi, & Barrett, 2003). Many children in this study (especially boys from poor households) engaged in economic activities for their families from age 9, depending on their household work patterns and structure. While girls took care of younger siblings so that their mothers could work, or helped their mothers to sell to contribute to the family income, the boys looked after cattle, helped their fathers on the farm, went fishing or did some odd jobs for money or just to assist their parents. In these circumstances, the extra money or productive labour they brought in often represented the household's survival strategy (Grimsrud & Stokke, 1997).

In these cases, poverty seemed to legitimise their non-enrolment in school and involvement in economic activities. Analysis based on data from the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 3, 4 and 5) by Rolleston (2009) highlights the substantial impact of child labour on school attendance, thus supporting the findings of this study. In asking children to help on farms or look after livestock, limits were being placed on the education that a child could receive. It is therefore not surprising that those in the family or close to the children who should have made contact with schools in the locality to get the children enrolled did not seem to be interested in doing so.

### **5.1.3 Fostering and Children's Education**

The literature shows that a child's relationship to the household head affects his/her school participation in economically poor countries including Ghana. This is partly because households may be financially constrained from educating all the children (Glewwe & Jacoby, 1994). Large household sizes, divorce and remarriage and death of a partner are some of the factors found in this study to be linked to never enrolment. The cultural practice of fosterage which is common in Ghana and other parts of West Africa was also raised as a reason for non-enrolment in this study. This was particularly true in the northern sample in Savelugu-Nanton district, where Rolleston (2010, 2011) has also found that fosterage is associated with never enrolment. Hence, the composition of the household, including the nature and extent of dependency among the members were found to impact on schooling decisions. The case of Afua in Box 2 illustrates this.

#### **Box 2: The story of Afua**

Afua was sent to Abidjan when she was very young to live with someone. She is now 10 years old. She was not sent to school by that person and it appears she was a 'child slave' in Abidjan. None of her siblings is in school. Her father is a fisherman but according to Afua he has no money to send her to school. Her mother does not live in the community where she stays and so she stays with her auntie who has promised to send her to school next academic year. She thinks at school children learn and play. She wants to go to school so that she will be, as she puts it "a nice lady in future". She stays at home all day doing nothing. She hopes to be a seamstress in future but thinks it is more likely she will be working in a salon braiding hair.

In households with larger proportions of dependents, sometimes, the biological children of foster parents and younger children were enrolled in school because the older children were often required to act as carers. In this study therefore, some of the children interviewed indicated that some of their siblings were in school. Interestingly, Rolleston (2011) found that non-fostered children living in households where some fostered children lived had the greatest chance of being enrolled and worked the least number of hours. Fostered children tended to live in households that were economically richer and had better educated household heads. Fostered children had roughly the same chance of going to school and worked the same amount of hours as children living in households where no child was fostered which tended to be poorer and smaller.

### **5.2 Community/Contextual Factors**

Outside the household and immediate locale, a mix of regional and contextual factors affects both supply and demand for schooling. These include urban/rural location, the dominant forms of agriculture and the overall level of development including employment opportunities (Dreze & Kingdon, 2001; Baschieri & Falkingham, 2007). Baschieri and Falkingham (2007) demonstrate that while individual, parental and household level characteristics are important in determining children's school enrolment, community factors are also key. This suggests that rather than poverty pushing children into the labour market, some vibrant labour markets (depending on the geographical location) pull children out of school (Duryea, 2003; Ersado, 2005, in Hunt, 2008).

The characteristics of the local communities that were used in this study provided the necessary market for child labour and apparent disinterest in education. In both the southern and northern parts of Ghana in which data was collected for this study, the participants' fathers were mostly fishermen/farmers and their mothers were fishmongers/traders. The occupations of the parents and caregivers were such that the children could help them. The children's aspirations of future jobs were therefore limited to the occupations of their family members and what they saw around them. Obviously to them, schooling did not play any key role in such occupations. The kind of jobs they aspired to do were those they were familiar with in their immediate locality, and the vibrant commercial activities and market days some of the communities were noted for, also seemed to carve a ready market for their 'occupations'. Therefore, the peculiar characteristics of the communities facilitated their earning potential and seemed to cloud their vision of the benefits of schooling even though most of them did not rule out the possibility of going to school one day.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study has been necessitated by the realisation that by 2015, the second of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which mandates nations to ensure that all children would complete a full course of primary schooling, will not be realised.

The findings of this study reaffirm some of the findings of other studies about the factors that contribute to children not enrolling in school. Mainly they are factors associated with poverty, child labour, large family sizes and low levels of parental education. In addition, migration in the south of Ghana and fosterage in the north of Ghana, were also important reasons behind never enrolment. These findings correspond with other CREATE research by Ananga (2011) and Rolleston (2011) in these locations. The role of family shocks and problems emerged as a significant reason for never enrolment, emphasising the importance of supportive parents in education. Often, a combination of these factors creates a more potent force that increases the likelihood of children not enrolling in school than each factor on its own.

Education of parents about the need to send their children to school and enforcing the policy on compulsory enrolment in school may be necessary to get some children to enrol in school. The Education Act, 2008 is very clear about the need to send children of school-going age to school and the penalties for parents who fail to do so. However, it seems legislation is not enough as children were found in the north and south that had never enrolled in school and whose parents and guardians had not received any sanctions. Fosterage in itself may not be an inhibiting factor for children to enrol in school. Rather, it is the combination of the characteristics of the household and their economic status, which is of paramount importance and determining factor. In this study, many of the children were living with their parents and yet they were not in school. Also, in some cases never enrolled children had some of their siblings in school. This shows that the incidence of non-school enrolment in the communities cannot be explained by one factor but rather a combination of several factors and how the configurations of such factors affect enrolment in school.

Finally, the study indicates that it is possible for some never enrolled children to enrol in school albeit too late, considering some of their ages. It must be noted however, that late enrolment in school has its own disadvantages such as the possibility of irregular attendance, repetition and difficulty in learning (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009). All these are at-risk factors that may put these children in a different zone of exclusion (zone 2) where children drop out from school and are excluded after initial entry. For children who are working to support their families or themselves, the challenge is how to be in school and continue to give support without compromising school attendance. In such cases, the families or children might need financial and material assistance to reduce the opportunity cost of schooling. This support could come from the livelihood empowerment against poverty, which is a social protection for the extreme poor and vulnerable, and should include such children in our study.

Schools and communities would also have to take on more responsibility for educating parents on the importance of schooling for children of school-going age. It is expected that headteachers and teachers would seek never-enrolled children in the communities and discuss with their parents the possibility of enrolling the children in school. Findings from the study however, show that in most cases schools had not made any contact with the families of the children in this respect. Most communities sanction members who do not engage in

communal labour or attend compulsory social gatherings. This could be extended to parents and guardians whose children are not enrolled in school.

Schools may also have to organise the academic calendar to suit the economic (farming/fishing) activities of communities. For example, in communities where a high proportion of children have to support their parents or themselves by selling during market days, they could be allowed to do so and adjustments rather made to the timetable. Schools could close on market-days, which are usually once a week and the lost time of five hours or so of school time added to the rest of the four school days.

The central message from this paper is that schools, local authorities and school governing bodies have to promote policies and practices that minimise the incidence of non-school enrolment, and not simply lay the blame on children and their households. To get some of the never-enrolled children back to school, the study suggests that (a) that parents/guardians and communities be sensitised about the benefits of education, (b) the academic calendar in some communities be changed to suit the economic/farming/fishing activities of communities where children's involvement in economic activities is paramount to the survival strategy of their families and therefore would find it very difficult to enrol in school.

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*Understanding the Social and Economic Lives of Never-enrolled Children:  
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### Report summary:

Evidence suggests that human skills and abilities, developed through education, translate into individual social and economic benefits that increase employment opportunities and incomes, national economic growth and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2002; David, 2009). For this reason, through a number of interventions, the Government of Ghana has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring that all children of school-going age are in school. However, many Ghanaian children of school-going age are still not enrolled in school. This study therefore sought to understand the household and community conditions that might be accountable for children's non-school attendance in selected communities in the northern and southern parts of the country. It used an interpretive research approach to elicit the stories of children who have never enrolled in school. Among others, it found that household factors such as fosterage, parents or guardians' inability to meet the direct and indirect costs of schooling, certain socio-economic activities peculiar to the communities and the need for child labour are accountable for children's non-school enrolment. To get some of the never-enrolled children back to school, the study suggests that (a) parents/guardians and communities be sensitised about the benefits of education, (b) the academic calendar in some communities be changed to suit the economic/farming/fishing activities of communities where children's involvement in economic activities is paramount to the survival strategy of their families and they therefore find it very difficult to enrol in school.

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