ACCELERATE ED+ POLICY BRIEF

Advancing Education Solutions: Research for Scaling up Education Innovations in Emergency and Fragilities and FCV Affected Areas of Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria

Existing Education in Emergencies Innovations in Ghana: A Focus on Effectiveness, Scalability and Sustainability

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Abstract

This policy brief explores innovative Education in Emergencies initiatives in Ghana to ensure learning continuity for children affected by crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic[1], conflicts, wars, and climate-related disasters. Drawing on evidence from a range of programmes—such as Complementary Basic Education, Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education, psychosocial support, and digital learning initiatives—this brief highlights the strategies for reaching out-of-school children in fragile, conflict and violence (FCV) contexts. These approaches include low-tech community information centres, accelerated education programmes, and psychosocial models. The brief concludes with policy recommendations aimed at institutionalizing successful innovations, scaling up low-tech community information centres, integrating gender-responsive strategies, and enhancing coordination and financing for EiE in Ghana. The insights presented offer a roadmap for building a more inclusive and resilient education system capable of withstanding current and future shocks and crises.

Introduction

[1] COVID-19 is no longer directly impacting schooling, but strategies adopted in response to that crisis continue to be used to address other crises.

Education in Emergencies (EiE) refers to quality learning opportunities for all age groups in situations of crisis, including conflicts, forced displacement, natural disasters, and public health emergencies such as COVID-19. These crises often disrupt formal education systems, increase vulnerabilities, and threaten the educational rights and futures of children and youth. In response, EiE serves as a critical life-sustaining intervention that fosters protection, resilience, and recovery through inclusive, flexible, and context-specific educational approaches.

Ghana, like many countries in West Africa, has experienced various forms of emergencies that have adversely impacted the education sector. The climate-related disasters such as floods, as well as localized conflicts and violence spilling into Ghana from neighbouring countries—particularly in northern Ghana—have heightened the urgency to provide responsive and resilient education solutions. These disruptions have disproportionately affected children already at risk, including out-of-school children (OOSC) in rural and underserved or internally displaced communities.

In the face of these challenges, Ghana has witnessed the emergence of several innovative educational responses that seek to bridge learning gaps, ensure continuity, and support marginalized learners. These innovations range from low-tech learning to Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs). As such, in this policy brief, we examine the existing EiE initiatives in Ghana, their effectiveness in reaching the most vulnerable learners, and highlights their potential for scalability. It concludes with recommendations for policy makers, development partners, and practitioners.

Key Education in Emergencies Innovations, Effectiveness, Scalability and Sustainability Initiatives in Ghana

1) Accelerated Education Programme and Complementary Basic Education: Complementary Education Agency and NGOs

Ghana's Accelerated Education Programme (AEP), led by the Complementary Education Agency (CEA) in collaboration with NGOs such as School for Life (SfL), the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT), and AfriKids, offers a proven second-chance learning pathway for out-of-school children (OOSC) aged 8 to 14. These initiatives have been especially effective in reaching children from marginalized, rural, and underserved communities—those often excluded due to poverty, distance from schools, displacement, disability, or language barriers.

The cornerstone of these programs is a nine-month, intensive, learner-centred curriculum focused on foundational literacy and numeracy, delivered in the learner's mother tongue by trained community-based facilitators. These facilitators are typically recruited locally and receive pre-service training in child-centred pedagogies, psychosocial support, inclusive practices, and early grade teaching methods. Their performance is regularly monitored through coaching, refresher training, and supervision by district Ghana Education Service (GES) officers and implementing partners.

At the end of each 9 months learning cycle, learners undergo placement assessments conducted jointly with GES officials and are typically transitioned into Primary 3 or 4 based on their age and competencies. The results have been consistently impressive: implementation data from Associates for Change (2023) show that over 90% of learners transition into formal education, with more than 80% retained after one year in formal schools, underscoring the model's effectiveness in reintegrating highly vulnerable learners.

In northern Ghana, SfL and GILLBT have contextualized this approach through culturally relevant, language-sensitive models that address both academic and social barriers to education. Their programs operate in close collaboration with local schools, head teachers, and school management committees to facilitate smooth transitions and ensure that psychosocial and academic support continue post-reintegration.

Similarly, AfriKids applies the CBE model through a combination of formal school support and non-formal learning centres in approximately 45 communities across Bawku Municipal, Bawku West, and Bongo districts. Working with over 20 public schools, AfriKids has reached more than 4,200 learners through both school-based and community-based interventions. The organization also engages in community sensitization, child protection, and capacity-building for school governance structures—fostering community ownership and sustainability.

Collectively, these AEP and CBE models have demonstrated clear effectiveness in addressing educational exclusion and bridging equity gaps, particularly in emergency-affected and underserved areas. Their low-cost, high-impact design, strong community embeddedness, and alignment with national education priorities position them as scalable and sustainable solutions. With continued investment and integration into Ghana's education planning and financing structures—particularly at the district level—these programs can be institutionalized and expanded to reach the remaining out-of-school children, contributing significantly to Ghana's goal of achieving universal, equitable basic education.

2) Gender-Focused Programmes: Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education

The Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education (STAGE) programme was a targeted, multi-year intervention that addressed the educational exclusion and socio-economic vulnerability of out-of-school girls and adolescent mothers in some of Ghana's most marginalized and hard-to-reach communities. Funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and implemented between 2018 and 2023, STAGE was delivered in partnership with the Ministry of Education and civil society organizations such as Afrikids, World Education Inc., and the Varkey Foundation. The programme operated across six regions—Northern, North East, Savannah, Upper East, Upper West, and Oti—reaching over 17,000 highly vulnerable girls in more than 600 learning centres and schools.

STAGE's holistic model combined accelerated literacy and numeracy instruction with life skills training, vocational readiness, mentorship, and robust community engagement. Delivered over a nine-month learning cycle, the intervention was designed to respond to the specific barriers faced by marginalized girls—including early marriage, poverty, child labour, and gender-based violence—through context-sensitive and community-owned strategies. Local

facilitators were trained not only in pedagogy but also in gender sensitivity and psychosocial support, ensuring that the learning environment was inclusive and trauma informed.

The programme's impact has been both significant and far-reaching. A 2023 evaluation by Associates for Change found that over 90% of participating girls were successfully reintegrated after the learning cycle: approximately 65% transitioned into formal education (mostly at upper primary or junior high levels), while another 25% pursued vocational pathways through partnerships such as with Women's Empowerment in Entrepreneurship (WEE) North. Many graduates initiated small businesses or entered apprenticeships in trades such as tailoring, hairdressing, and soap-making—demonstrating a clear link between education, economic empowerment, and self-reliance. Moreover, STAGE contributed to a measurable reduction in girls' involvement in unpaid domestic labour and enhanced their confidence, voice, and leadership in their communities.

STAGE's strong outcomes underscore its effectiveness in reaching the most disadvantaged learners—those who are often invisible within conventional education systems. Its success was rooted in its gender-responsive design, community-based delivery, and alignment with national policy frameworks. These features also make the model highly scalable and adaptable to other fragile or underserved contexts in Ghana and beyond. With adequate policy backing and sustained investment, STAGE offers a replicable blueprint for integrating out-of-school girls and adolescent mothers into lifelong learning and livelihoods pathways—thereby advancing both educational equity and sustainable development.

3) Teacher Training in Socio-emotional Learning: NABOCADO and Catholic Relief Services

In response to the unique educational and psychosocial challenges faced by out-of-school children (OOSC) affected by conflict, displacement, and chronic poverty, the Navrongo-Bolgatanga Catholic Diocesan Development Organization (NABOCADO), in partnership with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), has implemented a pioneering Education in Emergencies (EiE) intervention in Ghana's Upper East Region. The programme combines accelerated learning with psychosocial and socio-emotional learning (SEL) support tailored to the realities of children in emergency-affected and trauma-prone communities.

At the core of the initiative is the deployment of trained community-based facilitators—many of whom are not formal teachers but trusted local actors—who receive intensive capacity-building in trauma-sensitive education, psychosocial first aid, and inclusive pedagogy. These facilitators are equipped with SEL tools that help children identify, understand, and manage emotional stress arising from experiences of violence, loss, instability, or neglect. The learning sessions are delivered in safe, community-based learning spaces that are intentionally designed to foster trust, healing, and resilience among learners.

This approach has proven highly effective in reaching some of the most vulnerable and often overlooked children—those living in hard-to-reach, conflict-prone areas, particularly in places like Tarikom in the Bawku West District. By embedding SEL in foundational learning and centering children's well-being, the programme has facilitated the successful reintegration of

many learners into formal education, while also addressing underlying emotional and social barriers that hinder long-term learning and development.

In addition to its immediate impact, the NABOCADO-CRS model holds significant potential for scalability and sustainability. Its community-based delivery system, reliance on locally recruited facilitators, and alignment with the national Inclusive Education Policy make it adaptable for replication across other emergency-prone districts in Ghana. Furthermore, the training and mentoring structures developed for facilitators can be institutionalized within district Ghana Education Service (GES) structures to expand trauma-informed teaching practices in both non-formal and formal education settings.

As Ghana seeks to strengthen its EiE ecosystem, NABOCADO and CRS's integrated SEL intervention offers a replicable and cost-effective model for addressing the holistic needs of OOSC in fragile contexts. It demonstrates that placing children's emotional recovery and well-being at the centre of education can accelerate learning gains, foster resilience, and support a more inclusive and healing-centred education system.

4) Radio and Digital Learning: USAID, UNICEF, Mastercard Foundation & FAWE, Pencils of Promise

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the widespread closure of schools, Ghana's education stakeholders—including the Ghana Education Service (GES), USAID, UNICEF, the Mastercard Foundation, and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE-Ghana)—launched a series of innovative radio and digital learning interventions to maintain learning continuity, especially for children in remote and marginalized communities. The Ghana Learning Radio Program, delivered in English and 11 local languages, focused on foundational literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional learning. It successfully reached hundreds of thousands of learners, including out-of-school children and those with disabilities, offering a low-cost, high-impact solution for sustaining education during emergencies. In addition, Pencils of Promise implemented a radio literacy programme aimed at maintaining learning continuity for students were unable to attend school due to COVID-19.

In parallel, UNICEF and the Mastercard Foundation scaled up virtual and distance learning platforms—including SMS, radio, television, and mobile applications—to reach over nine million children and youth. These interventions prioritized equity by tailoring content for learners without internet or devices, using basic mobile technology, and establishing community-supported hubs. FAWE-Ghana further expanded the reach of educational content and gender-sensitive messaging through Community Information Centres (CICs), strategically linking them with radio programming in marketplaces and public spaces. This approach enhanced access for those without radios and embedded key education and protection messages into everyday community life.

In addition, the GIGA initiative is a global partnership between UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which aims to connect every school to the internet and every student to information, opportunity, and choice. In Ghana, the initiative supports efforts to strengthen digital learning by improving school connectivity and providing access to online and offline educational resources.

Collectively, these initiatives have demonstrated that radio and digital technologies can effectively deliver education to remote learners and support inclusion during crises. Their alignment with national education standards, strong public-private collaboration, and adaptability across diverse contexts underscore their potential for sustainability and scalability. With continued investment in connectivity, teacher training, and localized content, these models can be institutionalized as part of Ghana's long-term strategy for resilient, equitable, and tech-enabled education.

Conclusion

Ghana's experience with Education in Emergencies (EiE) reveals a promising landscape of innovation, adaptability, and community-driven resilience. The proliferation of diverse educational interventions—ranging from accelerated education programmes and radio learning to psychosocial support and mobile learning solutions—demonstrates the country's capacity to respond effectively to disruptions caused by conflict, displacement, pandemics, and climate-related events. These initiatives have not only helped bridge learning gaps for out-of-school children and other vulnerable groups but have also laid the groundwork for a more inclusive, equitable, and future-ready education system.

Evidence from programme evaluation highlights the effectiveness of context-responsive approaches, rooted in community engagement, mother-tongue instruction, and flexible delivery modalities. Interventions such as CBE, STAGE, SfL and NABOCADO/CRS's psychosocial support underscore the protective and transformative role education can play in crisis settings. Similarly, technology-enabled platforms like the Ghana Learning Radio Programme, GIGA, and other digital learning solutions have illustrated the scalability and cost-effectiveness of reaching marginalized learners in last-mile communities.

To ensure these gains are sustained and integrated into long-term education planning, it is essential to strengthen institutional support, security consistent funding, and promote policy alignment. Crucially, engaging with the Ministry of Education-particularly at the regional and district levels-is vital to ensure that interventions complement the formal education system, reinforce national education priorities, and avoid duplication or conflict with ongoing government efforts. By fostering coordination and shared ownership, Ghana can continue to advance a resilient and inclusive education system that leaves no child behind-even in times of crisis.

Policy recommendations

1. The Government of Ghana should build on successful initiatives like STAGE ensuring that all EiE programmes include components that empower girls, engage local communities, and reduce cultural and economic barriers to girls' education, adapting the strategies for these initiatives to the local contexts.

2. Secondly, socio-emotional learning components should be mainstreamed into both formal and complementary basic education, especially in conflict-affected areas, by scaling NABOCADO/CRS and similar trauma-informed education models.

3. The government must establish dedicated national and district-level budget lines for Education in Emergencies (EiE), ensuring alignment with key policy frameworks such as the Education Strategic Plan (ESP), the inclusive education policy, and disaster risk reduction strategies. To support this, Technical and Financial Partners (TFPs) and implementing organizations should actively collaborate with the Ministry of Education and relevant government bodies to disclose and coordinate their investments in EiE. This collaborative approach will promote transparency, reduce duplication of efforts, and enable the integration of external contributions into national planning and budgeting processes—thereby enhancing the efficiency, coherence, and sustainability of EiE interventions.

4. Furthermore, NGOs and communities must foster inclusive, multi-stakeholder collaboration that brings together local government authorities, NGOs, the private sector (including organizations such as the Mastercard Foundation, Vodafone Ghana Foundation, and MTN Ghana Foundation), as well as development partners and donor agencies. Such coordinated engagement is essential to harmonize Education in Emergencies (EiE) strategies, align with national priorities, and ensure the effective use of resources. Strengthening these partnerships will enhance collective impact, reduce fragmentation, and support the scaling of successful, context-responsive education interventions.

5. Moreover, the government and development partners must invest in regular monitoring, evaluation, and learning to generate context-specific evidence on what works in EiE. This includes supporting research organizations like Associates for Change and other local think tanks to inform decision-making and policy reforms.

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