Regional Inequality and

Secondary Education in Ghana

Policy Brief No 1.

Prepared for the World Development Report 2009

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1. Introduction

This brief explores the education dimensions of spatial inequality in Ghana and examines the model secondary schools policy, which was recently adopted by the Government of Ghana (GoG) in an attempt to address this disparity.

The first section of the brief briefly outlines the development, poverty and inequality context in Ghana. The second section examines regional inequality and the education dimension of regional inequality in Ghana. The third section discusses the model secondary schools programme, which has been developed by GoG to specifically address geographic disparities in education and discusses the potential for this policy to reduce regional disparities in education in Ghana.

2. Development, poverty and inequality in Ghana

Ghana has made substantial development progress in recent years and has long been thought of as a star performer in sub-Saharan Africa (Coulombe and Wodon, 2007: 3). Through the Economic Recovery Program, launched in the early 1980s, Ghana has made significant progress in renewing economic growth, with growth averaging 4.5% from 1983 through to 2000 and accelerating to 5.6% in 2004 and 6.2% in 2006 (World Bank, 2007a). Poverty has fallen, with consumption poverty[1] dropping substantially, from 51.7% (1991/92) to 39.5% (1998/99) and then 28.5% (2005/06) (Coulombe and Wodon, 2007: 7). Asset poverty[2] also decreased, from 45.7% (1997) to 38.9% (2003) (Coulombe and Wodon, 2007: 16). This has resulted in Ghana being on track to reduce poverty by half of the 1990 level, well before the target date of 2015 for the Millennium Development Goals (Coulombe and Wodon, 2007: 2). Ghana also has reasonable expectations of achieving middle-income status by 2015 (World Bank, 2007a). Political liberalisation, initiated in the 1990s, has continued, delivering enhanced political rights and civil liberties.

While the economy is growing and poverty levels are declining, Ghana still faces many development challenges. For example, weaknesses in social and human development are reflected in its poor performance as measured by the Human Development Index (138 out of

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[1] More specifically, the indicator of well being by which poverty was measured was based on the household's total consumption per equivalent adult (Coulombe and Wodon, 2007: 7).
[2] Using the national asset-based headcount.

177 countries, in 2003) compared to its rather better, and improving GDP per capita levels (ranked of 123, also in 2003) (World Bank, 2007a).

Inequality poses a significant development challenge for Ghana, and has increased in the last 15 years. This is illustrated by the differences in consumption between the rich and poor. The consumption per equivalent adult at the 90th percentile of the population was in 1991/92 5.2 times higher than at the tenth percentile (Coulombe and Wodon, 2007: 18). By 2005/06, this ratio had increased to 6.4. The adjusted Gini index for consumption per equivalent adult also increased substantially, from 0.353 in 1991/92 to 0.394 in 2005/06 (Coulombe and Wodon, 2007: 19). We know that there are multiple drivers of poverty and inequality, and Coulombe and Wodon (2007: 29-30) find that the probability of being poor is associated with the following characteristics: living in the northern regions (versus other regions); rurality (versus urbanity); being in a household with an older household head (poverty tendency increases with household head age); larger households (versus smaller households); marriage (versus being single, separated or divorced); having low levels of education (the probability of being poor decreases as education of the household head increases); being reliant on agriculture for your livelihood (followed by manufacturing and construction); being self employed in agriculture (followed by wage earners in the private informal sector) and not owning any land (versus land ownership).

3. Regional inequality and secondary education

The regional dimension of inequality is significant in Ghana. Poverty is much reduced in Accra and around the Rural Forest area but is still very widespread in the northern regions (Northern, Upper East and Upper West) (Coulombe and Wodon, 2007: 4).

The developmental North-South divide found in Ghana arises from a combination of circumstances and policies, including the geographical concentration of agricultural resources and activities (such as cocoa, minerals and forest resources) in the Southern regions; the British colonial legacy of investing more heavily in regions where exploitable resources, such as diamonds, gold, timber and cocoa, were available and cheap to produce and export; the transfer of labour and lack of educational investment from the northern region where labour was sourced and post-colonial investment patterns and development strategies (Langer et al., 2007: 15). As Jebuni, McKay and Shepherd (2007: 3) argue, northern Ghana has essentially 'lagged' behind the rest of the country and as a result Ghana has missed significant opportunities to increase the country's average income and foreign exchange earnings, and also further bed-down national stability. The degree to which regional disparities impact on development outcomes is reflected in the International Development Association, International Monetary Fund and World Bank's identification of targeting poverty disparities and addressing inequality within and between regions as central to improving Ghana's economic performance and human development indicators (International Development Association and International Monetary Fund, 2006: 3; World Bank, 2007).

Vigorous human resource development is one of three strategic priorities of Ghana's Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy II (GPRS II) (National Planning Commission, 2005: xxi).[3] The main goal of the human resource development priority is 'to ensure the development of a knowledgeable, well-trained and disciplined labor force with the capacity to drive and sustain private sector led growth' (National Planning Commission, 2005: xxv). Education is central to the GPRSII, comprising a major sub-sector of the human resource development pillar (National Planning Commission, 2005a: 42). Ghana's commitment to education is

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[3] The other priorities are continued macroeconomic stability and good governance and civic responsibility.

reflected in Ghana's Free Universal Basic Education policy, which aims to provide two years of kindergarten, six years of primary school and three years of junior high school free to all children in Ghana (Government of Ghana, 2007). Significant improvements in education access indicators reflect this commitment. Both primary and secondary school enrolment has increased (World Bank, 2007b)[4]. Nevertheless Ghana's gross and net enrolment figures are still below the sub-Saharan Africa average at the primary level, although they are above average at the secondary level (World Bank, 2006). There is a strong correlation between poverty and low primary and secondary net and gross enrolment rates (Coulombe and Wodon, 2007: 67), and despite free basic education, poorer people are still less able to educate their children[5].

Education access (measured in terms of gross enrolment rate and net enrolment rate) and education performance (measured in terms of Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE) pass rates) have a regional dimension in Ghana, as Table 1 demonstrates. Table 1 also shows the link between poverty and poor education access and performance indicators.

Table 1: Poverty and education access by region

Region	Poverty	GER	NER	SSSCE Pass Rate: Maths	SSSCE Pass Rate: English
Ashanti		36.6	13.3	37.0	36.6
Brong Ahafo		27.6	8.7	36.7	39.4
Central		46.1	18.5	33.0	37.5
Eastern		45.1	44.0	32.3	36.8
Greater Accra		20.9	7.7	32.3	42.3
Northern		22.0	6.2	15.5	11.6
Upper East		19.5	6.6	30.1	17.1
Upper West		22.9	5.3	33.2	28.7
Volta		26.6	7.8	25.6	26.9
Western		24.1	8.7	25.6	27.7
National		**30.2**	**10.6**	**31.6**	**34.8**

Source: SRIMPR Division, Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, EMIS Project

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[4] At the primary level, the gross enrolment ratio has increased from 72.1% in 1990 to 88.4% in 2005 and the net enrolment ratio has increased from 52.4% in 1990 to 65% in 2005. At the secondary level, gross enrolment has increased from 37.4% in 2000 to 46.4% in 2006 and net enrolment has increased from 31.8% in 2000 to 37.0% in 2005 (World Bank, 2007b).

[5] In 2005/06, at the secondary level, net and gross enrolment was been 36.1% and 44.2% in poor urban households compared with 57.7% and 72.6% in non-poor urban households. In rural areas, net and gross enrolment was 22.3% and 39.1% in poor rural households compared with 25.6% and 45.0% in non-poor rural households (Coulombe and Wodon, 2007: 67).

4. Addressing geographic disparities through the model secondary school policy

Persistent geographic disparities in education access are recognised in GPRSII one of the three policy issues and gaps in the secondary education sub-sector (National Planning Commission, 2005a: 42).[6] To address this, the GoG has instituted a model secondary school policy. This involves upgrading one secondary school in each district to 'model' secondary school status, 'in order to address the issues of geographic disparities in access to quality education' (National Planning Commission, 2005a: 43). The objective is to provide each district with a school that could be compared favourably with the leading schools in the country. The programme featured in the first *Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy 2003-2005* (see National Planning Commission, 2003: 101; 145), where enhancing the delivery of social services to ensure locational equity and quality was a priority (National Planning Commission, 2003: 144). In the initial phase, 31 schools were identified for upgrading after assessment of physical infrastructure and academic requirements. The *Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy Annual Progress Report 2004* shows that in 2004, 65.5% of work on the first batch of 31 schools was complete and the second phase – which would upgrade 25 additional schools – was being planned (National Planning Commission, 2004: 94).[7]

Appelton *et al* (2003) find, almost universally, that education lifts people out of poverty. Additionally, they find that the returns to education – in terms of the increment in income that accrues to each year of education – are much higher for those with higher levels of education. In the Ghana context, Coulombe and Wodon (2007: 52) also emphasise the value of secondary education. They find that primary education completion does not result in a statistically significant gain in earnings, but secondary education, particularly second tier secondary education, does have an impact. (see the working paper by Rob Palmer " Education, Training and Labour Market Outcomes in Ghana: A review of the evidence on the RECOUP web site which argues that poor quality of education at the primary level is causing a drop in the outcomes and "returns" to education at the primary level and can be misleading to government's like Ghana who may shift towards investment at the secondary level).

This economic argument appears to be one of the drivers of the model secondary school policy (Don Taylor, DFID Ghana, pers. comm.). Some senior people in Ghana appear to believe that achieving basic education has been 'cracked', drawing on high enrolment and attendance rates to support their claims. Following on from this, it is argued that the next step is to focus on secondary and tertiary education, to improve employability and productivity (Don Taylor, DFID Ghana, pers. comm.). There also appears to be a political dimension to this policy. Throughout the mid 1980s and 1990s, it became obvious that opportunities for post primary education were limited, mostly to towns and cities and this largely remains the case today. Senior secondary schools in rural areas are poorly resourced and as a result, there is much demand for a small number of government-subsidised elite senior secondary schools, which are in urban areas, are well resourced (heavily funded through the schools' 'old boy' networks) and have large numbers of studies progressing onto prestigious such as the University of Ghana (Kwame Akyeampong, University of Sussex, pers. comm.). There has been significant demand placed on the GoG to address this inequality and, assuming somewhat driven by this demand, model secondary schools were an election promise of President Kufuor's government (Leslie Casely-Hayford, Associates for Change, pers. comm.).

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[6] Note that geographic disparities are recognised as one of the four policy issues and gaps that need to be addressed in the basic education sub-sector.

[7] There are 478 public senior secondary schools and 127 approved private senior secondary schools in Ghana (Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, 2007: 8).

Unfortunately, no studies have yet been conducted to assess the impact of the model senior secondary school policy on reducing inter-district disparities in education outcomes (Kwame Akyeampong, University of Sussex, pers comm.). The preliminary observations of Ghana education experts are varying. On the one hand, criticism has been expressed about the over-emphasis on equality in distribution under this policy. The approach of establishing one model school in each district reflects a tendency in Ghana to distribute public goods equally between districts (irrespective of needs) rather than targeting disadvantaged areas and marginalised populations to achieve pro-poor and geographically equalising outcomes. By failing to target resources to the poorest districts - or the districts with the worst education facilities – the government is missing an opportunity to bring districts with the weakest educational facilities and performance up to a minimal level, set by government, as acceptable (Don Taylor, DFID Ghana, pers. comm.). In addition, there is concern that this policy further entrenches vertical, or class-based, divisions (Don Taylor, DFID Ghana, pers. comm.). Students must meet the senior secondary school admission criteria, which is more challenging for students from poor households and poor districts, to gain acceptance to a model secondary school (Kwame Akyeampong, University of Sussex, pers. comm.). Therefore, the policy does not address fundamental, underlying inequalities; those with more economic and social capital can manage and benefit from the system (Kwame Akyeampong, University of Sussex, pers. comm.).

On the other hand, the potential for this policy to reduce regional inequalities in senior secondary education in Ghana is recognised. While the model secondary school policy may not address underlying structural inequalities in the short term, it may have the potential to address these in the long term. Properly resourced schools may attract teachers to remote and rural areas, motivate teaching staff and therefore improve education outcomes. The policy may have a circular effect. Students who reap the benefits of model secondary schools may become teachers and be motivated to return to their districts and contribute through education. In addition, the facilities and resources offered in model secondary schools give students something to aspire to (Leslie Casely-Hayford, Associates for Change, pers. comm.). Essentially, it will enable students to have access to good quality senior secondary education across the country and regardless of district, reducing the current bias towards a small number of prestigious government funded and urban based senior secondary schools. It may also improve the chances of students from remote and rural districts gaining admission to competitive universities (Kwame Akyeampong, University of Sussex, pers. comm.).

In principle, the focus on reducing geographic disparities in senior secondary education is laudable. The criticality of quality basic education must not be ignored, however (Kwame Akyeampong, University of Sussex, pers. comm.; Leslie Casely-Hayford, Associates for Change, pers. comm.; Don Taylor, DFID Ghana, pers.comm.). The quality of basic education – particularly in rural areas – is crucial in tackling regional disparities across welfare dimensions and the incentives must be in place to ensure that the rates of return of education are good enough for households to choose education over agricultural production (Leslie Casely-Hayford, pers. comm.). While the model secondary school policy has the potential to address regional inequalities in education to some degree, it is just part of the solution (Kwame Akyeampong, University of Sussex, pers comm.).

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