



COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION AND ACCESS TO PRIMARY SCHOOLING IN NORTHERN GHANA

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This policy brief examines the role of complementary education (CEP) in progress towards Education for All in northern Ghana. The paper looks at the context of basic education that makes complementary education relevant. It also looks at the lessons and benefits of the CEP model and highlights key policy issues that need to be addressed in discussions on the state's attempts to utilise CEP to reach out to all school aged children in marginalised communities in Northern Ghana. It is based on the CREATE Pathways to Access Research Monograph, 'Complementary education and meaningful access to primary education in northern Ghana' (Arkoful, forthcoming).

Introduction

Access to education for all school aged children in Northern Ghana has still not been met despite a number of state interventions since the inception of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education. The Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service acknowledge that CEP has been one of the main strategies for bridging the access gap between northern and southern Ghana.

Complementary education, in particular, the School for Life (SfL) model has been implemented in Northern Ghana for over ten years and supported the state's efforts at providing access to primary education for the underserved communities and school aged children but for whom there will be no opportunity for schooling.

The model has been implemented by NGOs with donor funding in partnerships with communities.

This partnership has enabled a large number of children to access education in marginalised communities. The government has expressed a desire to utilise CEP to provide primary education to the underserved populations of Northern Ghana. But this desire may not materialise unless there is a clear government strategy that appreciates the context, dynamics, characteristic and lessons of the CEP model as is being implemented.

Basic Education in Northern Ghana

In Ghana, despite the giant strides taken to broaden access including the introduction of the capitation grants, there are still issues with access for marginalised and underserved populations especially in Northern Ghana.

CREATE's conceptual model includes seven 'zones of exclusion'. Four of these zones of exclusion are concerned with exclusion from basic education: children who never have the opportunity

to attend or enrol in school (Zone 1), children who enrol but drop out after initial entry (Zone 2), children enrolled in school but attending irregularly or at risk of dropping out (Zone 3) and children who fail to move to the next level after initial basic education (Zone 4) (Lewin, 2007).

There is evidence to show that in Northern Ghana, there are issues with each of these zones of exclusion. (Akyeampong et al, 2007). Full access to basic education in Northern Ghana remains elusive to the government of Ghana, which is the main provider of education. In the Northern region for instance GER is 92% while the completion rate is 69.2%. At the junior secondary school level, which is part of basic education in Ghana, GER is 66.4%, while completion rate is 55% (MOE, 2008). An indication that that while about 8% of children do not have access to school at all, more than a third of those who are enrolled do not complete basic education.

While a lot of progress has been made in the last ten years in bridging the gap between the north and south, the evidence on the ground indicate that state efforts at reaching the underserved through the traditional formal systems are not reaching the most marginalised and deprived communities where due to the small and sparse settlement systems in northern Ghana, some children have not benefitted from the formal system.

Studies done through the EQUIP2 Project funded by USAID have shown that there are several reasons why children are not enrolled in school even after cost reduction or elimination:

... including high opportunity cost, traditional beliefs and values, or the lack of interest. In addition, hidden costs such as uniforms and supplies may still exist, preventing students from enrolling (EQUIP2 Discussion Papers, 2007).

The studies showed that in northern Nigeria, even though school was ostensibly free, parent/guardians whose 6-16 year-old children had never attended school were asked why their children did not go to school. The most commonly cited reasons were related to the costs of schooling; both in terms of direct cost and the opportunity costs of the household's need for the child's labour.

Complementary Education Programmes in Northern Ghana

Complementary or alternative education systems have been known to support government efforts at reaching the underserved in rural marginalised communities (Farrell and Hartwell, 2008).

Complementary education systems are generally run by NGOs sometimes with the tacit support of the state. The School for Life (SfL) complementary education programme (funded by DANIDA) has since 1995 been running classes in deprived communities for children aged 8-14 who have no access to formal education.

The programme targets deprived rural children in Northern Ghana who for socio economic reasons are unable to attend formal school. There is evidence to show that this programme has been successful in enrolling over 150,000 children to participate in nine month functional literacy classes, approximately 80% of whom have been integrated into formal schooling. This programme has also been replicated with funding from USAID and IBIS, another Danish group and succeeded in enrolling children and transitioning them into formal schools. While the number of children benefiting from this programme is small compared to the formal sector, it is obvious that the programme fills an access gap.

Characteristics of the SfL Complementary Education Programme

SfL offers a nine-month literacy cycle in the mother tongue, aimed at assisting children to attain basic literacy skills and then integrate into the formal education system.

The curriculum which focuses on mother tongue literacy and numeracy is based on meeting the first three years of the formal school system's requirements and is delivered using child centred, active learning and multi-grade pedagogy (Farrell and Hartwell, 2008). The programme is designed to ultimately transition the learners into the formal school upon graduation.

Classes are established in remote and deprived areas for children who would otherwise not attend school. Volunteers who are literates in their mother-tongue are recruited from and by the communities to facilitate the classes. The facilitators are given initial three week intensive training and follow-up workshops and trainings.

Furthermore, the children are taught in their mother tongue and not English which makes it possible for them to learn to read, write and acquire some personal and social practices like personal hygiene, environmental sanitation and good farming practices.

The major characteristics of the SFL programme include:

- a focus on children between the age of 8-14 years (50% should be girls)
- communities with complementary schools providing their own teachers or facilitators
- facilitators residents from the community who volunteer to do the work and are literate in the language of the community
- use of mother tongue as both literacy language and medium of instruction
- strong community involvement or animation
- flexible school calendar or hours adapted to the community (Nine months starting from October; 3 hours every afternoon, generally 2 to 5 pm); and, 5 days a week- two off days are typically the market day and Friday or Sunday depending on major day of worship
- allowing children to maintain daily duties and to contribute to everyday activities in the communities
- use of primary school classroom in the afternoon or other suitable places, link with formal education

Benefits of Complementary Education Programmes

Results indicate that one third of the students can read fluently after nine months, and more than 60% of the graduates enter the formal school system and continue their education. Complementary education has also served as a catalyst for both the demand and supply of formal basic education in areas where but for this programme; formal schools would not be functioning.

In the Gushegu District of the Northern Region, in 2007, 50% of formal school children were graduates of School for Life (Hayford and Ghartey, 2007). In Talensi Nabdam, as a result of the implementation of complementary education, the district assembly and district education office have been advocated to open up ten new schools. Meanwhile in Tolon Kumbugu, School for Life has been running classes in communities alongside the formal school for the past ten years.

Education is one key social service delivery that governments are measured by. To date, complementary education in Ghana as in most

countries is donor and NGO driven. The programme has been implemented predominantly in the Northern Region with marginal implementation in the Upper East and Upper West regions.

School for Life has no statistics of the situation in a community after SfL has left because the number of out of school children was exhausted. Given the fact that the conditions that create the demand and supply for complementary education do not change in the beneficiary communities, there is no guarantee that new potential SfL learners will not increase after a few years.

The lessons from these are that complementary education in northern Ghana serves multiple functions:

- On one level it serves as a means of access to education to deprived communities in the 'dark spot areas'
- It also serves as an option for communities who may not be satisfied with the formal system or do not want to attend the formal system
- It also serves as a catalyst for the demand and supply of formal basic education

State utilisation of Complementary Education Programmes

The GES development of a complementary basic education document is an indicator that the state is considering using complementary education as a means to reach the underserved in Northern Ghana. There are however, gaps in current discussions as the state does not seem to be sure how to implement such a venture.

While the government's education strategic plan (ESP) 2003-2015 makes mention of CEP, and CEP has been mentioned as an option in subsequent education sector review reports (ESR 2006, 2008), there is no clear plan to make it a priority in the state efforts to reach marginalised children who cannot attend formal school. The current ESP (2010-2020) does mention support for complementary education, but there is no surety that the formal system and the Ghana Education System (GES) are structured to replicate or implement such a system. There is also no strategy to ensure that the lessons from CEP are utilised to ensure full access to children in deprived communities in Northern Ghana.

SfL's CEP has been successful providing education access to underserved populations because of some its inherent characteristics

including strong local community partnerships, availability of teaching and learning materials, local facilitators recruitment, local language and child centred pedagogy and flexible school calendar and schedules.

The state and GES are not structured to utilise such approaches. In spite of the government's efforts at decentralisation, education management is still centralised in a number of areas including: teacher deployment, school calendars, schedules and pedagogy. The primary school language policy is still unclear in implementation as teacher deployment is not linked to local language capability. These are all critical issues that will need to be addressed in utilising CEP as a formal mechanism to address the access gap in northern Ghana.

It is important that discussions on utilising complementary education programmes or strategies as a formal state strategy in reaching the underserved takes cognisance of the following issues that are critical in the current implementation of complementary education in Northern Ghana:

- Age of learners and how it affects or assist their progress in both CEP and formal school
- Support for graduates on entry into formal school
- Partnership with local communities and NGOs to ensure meaningful access
- How does the state reach the underserved without donor or NGO support given that complementary education to date has been funded by donors?

Policy Implications

It is generally accepted that NGOs have the right structures and capacity to mobilise communities. There is however no formal working relationship between the GES and local NGOs.

For the venture to be successful, it is imperative that the government accelerates its decentralisation efforts to give more room for districts to manage education development. This will create the opportunities for working partnerships between NGOs and district assemblies and district education officials to be able to implement such a strategy with community engagement a central to the strategy development and implementation.

There are also existing government programmes that can be examined to identify how they can be

used to support increased access. These include the National Youth Employment Programme and the Untrained Teachers Diploma Programme. These can be utilised to facilitate local teacher recruitment and mother tongue pedagogy both of which have been critical to the success of CEP.

It is important to note that Sfl has been totally donor funded which puts the sustainability of the programme in doubt. Distinct partnership arrangements with NGOs should take into consideration funding sources and the government should explore the possibility of using the capitation grants mechanism as an initial state funding mechanism.

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