

Synthesis Report

“Increasing Access to Quality Education for Rural and Marginalised Children in West Africa— A Comparative Study of Accelerated Education and Girls Focussed Programmes in Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone”

Out of School Mapping Study

Cross Country Synthesis of Mapping Study reports

2023

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	iv
List of Acronyms	v
Acknowledgements	vii
Executive Summary	viii
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Background to the study	1
1.2 The out of school mapping study	2
1.3 The Out-of-School Phenomenon across Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone	2
1.4 The efforts at addressing out of school situation across the countries of focus	5
2.0 Methodology	8
2.1 Study design across the three countries.....	8
2.2 Sampling procedures across the three countries.....	8
2.3 Instrumentation	9
2.4 Data collection procedure and data management across countries	10
2.5 Data analysis	10
2.6 Ethical considerations	10
2.7 Gender, equity, and inclusion considerations across the three countries	11
2.8 Study limitations.....	11
3.0 Overview and Impact of Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) in Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone	12
3.1 AEP interventions in Ghana	12
3.2 AEP interventions in Nigeria	18
4.0 Findings and analysis	28
4.1 Country Demographic Information and Background Context	28
4.2 Out of School Children Context – Prevalence of OOSC	32
4.3 Dropout Situation and Context.....	37
4.4 Children at Risk of Dropout	40
4.5 Summary on Out of School Context across three countries	42
4.6 Transition, retention and completion levels on AEPs	43
4.7 Demand-side factors that influence the OOSC situation.....	45

4.8	Supply-side factors that influence the OOSC situation.....	46
4.9	Presence and impact of AEP programming in the districts/communities in.....	47
	addressing the issues of OOSC	47
4.10	Presence and impact of girls focused programmes	48
5.0	Conclusion and recommendation	50
5.10	Key Recommendations	52

List of Tables

Table 1: Field Instruments for data collection	9
Table 2: Performance of AfriKids CBE programme	14
Table 3: Performance of GILLBT CBE programme	14
Table 4: Performance School for Life CBE programme	15
Table 5: Learning outcomes among AEP learners and Non-AEP learners in Ghana.....	16
Table 6: Enrolment levels for Girls focused programmes	17
Table 7: Transition from STAGE to formal school	17
Table 8: Breakdown of AEP Beneficiaries	24
Table 9: Accelerated Education Project (AEP) National Primary School Examination Results 2019.....	24
Table 10: Categories of all children across the study areas	32
Table 11: OOSC population by sex	33
Table 12: Education status of the children by gender.....	35
Table 13: Out of school population by gender.....	36
Table 14: Drop-out population by sex	37
Table 15: Dropout by level and gender.....	39

List of Figures

Figure 1: Out-of school children and youth	3
Figure 2: Out-of-school children in Ghana - 2021 Census (4-17 years).....	3
Figure 3: Out of school statistics in Sierra Leone	5
Figure 4: Education status of children in Nigeria	33
Figure 5: Educational status of children by age cohorts	34
Figure 6: Prevalence of OOSC by community emergency status.....	35
Figure 7: Proportion of dropout children by LGA	38
Figure 8: Figure 8: Proportions of dropout children by community intervention status	38

List of Acronyms

AE	Accelerated Education
AEP	Accelerated Education Programmes
AfC	Associates for Change
CBE	Complementary Basic Education
CHPS	Community health compounds
CLA	Collaboration, Learning and Adaptation
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
CSEA	Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa
DA	District Assembly
DEOs	District Education Offices
EI	Education Innovators
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GDHS	Ghana Demographic and Health Survey
GFPs	Girls Focused Programmes
GILLBT	Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation
HHS	Household Survey
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
JHS	Junior High School
KG	Kindergarten
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
KIX	Knowledge and Innovation Exchange
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
LA	Local Assembly
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Study
MS-Excel	Microsoft Excel
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NYEP	National Youth Employment Programme
OOSC	Out of School Children
PRIM	Primary
PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio

PTTR	Pupil Trained Teacher Ratio
REACH	Reaching and Teaching Out of School Children
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SfL	School for Life
SMC	School Management Committee
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PTC	Parent Teacher Committee
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
STAGE	Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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This cross-country study draws on the in-depth Out of School mapping studies conducted in Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone during 2021/22. These are available on www.associatesforchange.org.

Executive Summary

Despite ongoing efforts by governments in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) toward promoting equitable, access to quality education for all children, the out-of-school phenomenon remains pervasive among children in SSA. Currently, more than one-third of the world's 258.4 million out-of-school children (nearly 98 million children) live in sub-Saharan Africa, with majority (53%) of them being girls (UIS, 2019). One out of five children between the ages of 6 and 11 in SSA are currently out of school.

Using a mixed-methods approach, the study sought to investigate the out-of-school phenomenon in three countries in SSA – Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone – as well as the efficiency, effectiveness, and scalability of solutions in Accelerated Education programming that aim to return children back to formal education, particularly in the most rural, fragile, and hard-to-reach areas. A combination of survey data, interviews, and focus group discussions were obtained in households across the study districts in order to illuminate the OOSC situation as well as the impact of AEP interventions.

The study found that of the three countries, the OOSC situation is least severe in Sierra Leone and most pervasive in Nigeria, where nearly 50% of school-aged children are out of school. In Ghana, the situation is slightly ameliorated, with an OOSC rate of one-in-three children. Notably, Nigeria's OOSC situation is predominantly driven by conflict and internal displacement, which makes school largely inaccessible to children due to safety risk. The study found that similar trends exist in the OOSC phenomenon across all three countries: the percentage of children who have never attended school is consistently highest at the primary grade levels, while the percentage of attrition and dropout tend to increase at senior grade levels. When disaggregated for gender, the study finds that the OOSC rate at all grade levels tends to be higher among boys, but the drop-out phenomenon tends to disproportionately impact girls.

Challenges affecting out-of-school children can be grouped into supply-side and demand-side barriers. On the supply-side, the three main challenges are (1) the inaccessibility of schools in local communities, resulting in children having to travel far distances to get to school; (2) the inadequacy of school infrastructure, including equipment, furniture, and facilities; and (3) the shortage of trained teachers and high attrition rate among teachers. With respect to demand-side barriers, respondents in the communities highlight (1) economic and financial difficulties; (2) social norms and gender expectations; and (3) attitudinal ambivalence toward formal education from both students and parents.

The study found that AEP interventions, and in particular girls' focused programmes, were largely successful in providing out-of-school children with the required literacy and numeracy skills to reintegrate back into formal education. Many interventions also directly addressed several demand-side barriers by providing learners with free materials and supplies, teaching girls self-reliance and economic skills, and providing flexibility to help students balance domestic responsibilities with attendance at school. However, many challenges with transition still persist, largely due to barriers on the supply-side.

The study calls on local and national governments to support non-governmental organizations in scaling up AEP interventions to reach more children in more communities. It also makes recommendations for increased government subsidy and investment, information collection and sharing, and school-community partnerships to sustain the gains made by AEPs to date.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Institute of Statistics (UIS) notes that while many countries show greater promise towards achieving universal primary and secondary education under Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), little progress has been made with regard to reducing the global number of out-of-school children, adolescents and youth (UIS, 2019). Governments in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), for example, have made continuous efforts, over the past two to three decades, towards promoting equitable, access to quality education for all children. Notwithstanding, more than one-third of the world's 258.4 million out-of-school children (representing 98 million children) live in sub-Saharan Africa, with majority (53%) of them being girls (UIS, 2019). The UIS estimates that one out of five children between the ages of 6 and 11 in SSA are out of school. Moreover, one out of three youth aged 12 to 14 is out of school. More alarming-- about 60% of youth aged 15 to 17 are not in school. The large out-of-school numbers are associated with huge disparities in access to quality education across gender, economic status, ethnicity, and disability. High poverty levels are also closely linked with disparities in access to education and learning achievement across the region, as students from poor, rural households and urban informal settlements often confront hunger, stigma, internal exclusion, and other factors which negatively affect their learning experiences (UNICEF, 2019).

As part of the ongoing global and local level innovations focused on addressing these out of school challenges, the Knowledge and Innovation Exchange/Global Partnership for Education (KIX/GPE) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is supporting "A Comparative Study on Accelerated Education and Girls Focused Programmes in Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone" which is being implemented by Associates for Change (AfC), Ghana, Dalan Development Consultants, Sierra Leone and the Centre for the Study of the Economies of Africa (CSEA), Nigeria. The KIX IDRC research is a cross country study of Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) and Girls' Focused Models (GFM) that focuses on vulnerable children and youth in rural, extreme poverty and fragile environments across West Africa. The overarching objective of the study is to increase access to learning for children who are out of school through the strengthened use of knowledge on effective AEPs and GFM to ensure scalability and investments across West Africa.

The study is also a comparative one across innovations in the three countries and seeks to investigate the efficiency, effectiveness, and scalability of the selected Accelerated Education models in rural, fragile and hard-to-reach areas within West Africa. The comparison being done includes investigating the efficiency and effectiveness of these models to reach large populations of out of school children particularly in areas where trained teachers have difficulty working and refuse posting due to conflict and rural remoteness. The study also includes mini studies regarding approaches towards increasing access to education for children in poor rural areas, access to girls' education, access for children with disabilities and the transition and retention of AE children in formal schooling. The research design uses a Collaborative, Learning and Adaptation (CLA) approach and also uses an evaluative mixed-method approach including two longitudinal surveys related to the programme's efficiency and effectiveness.

In all, the consortium is working with seven education innovators across Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone, which are showing evidence for potential scalability and are relevant to the specific country contexts.

1.2 The out of school mapping study

The out of school children and youth (OOSCY) mapping study was the project's first key study, which focused on gathering data on out of school populations being reached by the alternative education (AE) innovations across selected districts and communities in the northern part of Ghana. The mapping study gathered data on the profile of the different types of OOSC (gender, age, disability etc.) and also on the demand and supply barriers to their education. The study also explored the diverse contexts in which the innovations are being implemented (rural deprived and extremely deprived contexts, socio-cultural and poverty contexts).

1.2.1 Objectives and research questions

The objective of the out of school mapping was to gather data on the prevalence of the out of school situation across the 3-focus countries (Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone). The mapping study answered four key research questions:

1. What is the scale and prevalence of out-of-school girls and boys of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds in selected rural zones across the three countries?
2. What are the profiles of the different categories of OOSC?
3. What is the drop-out rate across the various innovations, particularly for girls and children living with disability?
4. To what extent do AEP graduates transition to formal schools?
5. To what extent do OOSC enrol in AEP programmes?

1.2.2 Objectives of the cross-country synthesis report

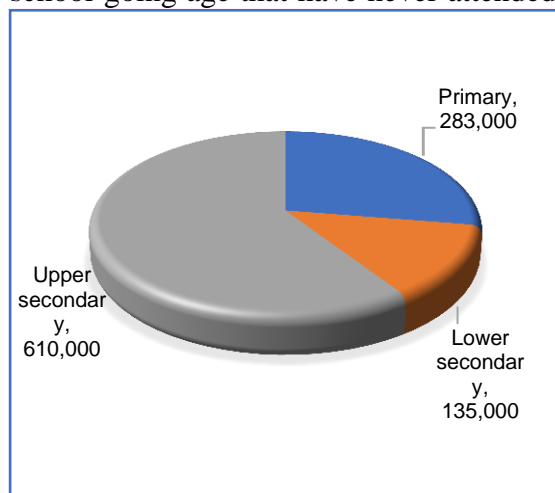
This report presents a synthesis of the findings of the out of school mapping study across Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. It highlights the magnitude of the OOS challenge, what the solutions have been over the period and what the prevailing issues are.

1.3 The Out-of-School Phenomenon across Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone

The out of school situation in the study countries presents interesting and slightly different dynamics in terms numbers, socio-cultural and economic factors driving the numbers and so forth. This section highlights key information relating to the OOSCY situation and sets the right context for the synthesis of the study results.

1.3.1 Ghana

Ghana's education sector is faced with many challenges - chief among them is the significant number of school-age children who are out of school. There are children in Ghana within the school-going age that have never attended school or who have had access to basic education but later dropped out.



Available data from UNESCO on out-of-school children in Ghana reveal that as of 2018, one million Ghanaian children aged 5 to 16 years were out of school despite government efforts at increasing access to education through interventions such as the school feeding programme, distribution of free uniforms and abolishment of school fees (UIS, 2018). The 2020 data by UNESCO places the total number of out-of-school children in Ghana at 283,000 children of primary school age and 135,000 children at the lower secondary level. The out-of-school numbers at the upper secondary level (610,000) further represents about double the numbers of OOSC at both the primary and lower secondary level (Figure 1).

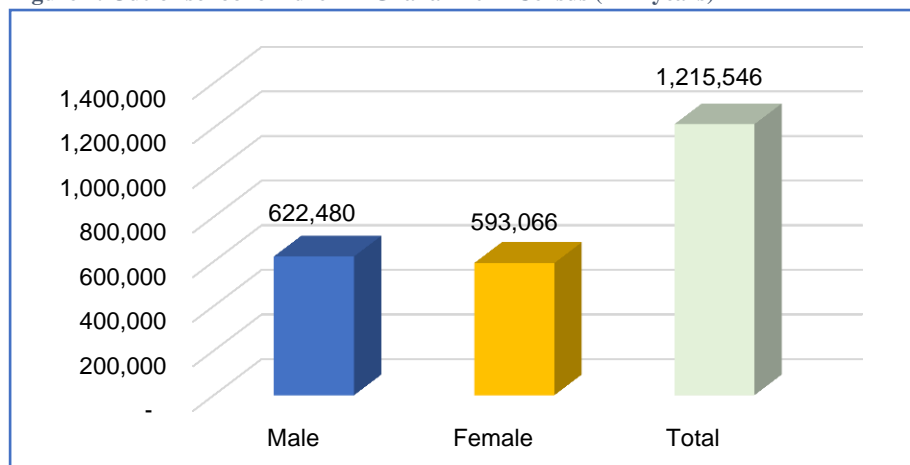
In total, approximately seven percent of children in Ghana are said to be out-of-school at the primary level. Unsurprisingly, children from the poorest wealth quintile have higher out-of-school rates compared to their peers from other categories (MICS, 2017/18). At the lower secondary level, the national out-of-school rate is also at seven percent, with the portion of OOSC from the poorest quintile being similar to that of primary. At the upper secondary level, the out-of-school rate increases for all groups, and the national rate is high at 25%, with more girls out of school than boys.

The current out of school numbers, according to the 2021 National Population and Housing Census stands at about **1,215,546** children aged 4-17 years (KG to SHS) – implying the situation has not significantly improved over the period. A slightly higher percentage of males (51%) are out of school compared to females (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Out-of school children and youth

Source: Ghana Education Fact Sheets, MICS (2017/18)

Figure 2: Out-of-school children in Ghana - 2021 Census (4-17 years)



Source: 2021 National Pop. & Housing Census

1.3.2 Nigeria

The out-of-school situation in Nigeria has been a topic of concern as the country has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world, including sub-Saharan Africa – with approximately 10.5 million, even though primary and junior secondary education is free and compulsory. According to UNICEF (2022), “one in every five of the world’s out-of-school children is in Nigeria.” In the Northern part of Nigeria, the OOSC situation is worse compared to the other parts of the country. In the North, the net attendance rate is 53 percent, and this is attributed to various factors such as conflict, socio-cultural norms, economic barriers, etc. Some of these factors reduce the level of attendance in formal schools, especially for girls. In the North-Eastern and North-Western regions of the country, the female primary school net attendance is 47.7 percent and 47.3 percent, respectively (UNICEF, 2022). Nigeria is also battling with the problems of high population growth, insecurity due to the Boko haram and other insurgencies and substantial obstacle to schooling due to religious beliefs. These factors may collectively slow down progress towards addressing the multi-dimensional problems of OOSCY.

1.3.3 Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone’s children face obstacles in obtaining a good education, staying in school, and graduating from secondary school. Poverty, gender discrimination, long distances to schools, a perceived low value placed on education, and negative social norms practices such as Female Genital Mutilation, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and an unsafe learning environment exacerbate these factors. According to UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics (UIS) 2018 database, there were 624,292, 608,717, and 719,750 OOSC in Sierra Leone in 2015, 2017, and 2018 respectively (Figure 3). At the primary school level, more boys than girls are OOS each year, while the opposite is true at the secondary school level.

The OOSC situation in Sierra Leone according to MICS 2017 is significant, rising at each transition stage. It reports that 18% of all primary-aged children, 19% of JSS-aged children, and 36% of SSS-aged children are out of school, with rural communities having the highest proportion of OOSC. The study also reveals that educational progression is stunted, with children older than their class, 45% of JSS-aged children attending primary school, and only 36% attending JSS, a situation which could result in further dropouts. The ASC report 2018 reveals that there was 34% average increase in national school enrolment across all school levels from June 2018 to June 2019 due to the free quality school education (FQSE). Even though this is remarkable in terms of access to education –the learning crisis persists and must be addressed in order to transform education systems and change the poverty context in which OOSC children are growing.

Some of the key reasons for the higher numbers of OOSC children relate to the deepening of poverty in the areas of high incidence and the growing risk to girls of teenage pregnancy which is of course linked to poverty and intergenerational family breakdown and parental neglect.

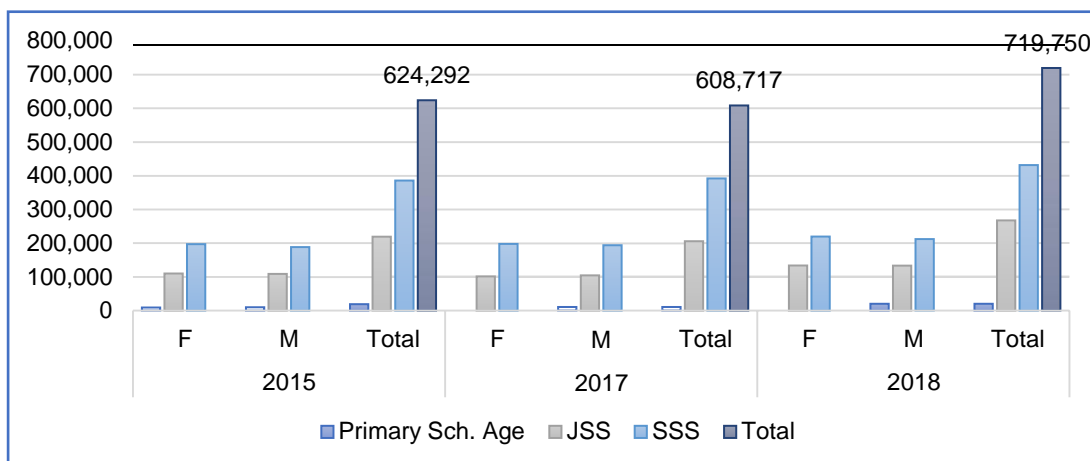


Figure 3: Out of school statistics in Sierra Leone
Source: UIS (2018)

1.4 The efforts at addressing out of school situation across the countries of focus

Over the years, Accelerated Education programmes (AEPs) have been seen as alternative opportunities to providing contextually relevant educational solutions to children and youth who remain out of school and/or drop out. These are particularly relevant to areas of fragility, extreme poverty and in locations where teachers are unwilling to serve across the West African sub-region (Casely-Hayford, 2018). The AEPs that specifically target girls, such as the Complementary Basic Education (CBE) Programme in Ghana and the ELA programme in Sierra Leone have positive impacts on reducing early marriage, and adolescent pregnancy.

1.4.1 The Ghana context

A growing body of evidence suggests that AEP models have huge potential to raise learning outcomes and provide a viable learning pathway for children and youth in deprived rural, extreme poverty and conflict zones in Africa. For instance, several civic actors in Ghana including: School for Life, Afrikids, Pronet, Action Aid, World Education and GILLBT have taken steps to address out-of-school challenge in these areas through the implementation and helping governments go to scale on these. These programmes reveal access, equity and learning efficiency results which demonstrate that they are the best alternatives for underserved children. Thus, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Ghana adopted the CBE programme, which is a government-led AEP, to provide a fully “free” educational pathway and reduce the burden to vulnerable care givers (such as grandparents, female-headed households, child-headed households and widows) of the cost of education (Casely-Hayford et al., 2017).

The evidence for example, shows that in contexts where economic deprivation denies children the right to education, CBE provides necessary teaching and learning resources to help marginalised children learn under flexible arrangements. This affords them the opportunity to participate in education and still support their households, either on the farm or through other economic activities. Thus, many boys and girls living in marginalized and low-income households have had access to basic literacy and numeracy training through the CBE programme, subsequently transitioning into the mainstream school system. The evidence also suggests that the CBE programme has opened school doors to many students previously underserved, most of whom subsequently transitioned into the formal school system and even progressed to higher levels (Casely-Hayford et al., 2018).

Since the introduction of the Ghana School for Life (SfL) model in 1995, the CBE programme has contributed significantly to improving access to education for disadvantaged OOSC. It has been implemented mainly in Northern Ghana (Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions), providing opportunities for OOSC to undergo a fast-track programme for nine months and subsequently integrates (8–14-year-olds) into the formal education system. The CBE Programme established very good results throughout its implementation from 1995 through to 2020. It was able to achieve, and even in some cases exceed, its outputs, outcomes and impact indicators. The project had a total of 533,352 learners enrolled of which over 90% of the learners transitioned into the formal education system. This comprises 290,037 learners under the GoG/FCDO/USAID funded period of 2012-2020; 93,315 under Plan Ghana REACH Project from 2015-2020; and 150,000 by School for Life under USAID and DANIDA support between 1995 and 2012. Transition rates of CBE graduates moved from 84% in 2012/2013 to 95% in 2016/2017 for all CBE participants.

Other on-going interventions such as the Strategic Approaches to Girls Education (STAGE) project, had over 16,794 girls' enrolment, targets of 8,025 girls for the formal track and 8,769 for the non-formal track learners (both programmes implemented CBE). The programme as of March 2021 had a successful transition rate of 69.5% of the total girls into the formal track enrolment.

1.4.2 The Nigeria context

While much progress has been made in increasing access to education for more people, Nigeria remains characterized by high educational exclusionary rates. UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) estimated Nigeria's Out-of-school (OOS) population to be about 10.5 million children in 2019, which was the highest across the world. Although this population spreads across the country, some regions have a higher concentration of OOSC than others. The COVID-19 pandemic has further intensified the OOSC situation in Nigeria as there are concerns that the number of OOSC is likely to have increased due to the prolonged school closures in Nigeria (which lasted between March and September, 2020). In response to the high OOSC population, the Federal Government has partnered with various national and international humanitarian organisations over the years – providing solutions to the education crisis. Through these collaborations, civic actors have made efforts to reduce the number of OOSC to the barest minimum using Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) and girl-focused models.

In Nigeria, reports on AEPs and GEPs implemented by innovators such as FHI 360, UNICEF, IRC among others are evidence lending credence to the significant impact of AEP and GEP everywhere they were implemented. Most education innovations have been impactful in improving enrolment situation at the sample level, but this impact is not yet noticeable on a national scale because of the magnitude of the OOSC problem. A number of such programmes and their associated impacts are highlighted:

1.4.3 The Sierra Leone context

In Sierra Leone, the government came up with an Education Sector Plan (2014 – 2018) which recognised AEPs for overaged children as a crucial intervention to bolster primary school enrolment and completion rate. The Plan allows the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to partner with other NGOs to provide accelerated primary education for older children and youth between the ages of 10 and 15 years. The model used a compressed primary school curriculum from six years to three years rather than the usual six years.

Sierra Leone's Accelerated Education programmes demonstrate that they help to increase and improve transition and completion rates of children who are considered at high risk of drop out. The experience also shows that once they learn within the AEP system the exam performance of girls was considerably better than that of boys. Two examples of AEPs in Sierra Leone are presented below: a pilot AEP implemented in Pujehun by Save the Children Sierra Leone; and a girls focused programme implemented by BRAC. The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education in Sierra Leone's goal of leaving no child behind can be achieved and supported by AEP being scaled up in strategic zones of Sierra Leone. The findings show that 494 students (69%), of the 552 students who attempted the government-sponsored NPSE passed the exams and entered formal education demonstrates the impact that AEPs can have in rural deprived and extreme poverty zones of SL. Additionally, there was a rise in the number of people who were re/enrolled in school and were reintegrated. The evaluation results demonstrate AEP's strong impact in providing high-quality education to the district's most vulnerable groups, despite the challenges in project implementation.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Study design across the three countries

In all three countries, the mapping study adopts a mixed methods approach using a combination of quantitative and qualitative survey methods to investigate the scale and magnitude of the out-of-school children and youth (OSSCY) situation across each country. The quantitative method consists of the use of structured household interviews and surveys as well as community and school-level checklists. Qualitative data are generated from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) with direct education officials, community leaders, head teachers, AEP facilitators, and students. The combination of these approaches provides robust and reliable data through the triangulation of methods to inform the situation on OOSCY and the delivering of AEP programming in each of the three countries.

2.2 Sampling procedures across the three countries

Across all the study countries, a multi-stage sampling approach was adopted to generate robust samples at each stage of the survey process (at the regional/local government area, district, and community levels). Sampling was based on exposure to any AEP programme and therefore focused on intervention regions and districts. Community-level selection focused on sampling both intervention and non-intervention communities for household- and school-level surveys.

Households were surveyed via systematic random sampling, where after a random selection of initial households, subsequent households were selected based on pre-determined fixed selection intervals, in order to reduce sampling bias. For the qualitative approach, a number of non-probability sampling methods were used, including purposive sampling, convenience sampling, and snowballing, in order to reach out-of-school boys and girls more effectively in survey communities.

2.2.1 Criteria for sampling of regions/local government areas and districts

The regions/local government areas and districts were sampled based on the following criteria:

1. Education Innovators' presence and implementation of Accelerated Education Programmes in those regions and districts over the last 3 to 5 years;
2. Extreme poverty zones - areas with high levels of deprivation;
3. High incidence of out of school children and challenges to girls' education;
4. Areas having AEP and non-AEP communities;

In the case of Nigeria, the additional key factor for selection was the issue of safety. This was because, for over a decade, Borno and the neighbouring states (focus area for the study) had witnessed escalating civil conflicts due to activities of the Boko haram terrorist and other native armed groups, of which many reports claim to have contributed to the population of out-of-school children in these areas.

2.2.2 Criteria for community sampling

In Ghana, sixty-four communities (32 intervention and 32 non-intervention communities) were sampled for the OOSC mapping (8 communities per district). In Nigeria, a total of sixty communities were reached. These comprised 12 AEP intervention communities and 18 non-AEP intervention communities; 10-Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps and 20 host

communities. Similarly, the Sierra Leone team worked in three districts, eight Chiefdoms and in 60-communities.

The same community selection criteria were used across all three study countries:

1. Communities that had benefited from AEP intervention in the past five years;
2. Communities that had not benefited from AEP intervention in the past five years;
3. Communities with high levels of teacher gaps;
4. Proximity factor – communities closer and not too far from each other with high incidence of OOSC);
5. Communities that had received interventions from different NGOs in the past.
6. Presence or absence of an IDP camp – Nigeria only

2.3 Instrumentation

Quantitative data were gathered through household survey questionnaires, developed through a collaborative approach by experts in each of the three countries under study. The questionnaire largely reflects the five dimensions of exclusion according to the conceptual and methodological framework of the global OOSC initiative by UNICEF, UNESCO, and GPE. The survey questionnaire comprises seven sections, including: (1) general household information; (2) household roster; (3) education history of children ages 6-18; (4) characteristics of children at risk of dropping out of school; (5) information about children who dropped out of school; (6) information about the children who have never enrolled in formal education; and (7) socioeconomic characteristics of the household.

Qualitative data were gathered through key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGD). Eight additional instruments were developed to this effect to enhance triangulation of findings from the quantitative data. A summary of all nine instruments is presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Field Instruments for data collection

SN	Instrument Number	Description/Targets
1.	Household Instrument	Household Survey
2.	Instrument 1: KII with District Local Government Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ KII for District or local government authority officials ▪ Planning Officer ▪ District Coordinating Director
3.	Instrument 2: KII with District Education Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ KII/FGDs with District Education Officials ▪ District Director of Education ▪ Complementary Basic Education Officers ▪ Officers/ Circuit Supervisors and others
4.	Instrument 3: KII with community & traditional leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community and traditional leaders' interviews ▪ Chief/queen mother ▪ Assembly man
5.	Instrument 4: KII with headteachers & teachers	Teachers and head teachers' Interviews
6.	Instrument 5: KII with AEP Facilitators	AEP/CBE Facilitators Interviews

7.	Instrument 6: FGD with OOSC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide for OOSC Children and Dropouts ▪ Girls Separate FGD ▪ Boys separate FGD
8.	Instrument 7	SMC/PTA Focal Group Discussion
9.	Instrument 8	Community and school checklist

2.4 Data collection procedure and data management across countries

In all three countries, field enumerators and researchers were selected for language proficiency, education and research experience and an appreciation of gendered issues in education. Researchers underwent intensive centralized training on the administration of data collection instruments, community mapping, and probing techniques, as well as the use of FGDs and KIIs, among other procedures.

Data were collected using a computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI) tool, which was employed because of advantages in time-saving (via skipping patterns and pre-loaded response options), relatively clean data (via response field controls and data validation), and direct data entry. The instruments of inquiry were then programmed on Kobotoolbox and deployed on KoboCollect App to aid efficiency in data collection. A field team of male and female supervisors and enumerators was deployed for the data collection in each community.

The fieldwork lasted between 9 and 14 days with an extra seven days for mop-up activities in the case of Nigeria. This was due to insecurity and related issues in the study areas. In administering the quantitative tool, it took an average of 45 minutes to survey a household and an average of 80 households was covered per day by each team. During qualitative data collection, supervisors conducted the qualitative interviews, whereas paired male-female enumerators moved from household to household in each community.

2.5 Data analysis

Across the three countries, a variety of analytical techniques including descriptive and narrative approaches were used. Primary quantitative data were cleaned, stored, and analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. Basic descriptive, frequency, and cross-tab analyses were computed for each survey data set, and further analysis was done in disaggregating data across region/local government area, district, locality, level of deprivation, gender, disability, and intervention status.

Qualitative data were analyzed based on general themes from the mapping survey and were used to corroborate the findings from the quantitative analysis. Gender-based analysis was also used in qualitative data by ensuring that responses from female participants in FGDs and KIIs are adequately represented in the reporting stage. Qualitative and quantitative data were integrated after analysis to inform conclusions and recommendations.

2.6 Ethical considerations

As a standard practice, ethical approval was sought from appropriate authorities including both the state and the local governments, before proceeding with the research. In observance of the community entry protocol, the purpose of the research was clearly communicated to the community leaders. During data collection, respondents were briefed on the purpose of

the research and their consent was sought with the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, and the option to opt-out of the study at any time. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that there were no financial or any other such incentives provided for compensation. In Ghana, special emphasis was placed on adherence to COVID-19 protocols as part of the country-level guidelines for conducting research.

2.7 Gender, equity, and inclusion considerations across the three countries

Gender considerations in conducting the study included using female researchers to conduct FGDs and KIIs with female participants (particularly AEP beneficiaries) and community leaders. The study achieved over 50% female representation in the recruitment of enumerators and supervisors. Gender considerations also played a prominent role in the selection of participants for surveys, FGDs and KIIs, and the study ensured gender balance in all mixed FGDs. Female-headed households and primary caregivers, as well as young females and persons with disabilities were deliberately selected for engagement to ensure inclusiveness.

2.8 Study limitations

2.8.1 Ghana

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant limitations due to the need to observe public health protocols, including social distancing and wearing face masks, in order to reduce the spread of the virus during fieldwork. This heightened the stress level of the field teams. Secondly, accessing district-level data on out-of-school children and other educational indicators posed a considerable challenge. This may have been due to poor record-keeping practices at the district levels, and resulted in gaps in the district-level data collected.

2.8.2 Nigeria

One major limitation of the study was the inaccessibility of most local government areas (LGAs) in Borno state. Despite the counter-insurgency efforts of the government, the security situation in the entire state remains volatile. As such, only the more relatively stable and secure LGAs and communities could be sampled in the OOSC mapping exercise.

2.8.3 Sierra Leone

One limitation in data collection occurred when it was discovered during fieldwork that a few chiefdoms in the Kambia and Port Loko districts had been re-demarcated and renamed. The researchers mitigated the negative impact by adjusting the mapping plan in these areas. Furthermore, though the OOSC survey proposed to gather data at the level of education innovators, it was not possible to obtain the required data sets from ministry officials at the time of the survey. However, community stakeholders provided comparable information.

3.0 Overview and Impact of Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) in Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone

In all three countries in the study, the studied communities were all selected because of the presence of one of several accelerated education programme (AEP) interventions. In general, most AEPs were developed and delivered by various non-governmental organizations. They largely took the form of Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programmes, which aim to help out-of-school children enter primary education by helping them acquire the necessary literacy and numeracy skills through an accelerated approach that specifically targets the needs of OOSC.

AEP interventions also attempt to address the specific supply- and demand-side barriers faced by OOSC which result in them being out of school in the first place, such as lack of instruction in the local language, financial difficulties, and domestic responsibilities. These interventions prioritize teaching in the local language and provide assistance through free materials and school supplies for children. In some programs, interventions are also sensitive to the domestic responsibilities children undertake to support their families and are flexible to accommodate for these. Finally, especially in the case of young girls, some AEP interventions have also provided them with hands-on skills such as weaving or soap-making, that encourage entrepreneurship and self-reliance.

In general, AEP interventions in the studied communities have resulted in great success and significant gains in improving the OOSC phenomenon. Transition rates to the formal education system following completion of AEP classes are high. Community stakeholders, parents, and district education coordinators have all remarked on the efficacy of AEP interventions at not only improving literacy and numeracy rates among children, but also creating attitudinal shifts within the community on the importance of education.

This section provides a brief description of the various AEP interventions implemented throughout the study communities in the three countries, as well as their sponsoring organizations.

3.1 AEP interventions in Ghana

In Ghana, over five AEPs have been implemented across the communities under study. This section highlights key dimensions and achievements of the three key partner AEPs¹ working with AfC on this project in Ghana. The areas of analysis centered on enrollment and transition levels across different cycles.

3.1.1 CBE program under USAID/DFID

The population of primary school age OOSC stood at about 32% in 2003, decreased to 18% in 2014 but increased to 19% at the last multi-indicator cluster study (MICS) in 2018². Based on a simulation-based approach (called rate of change), the results show a steady decline from 540,000 in 2010 down to just over 420,000 in 2020.³ Since the introduction of the SfL

¹ Afrikids, SfL, GILLBT

² GSS (2018): Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2017/2018), Survey Findings Report. Accra; GSS (2003) and GSS (2014) Ghana Demographic Household Survey; and MoE (2016) OOSC Incidence Study Report.

³ MoE (2016) OOSC Incidence Study Report.

model in 1995, the CBE programme has contributed significantly to improving access to education for disadvantaged OOSC. The CBE programme has been implemented mainly in the northern regions (Northern, Upper East and Upper West) of Ghana, providing opportunities for OOSC to undergo a fast-track programme for nine months and then to be integrated into the formal education system.

The CBE Programme established very good results throughout the implementation from 1995 through to 2020. The programme was able to achieve, and even in some cases exceed, its outputs, outcomes and impact indicators. The implementation had a total of 533,352 learners enrolled with over 90% of the learners transitioning into the formal education system. This comprises 290,037 learners under the GoG/FCDO/USAID funded period of 2012-2020; 93,315 under Plan Ghana REACH Project from 2015-2020; and 150,000 by School for Life under USAID and DANIDA support between 1995 and 2012. Other on-going interventions such as the Strategic Approaches to Girls Education (STAGE) project, with 16,794 enrolment, targets 8,025 formal track and 8,769 non-formal track learners. The programme as of March 2021 had a successful transition rate of 69.5% of the total formal track enrolment⁴. The average literacy rate at midline stood at 29.3% as compared to 11.2 percent at baseline; and the average numeracy score was 52% as compared to 30.7% at baseline. In both cases there were percentage gains increase of 18.1 percent and 21.3 percent for both literacy and numeracy respectively. Life skills had a 4.5 percentage point increase from 56% at baseline to 60.5% at midline. There was also a reduction in the number of formal track girls who were involved in employment from 8.0% at baseline to 4.3% at midline. The reason for this might be due to the project beneficiaries' decision to give up working for their household in order to focus on schooling. These results and milestones were made possible as a result of the strong partnerships and support from all stakeholders including communities, the private sector, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), Development Partners (DPs) and government. The learning outcomes showed improvement in numeracy and literacy over the nine-month cycle of learning. About 91% of learners demonstrated gains in basic numeracy and 87% also had gains in basic literacy⁵.

Generally, the programme's targets for increasing female involvement were exceeded in all areas during the final cycle of the Crown Agents' implementation, especially with excellent results on girls' participation in the programme at 54.16% and female facilitator participation at 30%.⁶ This exceeded the programme's target of 20% female facilitators. In addition, the implementing partners' (IPs) gender action plan completion reports provided full feedback on the gender strategies which were effective in reaching CBE targets and outputs.

3.1.2 Performance by Education Innovators (EIs)

Over all, the three EIs (*Afrikids*, *GILLBT*, and *School for Life CBE programmes*), enrolled a total of 90,984 (31.4%) out of the 290,037- enrolment achievement of the CBE programme in the Talensi, Nabdam, Bongo, Bawku, Pusiga, Karaga, Gushiegu, Saboba, Yendi, Central Gonja, Mion, Sagnarigu, Savelugu, Wa West, Mamprugu Moagduri, Tolon, Kumbungu and Bunkpurugu Nansuan districts in the Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Savanna and the North East regions. Out of this, the three EIs successfully transitioned 80,211 (81.2%) of their total enrolment. AfriKids transitioned 15,929 (91.6%) of their total enrolment of 16,657 into the formal school with most learners integrated into primary 3 between 2013 and 2021.

⁴ Formal girls transitioned to school in January 2021, Strategic Approaches to Girls' Education External Evaluation Report

⁵ DFID (2018). Cycle 5 End line Report, Accra

⁶ <http://www.kantar.com/public>

AfriKids again took part in the STAGE programme by enrolling 4,011 girls in the formal track and transitioned 3,142 (78.3%) into the formal school system. The non-formal track had an enrolment of 533 with 513 (96.2%) of the learners completing training. School for Life also enrolled a total of 60,344 and transitioned a total of 51,819 (85.9%) between 2010 and 2018. GILLBT transitioned 12,463 (89.1%) out of a total enrolment of 13,983.

3.1.2.1 Performance of AfriKids CBE programme

The analysis in Table 2 shows about 16,657 children were enrolled in the Afrikids programme during Cycles 1–5. The majority of the total number were females (39%). Males outnumbered females (58%) in cycle 1, but the female population rose in subsequent cycles. In cycle 5, the gender difference became more noticeable, with females becoming the majority (59%). Again, the statistics indicated that not all children enrolled were able to transition. At the program's beginning, around 77% of enrolled children were able to transition, with the majority being boys (51%). Around 96% of students were able to enter the formal school system, the greatest rate among the three innovators.

Table 2: Performance of AfriKids CBE programme

Education Innovator	CBE Cycle	Enrolment				Total	Transition				Percentage Transitioned	
		Boys	%	Girls	%		Boys	%	Girls	%		%
AfriKids	1	822	58%	594	42%	1416	552	51%	539	49%	1091	77%
	2	1083	46%	1293	54%	2376	994	45%	1208	55%	2202	93%
	3	2739	49%	2876	51%	5615	2699	49%	2819	51%	5518	98%
	4	2273	46%	2627	54%	4900	2234	46%	2587	54%	4821	98%
	5	965	41%	1385	59%	2350	945	41%	1352	59%	2297	98%
Grand Total		7,882	47%	8,775	53%	16,657	7,424	47%	8,505	53%	15,929	96%

Source: Afrikids Annual Report, 2020

3.1.2.2 Performance of GILLBT CBE programme

Analysis of the GILLBT-managed CBE programme shows a higher proportion of females across all the cycles except for cycle 4 where there were more males compared to females. Conversely, there was an equal representation of boys and girls in cycle 3. In comparison to transition data, the majority of cycles had an equal number of children transitioning from CBE to formal education. As shown in Table 3, approximately 50% of boys and girls transitioned throughout cycles 3,4,5. At the end of cycle 5, there is a total of 100% transition. Cycle 1 had the smallest proportion of transitioned pupils (85%).

Table 3: Performance of GILLBT CBE programme

Education Innovator	CBE Cycle	Enrolment				Total	Transition				Percentage Transitioned	
		Boys	%	Girls	%		Boys	%	Girls	%	No.	%
GILLBT	1	745	45%	920	55%	1665	616	43%	804	57%	1420	85%
	2	3200	49%	3366	51%	6566	2907	49%	3018	51%	5925	90%
	3	2000	50%	2008	50%	4008	1750	50%	1722	50%	3472	87%
	4	530	52%	487	48%	1017	460	50%	459	50%	919	90%
	5	366	50%	361	50%	727	366	50%	361	50%	727	100%
Grand Total		6,841	49%	7,142	51%	13,983	6,099	49%	6,364	51%	12,463	89%

Source: GILLBT Data, 2021

3.1.2.3 Performance School for Life CBE programme

In all, the SfL programme enrolled a total of 60,344 children comprising a slightly higher number of boys (30,774) compared to girls (29,570). With the exception of cycles 4 and 5, female enrolment was generally low across the other cycles. On the other hand, the transition rate was modest (86%) in comparison to Afrikids (96%). Girls' transition rates were also low over the first three cycles of the CBE program. Cycle 2 had a low transition rate in comparison to other cycles. The majority of transitions occurred during cycle 5 (Table 4).

Table 4: Performance School for Life CBE programme

Education Innovator	CBE Cycle	Enrolment				Total	Transition				Percentage Transitioned	
		Boys	%	Girls	%		Boys	%	Girls	%		%
SfL	2010	5207	52%	4793	48%	10000	4160	51%	3978	49%	8138	81%
	1	5201	52%	4799	48%	10000	5201	55%	4202	45%	9403	94%
	2	6552	53%	5738	47%	12290	5128	53%	4636	47%	9764	79%
	3	6422	51%	6282	49%	12704	5772	51%	5448	49%	11220	88%
	4	5518	49%	5832	51%	11350	4601	49%	4812	51%	9413	83%
	5	1874	47%	2126	53%	4000	1820	47%	2061	53%	3881	97%
Grand Total		30,774	51%	29,570	49%	60,344	26,682	51%	25,137	49%	51,819	86%

Source: School for Life Data, 2021

3.1.3 Effectiveness of the strategies of the EIs

The AEP strategies have been effective for providing basic literacy and numeracy as well as life skills for disadvantaged children in hard-to-reach communities to help integrate them into the formal school system. Among other factors, is the huge contribution to the gross enrolment rate of 119.9 percent through the integration of graduates of the AEP into the formal school system⁷. Many parents and community members in the northern, Upper East and Upper West regions indicated their preference for the CBE programme over the formal school because they believed children are able to read in a shorter period compared to those enrolled in the formal school system⁸. This is largely a result of the use of local language in teaching and learning on the CBE programme which makes it easier to transfer basic literacy skills to learning to read in English. It is also evident that the STAGE project has contributed to the reduction in the proportion of formal school learners who engaged in work during school period from 8% at baseline to 4.3% at midline in 2021.

3.1.4 Transition rates

Transition rates for AEP graduates are high, but some challenges such as non-existence of schools in deprived communities, inadequate school infrastructure, teacher gaps, over aged children, dropouts and non-attendance continue to confront the communities and the education sector. It is important that other innovations and interventions be explored to complement the AEP programmes in order to guarantee the reduction of OOSC/disadvantaged girls. Some of these interventions include the continuous enrolment

⁷ CBE Management Unit Progress Report 2017

⁸ Crown Agents (2018). Parental and Learner Choice Study

drive/right age enrolment, establishment of formal schools in deprived communities beyond a 3 to 5 km radius to the nearest public school, and scholarship interventions for children at risk of dropping out. Again, it is important to take a critical look at community and parental engagement and livelihoods in going forward. This will help to improve parents' incomes and to reduce the use of children for work. It is also critical to take a look at the CBE curriculum so as to reflect the formal school new curriculum as well as improving the delivery of life skills in the AEP programmes as initiated by the STAGE project.

3.1.5 Learning outcomes among CBE and Non-CBE students:

The evidence on AEPs supporting significant quality learning is strong in the area of literacy and numeracy skills. It suggests overall improvement among OOSCY compared to government school students in the same grade and/or age. Though CBE children showed higher mean percent scores for basic, advanced and overall scores at endline, non-CBE children showed marginally greater progress over the course of the school year in all three instances (Table 55). Only in advanced local language assessments, however, was this change significant. For English, whilst baseline component scores were comparable, both endline and progress results for CBE children in basic, advanced and overall scores were higher, with advanced and overall scores showing statistically significant gains. For numeracy, this same pattern was observed. Whereas baseline results for all three component scores did not differ, CBE children outperformed non-CBE children in endline results and change scores, with advanced and overall numeracy scores showing statistically significant differences.

Table 5: Learning outcomes among AEP learners and Non-AEP learners in Ghana

Component Scores	CBE			Non-CBE		
	Baseline mean percent score (%)	Endline mean percent score (%)	Change in score (% points)	Baseline mean percent score (%)	Endline mean percent score (%)	Change in score (%points)
Local language						
Basic local language	19.5	46.2	26.7	14.3	43.0	28.7
Advanced local language	26.2	57.7	31.5	18.4	53.3	34.9*
Overall local language	26.0	55.7	29.6	20.2	51.9	31.7
English						
Basic English	24.6	55.4	30.8	22.6	51.9	29.3
Advanced English	30.4	66.0	35.6*	31.8	64.1	32.2
Overall English	29.7	63.0	33.3*	29.9	60.1	30.2
Numeracy						
Basic Numeracy	46.2	76.4	30.2	45.1	73.3	28.2
Advanced Numeracy	42.6	75.8	33.2*	42.7	72.7	30.0
Overall Numeracy	45.0	76.2	31.2*	44.2	73.1	28.8

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Source: Department for International Development (2019).

▪ Effectiveness of the strategies of the AEP:

The AEP strategies have been effective in providing basic literacy and numeracy as well as life skills for disadvantaged children in hard-to-reach communities to help integrate them into the formal school system. Among other factors, is the huge contribution the AEP have made to the gross enrolment rate of 119.9 percent through the integration of graduates of the AEP into the formal school system particularly in zones which are normally considered 'deprived and hard to reach'⁹. Many parents and community members in the Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions indicated their preference for the CBE programme over the formal school because they believed children are able to read in a shorter period compared to those

⁹ CBE Management Unit Progress Report 2017

enrolled in the formal school system¹⁰. This is largely a result of the use of local language in teaching and learning on the CBE programme which makes it easier to transfer basic literacy skills to learning to read in English. It is also evident that the STAGE project (AEP focussed on Girls) has contributed to the reduction in the proportion of formal school learners who engaged in work during school period from 8% at baseline to 4.3% at midline in 2021.

▪ **Impact and outcomes of Girls focused programming models--STAGE programmes:** Girls Focused Programmes have been visible and led to a significant increase in the number of girls who have enrolled in school, bridged the gap between boys and girls in education, and reduced the incidence of child marriage. The data shows that a large proportion of children enrolled in the AfriKids STAGE programme were transitioned into the formal education system (88%) after the programme. The programme met 99% of its targets. Four out of five STAGE graduates were able to successfully move into the formal education system. Further, it was found that the programme exceeded its informal cohort targets, with coverage of 103% while around 96% of participants successfully *completed* the informal training. Also, the results indicated that a UNICEF initiative enrolled about 197 females who were already in the formal education in Saboba (Table 6).

Table 6: Enrolment levels for Girls focused programmes

Girls Focused Program	Target		Achieved		Transitioned/completed	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Formal (Afrikids)	4050	89	4011	88	3142	86
Informal (Afrikids)	520	11	533	12	513	14
Formal (UNICEF Prog. Saboba) ¹¹			197	100	197	100
Total	4570	100	4741	100	3852	100%

Source: District level data, Saboba, 2022.

The results show that a third (29.7%) of STAGE graduates were placed in P-3 and most students who transitioned to P-3 were between the ages of 6 and 11. Although some pupils were put in junior high school, the numbers were insignificant; 4.6 percent were placed in JHS 1 and 0.4% in JHS 2 (Table 7).

Table 7: Transition from STAGE to formal school

STAGE	6-11 years		12-14 years		15-17 years		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
P3	560	39.4	526	30.5	-	-	1086	29.7
P4	404	28.5	484	28.1	-	-	888	24.3
P5	229	16.1	269	15.6	-	-	498	13.6
P6	203	14.3	357	20.7	-	-	560	15.3
JHS 1	24	1.7	79	4.6	-	-	103	2.8
JHS2	-	-	7	0.4	-	-	7	0.2
Apprenticeship	-	-	-	-	513	100	513	14
Total	1420	100	1722	100	513	14	3655	100

Source: Programme data, STAGE Project, 2022.

¹⁰ Crown Agents (2018). Parental and Learner Choice Study

¹¹ Empowering Adolescent Girls, Embracing Gender Equality, Advancing Girls' Lower Secondary Education in Ghana (2019-2022)

Impact/achievements:

The introduction of AEs and Girls Focused Programmes (GFPs) helped to tackle several of the education access constraints faced by girls in the rural and deprived societies. Prior to the introduction of GFPs, the incidence of child marriage was on the rise because parents did not value academic education for their girl children and believed that their proper place was in the home, where she was raised to serve her future husband. Following the implementation of Afrikids' STAGE Project, which targeted out of school girls, there has been a significant change in the lives of girls in these communities. The STAGE project s enabled out of school children, particularly girls who had dropped out of school, to go back into the formal education system or acquire a skill in catering, dressmaking, soap making, beadmaking or hairdressing.

Not only has the STAGE project helped girls to access relevant education on their terms, it has also empowered them to know their rights and has enlightened parents on the importance of girl-child education. Some SMCs/PTAs confirmed that activities of Girls Focused Programmes have been visible and led to a significant increase in the number of girls who have enrolled in school, bridged the gap between boys and girls in education, and reduced the incidence of child marriage.

3.2 AEP interventions in Nigeria

In Nigeria, about six AEP interventions were implemented across the communities under study. Accelerated Education Programmes are at the heart of current strategies adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in collaboration with civil societies and NGOs, both local and international, to address the high number of out of school children in the country.¹² Having realised that the policy of making basic education free and mandatory for all in the country, and the policy of integrating secular education into the Islamic school curriculum have not yielded significant results in reducing the OOSCs, the FGN has turned to Accelerated Education as the way out in solving this problem. The government has successfully conducted a pilot of this innovation which is named Accelerated Basic Education Programme (ABEP) in Borno state in Nigeria's Northeast, with 54 learning centers and over 8000 learners enrolled. The plan is to roll out a scaled phase of the programme starting with two sister states in the Northeast, namely, Yobe and Adamawa state.

Different AEPs are on-going in Nigeria, each with its unique model, quality and effectiveness. In line with this, the federal government has deemed it fit to develop a curriculum and a policy guideline for the implementation of this intervention in order to ensure model uniformity and enhance programme scalability. The curriculum for this programme has therefore been developed by the Nigeria Educational and Research Development Council (NERDC) with support from PLAN International and Save the Children. The project was funded by the EU Response, Early Recovery, and Resilience in Borno¹³. The subjects covered include Mathematics, English Language, Basic Science, History and Nigerian languages. The curriculum sandwiches basic education curriculum of nine (9) years into three years, each year representing a level. Year one (first level) covers primary 1 to 3 learning contents, year two (the second level) covers primary 4 to 6 learning contents, and year three (third level) covers JSS 1 to 3 material. A Teacher's guide has also been developed to support

¹²As contained in the Nigeria Education Ministerial Strategic Plan (2018 -2022, p.10-11))

¹³<https://sundiatapost.com/eu-partner-nerdc-others-develop-national-guidelines-for-accelerated-education/>

the effective implementation of the curriculum by both teachers and policy makers. The development of the policy guideline is currently being done in collaboration with PLAN led consortium of education innovators in order to ensure best practices in the delivery of AEP. This effort is not without input from the state actors such as State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and other agencies of the government in the education space. The development of the curriculum and policy guidelines can therefore be a strong basis for integrating the learners who undergo the government now backed ABEP into the formal education system.

Some other innovators in Accelerated Education Programme interventions and their programmes in conformity with best practices are described briefly in the following subsection.

3.2.1 Internal Rescue Committee (IRC)

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Creative Associates International¹⁴ have worked together to provide OOSCs with an Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) at community-based Non-Formal Learning Centers (NFLCs). The project is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) as an Education-in-Emergency programme to support literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills. The target beneficiaries are 20,500 children between the age of 9-14 years in 10 local government areas of Yobe (3) and Borno (7) state, who have never attended school or been out of school for more than two years.

The IRC-ALP is a 9-month circle project, such that the beneficiaries attend three-hour sessions per day, three times per week, to learn the basic literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills they need to successfully transition into formal schools. However, due to the shortage of certified teachers in Northeast Nigeria, the project enrolls community members to work as learning facilitators (LFs) and equips them with content knowledge and the educational skills to teach foundational literacy, numeracy, and social-emotional skills.

The professional development opportunities for LFs provided by the program include face-to-face training, on-going peer support in the form of monthly Teaching Learning Circles (TLC) and on-site coaching visits by qualified teachers, and supervisors from state ministries of education. NFLCs fill a crucial gap and account for some of the immediate, pressing needs of school-aged children growing up in crisis and conflict settings and help prepare them for entry or re-entry into the formal school system.

3.2.2 FHI-360 – Addressing Education in the Northeast (AENN) Project

The AENN is a USAID project for basic level Non-Formal Learning Centre (NFLC) that targets the immediate needs of internally displaced children and their host communities between the age of 6 to 15 years in 8 local government areas of Borno and Yobe state. In Borno state, the AENN was implemented in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, Jere, Monguno, Hawul, and Dikwa. Whereas in Yobe state, the AENN was implemented in Damaturu, Potiskum, and Bade Local Government area. In total, the programme was rolled out in 150 communities across these local governments.

¹⁴Details are in Research report downloadable from:

<https://airbel.rescue.org/studies/the-cost-effectiveness-of-accelerated-learning-programs-alp-and-the-added-value-of-on-site-coaching-on-the-learning-and-transition-outcomes-of-out-of-school-children-in-northern-nigeria/>

Within the NFLCs, AENN uses a condensed curriculum that is aligned to the formal curriculum and is divided into two levels (Basic Literacy, which is equivalent to primary 1-3, and post-Literacy, which is equivalent to primary 4-6) according to the national non-formal education policy. This assessment only examines students participating in Basic Literacy (NFLC Level 1). Students attending the NFLC Basic Literacy program receive classes 4 times per week for 2 hours and 15 minutes per day for approximately nine months (although due to time constraints the first cohort was completed in seven months). Each day, learners participate in 45-minute lessons for literacy, math, and social emotional learning (SEL). After completing the Basic Literacy program, learners can either mainstream into formal schools at grade 4 or continue into the two-year post-Literacy program. After completing the post-Literacy program, learners can mainstream into formal schools at grade 7 (junior secondary school). As at March 202, AENN mainstreamed 12, 868 cohort learners (6,664 males, 6204 females) into formal schools in Borno and Yobe States.¹⁵ Also among the cohort 1 learners, 8,640 (4,384 males, 4,256 females) adolescent learners transitioned into the Post-literacy program offered by the activity (USAID 2020).

These classes are primarily delivered in formal school buildings in the afternoon (after formal school lessons are over) or in temporary learning spaces that have been established by United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) or other education actors. Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) that oversee the implementation of non-formal activities provide seating mats, WASH materials, and other support the process of making the classrooms safer and more comfortable for learners. Additionally, CBOs provide learners with snacks and female learners with hygiene kits to promote regular attendance. The size of classes ranges between 50-60 learners per class. Classes are delivered by trained local learning facilitators. NFLCs were delivered in Hausa and Kanuri languages. All non-formal education activities are accompanied by safety interventions and community-level activities that support enrollment and awareness around the importance of education.

FHI-360 trained partnered with 12 local partners in a Community Action Circle (CAC). CAC fosters a community-led process through which those most affected and interested organize, explore, set priorities, plan and act collectively, for their wellbeing. There are various stages in the CAC which include: Preparing to mobilize, organizing for action, exploring the issues affecting access and demand for education and setting priorities, planning, acting, and evaluating together, and scaling up successful efforts.

3.2.3 Kanem Borno Human Development Association (KABHUDA)¹⁶

KABHUDA is one of the local partners of FHI-360 which, a registered Civil Society Organisation both in Borno and Yobe. The organization has implemented several projects with over 30,000 beneficiaries which ranges from women, children, rural and urban dwellers, youths, and other CSOs. KABHUDA has worked on non-formal education/AEPs with international organizations such as USAID, Creative International Association, IRC as well as FHI-360. The organization had enrolled the minimum of 1,300 pupils and maximum of 10,000 pupils while running the AE programme. The local governments engaged are Munguno, Jere, Kukawa, Biu and Shani all in Borno state.

Kanem Borno Human Development Association (KABHUDA) was enlisted among 8 civil society organizations selected by the IRC to implement the DFID supported education project in Borno state for 2 years with an end date of May 2019. The project commenced in October 2017. Below are the details of the project. KABHUDA was to ensure 2100 out of school 6

¹⁵Full details of this are contained in the FHI360 reports.

¹⁶See http://kanemborno.org/?page_id=249

to 14 year old in Jere spread over 72 learning centers have increased access to learn in a safe conducive environment which is responsive to their needs. The centers were established and have been fully operational in Jere Local Government Area of Borno state since March, 2011. This project was successfully closed on 18th October, 2018. KABHUDA also partnered with USAID/Creative Associates International to implement ECR targeting 1400 out of school children and adolescents of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) spread across 28 learning centres and host communities in Jere Local Government Area of Borno State.

This education crisis response programme involves provision of basic literacy and numeracy skills to these otherwise hopeless children which commenced in September, 2016 with refreshments provided for participants during the learning activities. These 28 learning centres (LCs) are further divided into: 13 Non-Formal Learning Centres for both boys and girls; 6 Girls Learning Centres (GLCs); 6 Youth Learning Centres (YLCs) and 3 Adolescent Girls Learning Centres (AGLCs). The basic education instructions continued for 11 months. By the end of this intervention, 300 adolescent boys and 150 adolescent girls had received vocational training for 6 months and working tools were provided to them. Also, about 78.79 % of the 1400 pupils have acquired functional literacy and numeracy skills in both Hausa and English languages and a total of 700 pupils were mainstreamed into the public school system in Jere local government area of Borno state.

3.2.4 Horn of Hope Vision, Peace and Community Development in Nigeria (HOHVIPAD)

HOHVIPAD is also a local partner of FHI-360. HOHVIPAD is a religious-based (Christian) NGO which has been responding positively to the pressing needs of vulnerable – widows, the sick, destitute pupils and students across Adamawa, Borno and Yobe state.¹⁷ The organization collaborated on an accelerated education programme with FHI and other international NGOs. Jere, MMC and Munguno are the communities where HOHVIPAD has worked.

3.2.5 Communal Conservation Friendly Health and Social Development in Nigeria

COCOSOHDI is a non-religious and NGO with the aim of creating awareness on environment, education, maternal and child health among others.¹⁸ The organization works in three categories of Education intervention which includes the Education in Emergency (EiE), formal and tutoring program and skills acquisition/youth empowerment. The organization has worked in EiE in both Borno and Yobe state with international organizations such as IRC and FHI-360. In particular, COCOSOHDI was part of the ECR and the AENN project.

COCOSOHDI also implemented the North East Nigeria Transition to Development programme (NENTAD) project which aimed at delivering an effective response to the basic needs of vulnerable people impacted by the crisis in the north east of Nigeria including Education in Emergency. The project concentrated in Biu LGA of Borno State.

3.2.6 Plan International

As earlier noted, PLAN International is currently implementing the Accelerated Education Programme (AEP), although pilot study in Borno, Yobe, Adamawa state. The AEP program is implemented in 9 locations in Borno state namely, Biu, Maiduguri, Jere, Kudunga, Goza, Magumeri, Dambuwa, Munguno. However, there is a tendency of scaling up the programme to other states like Kaduna and Plateau state based on the result of the pilot survey. The

¹⁷<https://hohvipad.org/>

¹⁸<http://cocosoehdi.org/services.html>

project consists of 8,400 pupils with 230 teachers which they termed as facilitators across these locations. Initially, the target beneficiaries were 18,000 pupils, but with the advent of the pandemic, the target decreased to around 12,000 pupils.

Plan International approached the NERDC to develop a universal Accelerated Education curriculum. The curriculum is designed for 5 subjects: Math, English, Science, Nigeria history and Nigerian languages. However, these subjects are to be instructed in the dominant native language of the location (Hausa, Kanuri). The classes take place anywhere safe such as under the tree, king's palace among other places, early in the morning or in the evening.

In addition, Plan International is currently completing the teacher's guide, implementation plan, as well as national roll-out where other states will be met and discuss ways forward about scaling-up the AE programme. Also, there is a mid-line assessment to be carried out by the government, this will determine the promotion of the pupil into the next level. Gender Equality Peace and Development (GEPaD) is the only local partner Plan International is working with.

3.2.7 Education in Emergency Working Group (EiEWG)

The EiEWG is a coordination committee operating within the principles and guidelines of Inter-Agency Standing Committee and country sectoral coordination mechanisms. EiEWG comprises NGOs (national and International), UN agencies, academics, and stakeholders sharing a common goal of safeguarding a well-coordinated and equitable provision of education for populations affected by humanitarian crises. This committee is presided by the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB), Save the Children and UNICEF. The Nigeria Education Working Group (EiEWG) is based in Maiduguri, coordinated centrally by a team of coordination specialists. Under the EiEWG, donor stakeholders are putting concerted exertions to narrow the margin of OOSC through the implementation of Accelerated Education (AE) programme in the northern Nigeria some of which overlap with the ones already detail under the interventions mentioned above. The core of the EiEWG's response and coordination is based in the Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) area. 44 percent of EiEWG education response are in Nigeria.

In the EiEWG Nigeria Strategy 2018¹⁹, it is stated that effort will be on responding to the emergency needs in education facing the people of Northeast Nigeria specifically in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe. The Humanitarian Situation report for Nigeria released by UNICEF for the period between January and March, 2021 details the emergency responses on education: The report says "UNICEF and partners improved access to education for an estimated 69,985 (36,754 girls and 33,231 boys) conflicted affected children through the provision of teaching and learning materials, essential supplies, school supplies, and WASH items across LGAs in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states. A total of 15,216 (7,679 girls and 7,537 boys) children benefited from the ongoing distribution of teaching and learning materials to 100 OOSLCs and three schools in Jere, Konduga, Maiduguri LGAs of Borno state and Yunusari LGA of Yobe State. A total of 59,835 (31,768 girls and 28,067 boys) children in OOSC Learning Centers and radio learning hubs/clubs benefited from the distribution of face masks, radios, mats, hand sanitizers, and soaps in Fufore, Gombi, Guyuk, Hong, Mubi North, Mubi South and Toungo LGAs of Adamawa State and Jere, Konduga and Maiduguri LGAs of Borno State. Additionally, a total of 145 (59 females and 86 males) school-based management committees (SBMC) members were trained in PSS, COVID-19 mitigation, school

¹⁹https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/30092018_nga_education_sector_strategy.pdf

improvement plans, school emergency preparedness response (SEPR), and disaster risk reduction in Yunusari, and Geidam LGAs of Yobe State”.²⁰

²⁰<https://www.unicef.org/media/97366/file/Nigeria-Humanitarian-SitRep-31-March-2021.pdf>

3.3 AEP interventions in Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, about four AEP interventions were implemented across the communities under study.

3.3.1 Save the Children: Pilot Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) in Pujehun District

Save the Children (SC) SL launched a four-year Pilot Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) from 2016 to 2020. The project was rolled out across six communities in the Pujehun District. The beneficiary communities included Zimmi, Jendema, Gbondapi, Potoru, Massam, and Bumpeh. Beneficiaries/ participants of the SCF SL Pujehun AEP were enrolled in three levels (a condensed version of the six-year primary school curriculum): Level 1 (grades 1&2), Level 2 (grades 3&4), and Level 3 (grades 5&6). In order to transition into secondary school, the "students" enrolled in level 3 were encouraged to complete the NPSE exams (Table 8).

Table 8: Breakdown of AEP Beneficiaries

YEAR	LEVELS			TOTAL	NPSE	TRANSITION	LEVEL REPEATERS			DROP OUT
	1	2	3				1	2	3	
2016/2017	628	92	0	720	N/A	N/A	447	21	0	0
2017/2018	444	202	71	717	71	58	311	13	13	3
2018/2019	137	320	202	659	202	188	0		14	0
2019/2020	0	137	334	471	279	248	0		31	55
2020/2021			168							

Source: Final Evaluation Report for the AEP, Save the Children International

Impact on Transition: In 2018, 82% of beneficiaries who took the NPSE during the academic year 2017/2018 passed with an average score of 259/500 from the AEP. The students moved on to the formal education at the junior secondary level²¹. The first group of 71 students (42 boys and 29 girls) who took the NPSE enrolled in secondary schools in the district.

In 2019 the programme saw 197 students (109 girls and 88 boys) sit the NPSE and pass with a 95% success rate. The pass rates for the various AEP settlements in the district are shown in Table 9. With the communities of **Zimmi**, **Gbondapi**, and **Massam** recording 100% passes, a 13% rise in pass rates compared to 2018 can be seen. With the exception of **Zimmi**, it is important to note that all the students at the other centers who received the best scores were girls, further demonstrating the ability of AEPs to empower girls. (Sierra Leone Policy Brief on the Effectiveness of AEPs, 2022). The results show that once girls enter the AEP programming, they work hard to attain high learning results and further their opportunities.

Table 9: Accelerated Education Project (AEP) National Primary School Examination Results 2019

Community	Best grade	Average score	Pass rate (%)	Remarks
Zimmi	311	292	100	Pass
Gbondapi	301	286	100	Pass
Massam	279	270	100	Pass
Jendema	292	292	92	Pass
Potoru	291	248	66	Pass
Bumpeh	281	242	82	Pass

²¹ Save the Children AEP Sierra Leone

Source: Save the Children Sierra Leone

Similarly, the final group of AEP students took the NPSE exams in 2020. As indicated in Figure 4, 279 students (132 girls and 147 boys) took the tests, with an 88% pass rate. In Gbondapi, there was a 100% pass rate, with three females receiving the highest scores in their AEP centers. 47 students received scores of 300 or higher, which is a respectable result.

The Sierra Leone Policy Brief (2022) on the Effectiveness of AEPs reveals that: The Pujehun AEP has helped more AEP students access junior secondary school even though, the pass rate for AEP students fell from 95% in 2019 to 88% in 2020, partly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The majority of AEP students are mothers and older children who frequently contribute to family income, hence, the limitation of travel and closure of local weekly markets significantly impact their sources of revenue to support their families, resulting in them returning late to write the NPSE exams.

Other Key results from SL that are measures of effectiveness comprise the following:

- They had an 82% pass rate in the 2018 National Primary School Examination (NPSE)
- Normal 6-year primary curriculum condensed into 3 levels/ cycles
- Volunteer community-based teachers have independently enrolled in distance education to obtain full teaching certificates;
- AEP committees in each community are dedicated, mobilized, and active, in one case acting to prevent child marriage
- Community & Ministry of Basic and Secondary School Education (MBSSE)/DEO/local council ownership is very high
- Class hours are suitable for older learners
- Youth were involved in planning the initiative
- Monitoring tools for the project were developed and are available
- Completed version of AEP step-by-step curriculum.

3.3.2 Girls Empowerment Models: Effectiveness of the Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescents (ELA) innovation in Sierra Leone

Given the crisis of girl's education in West Africa and the endemic problems of teenage pregnancy, poverty and negative socio-cultural practices which restrict girls entrance, retention and completion at schools - safe spaces for girls have become a best practice strategy for countries striving to protect the next generation of girls. A key result of the AE innovation was a significant reduction in the number of unmarried pregnancies in part due to the life skills the girls acquired during the program. The safe space model includes: a place where girls can obtain support, information on health and reproductive issues, and vocational training. These models were particularly important during and after the Ebola crisis in SL and were made available to roughly **16,160** adolescent girls as part of the intervention.

ELA is an AEP-style initiative that BRAC-Sierra Leone launched in the country. The ELA programme was implemented in 5 districts in both the North and South of the country. The programme ran over 2012 and 2021, with several phases hosting a specific number of girls with funding from various NGOs. The programme aimed to give teenage girls a safe environment, improve their understanding of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and behavior, enhance their access to income-generating activities (IGA) through training and financial support, and to boost adolescent girls' engagement in family and societal decision-making.

- **ELA Impact—the transformative gender empowerment dimensions:**

A random control trial of the ELA programme conducted during the EVD crisis found that safe spaces successfully alleviated the risks of unmarried pregnancy and consequential school drop-out posed to girls by disease containment measures. School enrolment rates fell by 16 per cent in the communities hardest hit by EVD but only by 8 per cent in communities with safe spaces. Pregnancy among unmarried girls also fell in communities with active safe spaces (Bandiera et al., 2019). The ELA approach is centered on giving the girls access to safe environments where they may engage with peers of their own age and learn about SRH through the life skills component, financial literacy training, and livelihood training. The hope is that by combining these approaches, girls will be given the knowledge and ability to help them get through the challenging time of puberty, and eventually become empowered members of society.

- **Effectiveness of the ELA Programme**

Teenage girls in Sierra Leone were among the worst affected by the Ebola epidemic, but those in the ELA programme exhibited significant resistance to many of the shocks triggered by the outbreak. A key result of the AE innovation was a significant reduction in the number of unmarried pregnancies in part due to the life skills the girls acquired during the program. In ELA clubs, both older and younger ELA girls spent an average of 3 hours per week together with their peers and skilled mentors. Additionally, the program reduced the rise in unprotected sex by 43%, helping to lower the number of unintended pregnancies. In addition, girls under the programme were able to increase their use of contraceptives thereby helping to prevent unwanted pregnancies

The human capital development, which is essential for future employment chances, was protected by the clubs. Young girls in high-disruption areas saw an approximate 73% loss in literacy abilities (99% in numeracy), but this was more than offset by the fact that they spent 10 hours per week more in school and almost 5 hours less on household chores. ELA clubs helped older learners make up 93% of the numeracy abilities they had lost. The teenagers had to abandon their studies because of Ebola and search for income generating activities (IGA). Fewer younger girls had unmarried pregnancies because of their involvement in the ELA clubs, which allowed them to finish their education and made re-enrolling in school simpler. ELA girls, regardless of their age, were also better able to balance school and income generating activities. IGA attendance by 9.5 percentage points (pp) for younger girls and by 5.1 pp for older girls. While Older girls doubled their participation in credit or finance networks an, younger girls increased their business networks by 46%.

4.0 Findings and analysis

4.1 Country Demographic Information and Background Context

This section provides an overview of the demographic characteristics within each of the three countries studied. It also analyses the local government areas/districts, communities and households in relation to enrolment, teacher types, academic qualifications of teachers, and infrastructure among others.

4.1.1 Ghana

In Ghana, the mapping study was conducted across eight districts – six districts in the Northern region and one district each in the Upper East and Northeast regions. The selected districts are all part of one of several AEP interventions, delivered by innovation partners including School for Life (SfL), GILLBT, and Afrikids. Among the eight districts, a third of the communities (33%) are classified as extremely deprived and hard-to-reach communities, with a higher percentage of these located in the Mamprugu Moagduri district (9%) and the Yendi district (7%)²². The remainder of sampled communities fall within the category of rural deprived²³.

▪ Community Context

Study results show that mixed farming²⁴ is the predominant economic activity across men, women, and youth. The vast majority of men (85%) engage in mixed farming, while others engaged in mining, commercial motor-bike operations, carpentry, and masonry. A sizable portion of women also engage in other economic activities, such as petty trading (23%) and shea butter processing (19%). Notably, the extremely-deprived communities mostly engage in farming and trading, while those in rural-deprived areas undertook a mix of other vocations.

In terms of access to drinking water and healthcare facilities, the study reveals that nearly 70% of the communities rely on boreholes and 11% on pipe-borne water and dams. Across all districts, 19% of communities rely on unhygienic water sources, such as rivers, dams, and ponds. The study also showed that about 60% of communities do not have any healthcare facility; the remainder 40% have access to basic facilities mostly in the form of “community health compounds” (CHPS compounds), meaning that long-distance to secondary and tertiary healthcare centres is still required for more complicated conditions.

▪ Household Context

Of the eight districts, the Mamprugu Moagduri district contains the highest number of households in extremely-deprived communities, accounting for about a third of all households in this category. Conversely, the Kumbungu and Tolon district account for the highest proportion of households in rural-deprived communities. Within households, 93% of household heads are male across the six districts, which is significantly higher than the national average. Furthermore, 80.7% of household heads have no education, which could pose implications for the education of their children. This number is even higher (91.2%) in

²² Extremely deprived communities: defined as communities more than a two-hour drive from the district capital, with no access to basic schools or a 30 minutes' walk to the nearest school; an absence of healthcare facilities and other social amenities.

²³ Rural deprived communities: defined as communities that are less than a two-hour drive from the district capital; which have access to basic school in the community, where it is less than a 10-minute walk to the nearest school; the presence of healthcare centres and access to other social amenities.

²⁴ Mixed farming is defined as the planting of maize, millet, cassava as well as animal rearing.

female-headed households. In terms of household divisions of labour, household heads predominantly engage in crop farming (90%) and animal rearing (41%). Both are overwhelmingly performed by men.

The average household size in the districts sampled is 6.7 members, nearly two times the national average as reported by the 2021 GSS. Most households consist of between six and ten people. Household assets often include farm-help animals and other tools used for economic activities, such as bicycles and farm tools. Though some households possessed electrical appliances, education-related assets, such as tables and chairs and computers, were scarce in most households.

▪ **School-level Context**

The study data show that the Kumbungu, Talensi, and Tolon districts had the highest proportion of teachers (at 21%, 19% and 18% respectively), whereas Gushiegu (6%) and Karaga (6%) were the districts with the least number of teachers. It should be noted that this pattern is likely explained by the number of schools accessible to the study communities and their relative remoteness and may not be reflective of the general teacher distribution situation within these communities. Of all teachers, about two-thirds (67%) across all districts possess the minimum Diploma in Basic Education, with a further 24% having first degrees mostly in education-related courses. The remaining 9% is accounted for by teachers in the National Service Personnel, in the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP), City and Guild, and those with O-level qualifications. Survey results reveal that approximately 90% of all teachers in the sampled districts are trained. The vast majority (79%) of those with high degrees are headteachers within their districts.

In terms of school infrastructure, the study reveals that over two-thirds of schools (77%) do not have adequate furniture, including writing desks and chairs, while 15% of schools report the complete lack of furniture for students. This finding is more prevalent in the Karaga district.

4.1.2 Nigeria

In total, the study surveyed 30 communities in the Borno state of Northeast Nigeria. Due to civil conflict and internal displacement, the region sees a significant prevalence of out-of-school children. In total, 13 communities from Jere and 17 from Maiduguri (MMC) were sampled. Though there exist a number of primary and secondary schools in proximity to these communities, many of these are no longer easily accessible to children due to safety risks, including kidnapping and death.

In MMC, schools are relatively more accessible, with the average distance to senior secondary school (SSS) between three and five kilometres. Conversely, in Jere LGA, the average distance is greater than five kilometres, and most children only have access to SSS in other LGAs through daily commuting or through temporary relocation to these other school communities.

4.1.3 Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, the mapping study was conducted in three districts, selected based on the BRAC International and Save the Children International (SCI) intervention areas: Kambia, Port Loko, and Pujehun.

▪ **District distribution and context**

Among the three districts, Port Loko has the highest percentage of extremely deprived communities²⁵ (16%), followed by Pujehun (15.2%) and Kambia (13.3%). Over half (56%) of all communities within the three districts are classified as rural deprived²⁶ and 44% fall within the category of extremely deprived.

▪ **Community Context**

In all three communities, the primary source of household income is farming – particularly in Kambia and Port Loko, where it was reported by more than 50% of respondents. Other sources of income for district households include trading, mining, and hunting. In comparison, income from inheritance or remittances comprise a small percentage of household responses. In all three districts, all family members, including children, contribute to economic activity. There is a significant gendered division of labour among family members, with men and boys engaging primarily in farm-related activities and women and girls undertaking a broader range of home-based activities, such as trading, vegetable farming, laundry, housekeeping, and child-minding.

The right to access healthcare is granted to all citizens of Sierra Leone, though the availability of health facilities across communities varies significantly. Within the districts, the primary source of healthcare is formal medical facilities, as reported by 93% of households. Use of other facilities such as herbalists, chemical shops, or other sources is minimal. However, accessibility of formal medical facilities remains sparse: for example, only one in eight respondents in Port Loko reported the existence of a health facility within their community.

▪ **Household Contexts**

Of all sample communities across all three districts, 536 (44%) of these are classified as extremely deprived while 669 (56%) are classified as rural deprived. Of the 1,205 households interviewed, 931 (77%) were male-led, while only 274 (23%) were female-led. This pattern is consistent elsewhere in Sierra Leone, as in most parts of Africa, where tradition dictates that the husband is generally the head of the household. The educational levels of household heads are generally low, where only 10% of male household heads in Pujehun, 5% in Kambia and 4% in Port Loko have a university or other form of tertiary education. More significantly, the majority of female household heads (67% in Pujehun, 82% in Kambia, and 83% in Port Loko) do not have any formal education at all, compared to 26%, 45%, and 66% respectively in the three districts for male household heads. In terms of economic activities, on average of 62% of household heads engage in agricultural production, while traders, artisans, and drivers make up the remainder of the household economy.

▪ **Community Profile**

The physical characteristics of dwellings provide valuable insight into the socioeconomic status of respondents. Of all respondents, the majority report dwellings constructed of iron sheet and mud brick. In terms of water access, 68% of households reported access to safe drinking water sources, such as protected wells, public taps, and boreholes. In Port Loko (40%) and Kambia (28%), households also largely depend on unsafe sources, such as streams, rivers, and ponds. Of all the households surveyed, the majority of residents (70%)

²⁵ Extremely deprived communities: defined as communities that are more than a one-hour drive from the district capital, do not have a school nor health facility in close proximity, and where households within the community have one or less meals in a day.

²⁶ Rural deprived communities: defined as communities that are less than one hour from the district capital, have a school and health facility, and where households within the community have more than one meal a day.

report using latrines as toilets, with 59% of these respondents using a more hygienic covered latrine. These households further own a broad range of assets, as depicted in Table X. Of these, livestock, crockery, and furniture formed the majority of reported assets in all three districts, and particularly in Kambia and Port Loko. Furthermore, while cell phones and radios were reported consistently by communities in all three districts, other gadgets of modern convenience, such as irons, refrigerators, and air conditioners, were only reported in a fraction of homes. Of important note is the significant absence of writing tables and chairs, which are necessary for school children to comfortably study while at home. This was reported by fewer than 10% of respondents in all three districts.

The average household size in all three districts is 5.7 members, which is only slightly higher than the national household size of 5.6 reported in the 2018 SLIHS. Of these households, members between the ages of 0-17 form the majority, indicating that there is lower economic engagement and thus higher dependency. In many cases, where the earning power of the working population is insufficient, older children are relied upon to provide additional economic support, resulting in negative effects on school output and retention.

▪ **School-Level Context**

Physical accessibility of schools is a major contributing factor to enrolment and retention of children in schools, particularly in young children who cannot travel long distances. In the study areas, only 36% of schools are within one-hour of the district capital, with the greatest number of these in Kambia. Conversely, 15% of schools in the study area are considered remote, the majority of which are located in the Port Loko district. Based on household surveys, the majority (65%) of school-aged children live less than three kilometres from the nearest school, where the average time taken to reach the nearest school is less than ten minutes on foot. However, in communities without secondary schools, students who choose to continue with their schooling must continue their education in larger towns, resulting in much longer and hazardous travel for children, particularly girls. Furthermore, children in rural and hard-to-reach areas, who are most disadvantaged by long distances, do not benefit from government-provided school buses. As a result, many parents in remote areas send their children away to school, though this is met with a high economic cost and considerable safety risks.

Across the study districts, there are 104 primary schools, but only 19 pre-primary schools, suggesting a supply barrier to preparing children with the necessary foundational skills to begin primary education. Respondents cite the general lack of schools in and around communities as a major challenge, particularly at the junior (JSS) and senior (SSS) secondary levels; many parents are compelled to keep children at home rather than send them away to obtain an education. Within schools, male teachers are predominant at all levels, increasing as the level of education increases. With the exception of the Kambia district, the proportion of trained teachers is higher than the proportion of untrained teachers at the primary level. In terms of teacher distribution, primary schools have the most teachers, but have the highest pupil-teacher ratio (PTR), at an average of 49 to one in Pujehun, 39 to one in Port Loko, and 44 to one in Kambia. This is significantly higher than the ratio of 25 to one prescribed by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE). Conversely, at the JSS level, Kambia and Port Loko's PTRs are relatively at par with the national requirement, while the PTR at the SSS level is lower than the national average across all districts, indicating a low level of enrolment at higher levels when viewed against the few number of schools in the area under study. Similar trends exist for the pupil-to-trained-teacher ratio (PTTR) across all three levels of education.

According to respondents, approximately 70% of schools in the study area require some repair in order to be restored to proper function. Participants' satisfaction with basic infrastructure within schools scored below 50% in nearly all domains, including the perceived adequacy of toilets, classrooms, sitting spaces, furniture, and computers.

4.2 Out of School Children Context – Prevalence of OOSC

This section discusses the out of school situation identified from the various districts, communities and households under study. The out of school numbers are estimated using the sum of those (children) who have never attended school and those who have dropped out of school.

4.2.1 Ghana

In total, the study identified 3,536 children aged 17 years and below across the communities under observation. Of these, 1,836 (63.2%) are currently in school, 680 (23.4%) have never attended formal school, 303 (10.4%) have dropped out of school, and 88 (3%) are sometimes in school and at risk of drop out (Table 10). The OOSC population comprises of children who have never attended school, or who have dropped out, for a total of 983 children between the ages of 4-17 (33.8%). The study shows that the out-of-school phenomenon occurs predominantly among children aged 6-11, or those at the primary level. Interestingly, the proportion of children who have never attended school is significant at the kindergarten level (age 4-5), whereas the number of children who have dropped out is highest at the senior high school (SHS) level (age 15-17).

Table 10: Categories of all children across the study areas

Categories	Age Groups				Total	OOS Pop.
	4-5	6-11	12-14	15-17		
Total Sample	236	1643	551	477	2907	
In-School	Freq.	97	1103	354	282	1836
	%	3.3%	37.9%	12.2%	9.7%	63.2%
Never Attended	Freq.	132	394	86	68	680
	%	4.5%	13.6%	3.0%	2.3%	23.4%
Drop Out	Freq.	2	87	98	116	303
	%	0.1%	3.0%	3.4%	4.0%	10.4%
At Risk²⁷	Freq.	5	59	13	11	88
	%	0.2%	2.0%	0.4%	0.4%	3.0
Total	8.1	56.5	19.0	16.4	100.0	
						KG: 134 (4.6%)
						Prim.: 481 (16.6%)
						JHS: 184 (6.3%)
						SHS: 184 (6.3%)
						Total: 983 (33.8%)

Household data, OOSC mapping survey, 2022

Disaggregating the findings by gender, the study finds that there is a higher out-of-school rate among boys (55%) compared to girls (45%), which is consistent with the national-level evidence from the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) as well as the MICS (Table 11). Disaggregating the data by level of deprivation, the study shows that there are slightly more out-of-school children in rural-deprived communities than in the extremely-deprived communities under study. This is most likely due to the nature of the study sample, which had a higher concentration of rural deprived communities. However, results show that

²⁷ Sometimes in school

children who have “never attended” school tend to come from extremely deprived communities, whereas “dropped out” children are more likely to come from rural deprived communities. In both intervention and non-intervention areas in the districts under study, children who had never attended school formed the majority of the OOSC population. However, the percentage of children who have dropped out is significantly higher in intervention areas compared to non-intervention areas.

Table 11: OOSC population by sex

Out of school Pop.	Female		Male		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Drop Out	108	24.7%	195	36.6%	303	31.2%
Never Attended	330	75.3%	338	63.4%	668	68.8%
Total	438	100%	533	100%	971	100%

Source: Household data, OOSC mapping survey, 2022

4.2.2 Nigeria

In the study, of the total 4,049 school-aged children surveyed, 2,096 (52%) are currently in school, 456 (11%) have dropped out, 84 (2%) are only in school sometimes and thus at risk of dropping out, and 1,413 (35%) have never attended school. Incredibly, the combined proportion of dropped-out children and those who have never attended school constitutes nearly half the population of school-age children (Figure 4). This is a phenomenon that calls for urgent intervention.

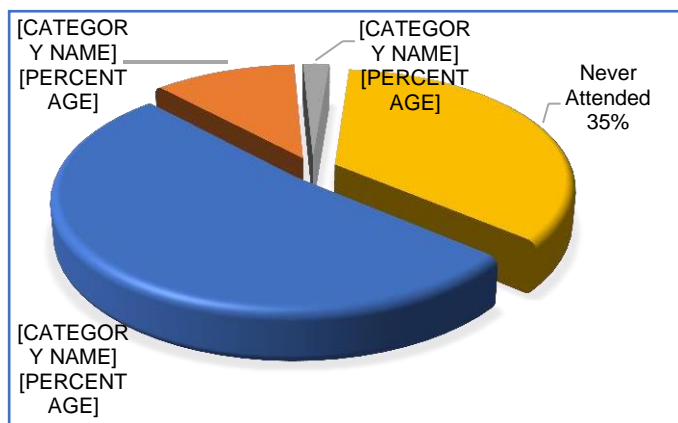


Figure 4: Education status of children in Nigeria

Source: Household Survey Data, OOSCY Mapping (CSEA, 2022)

Comparing across education levels, the study finds that the ECCDE age (4-5 years) contains the highest proportion of children who have never attended school (Figure 5). Interestingly, while the proportion of children who have never attended school are higher at lower levels of education, the proportion of drop-out cases increases with age and education level. Similarly, the proportion of children enrolled in school increases until the junior secondary school (JSS) level, but then falls at the senior secondary school (SSS) level. This suggests that enrolment and retention tend to decline after junior secondary school.

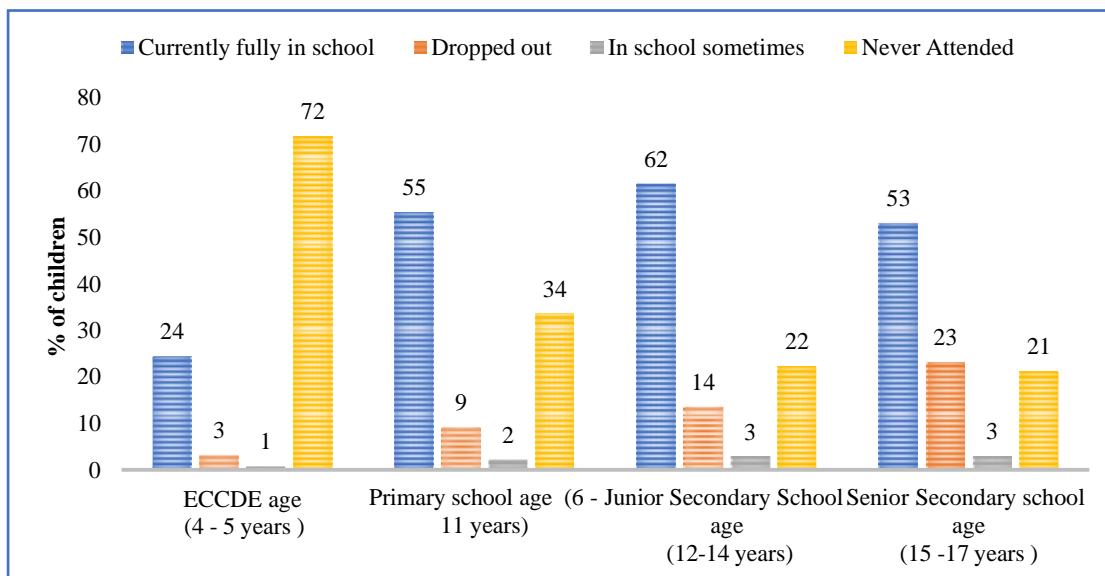


Figure 5: Educational status of children by age cohorts
Source: Household Survey Data, OOSC Mapping 2022

Data on the education status of children in each LGA reveal that there is a slightly higher prevalence of OOSC in Jere compared to MMC, with similar proportions of OOSC between boys and girls. When comparing the OOSC situation across intervention- and non-intervention communities, as well as between children in host communities versus IDP camps, the study finds similar proportions of children throughout, suggesting the presence of substantial barriers to education that widely persist regardless of community-type.

Comparisons of the OOSC situation across households reveal interesting trends. The study finds that in both dropped-out children and children who have never attended school, the majority come from small households, with the least coming from large households. Notably, in small households, OOSC children are more likely to be dropouts than those who have never enrolled in the first place; the opposite is true for medium-sized households. When examining the OOSC situation across marriage systems, the study finds that there are both more children dropped out as well as those who never attended school in polygamous households compared to monogamous households.

The prevalence of OOSC by community emergency status reveals, 77% of the children in the host community never attended school, while 23% of these dropped out. In the IDP camps however, 75% of the children have never attended school while 25% have dropped out (Figure 6). The proportions mirror the result already seen in the distribution of the enrolment status of school age children, buttressing the fact that there are enormous barriers to children's access to education both in the host communities and the IDP camps.

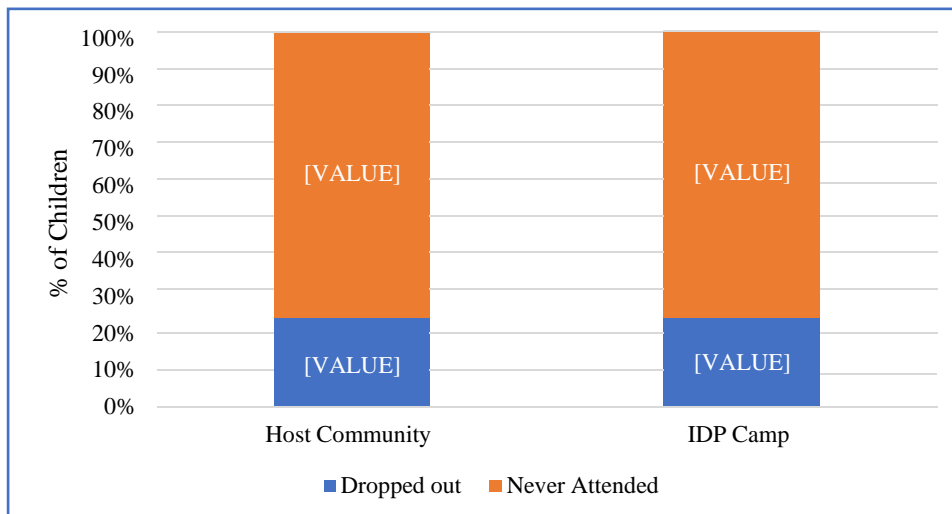


Figure 6: Prevalence of OOSC by community emergency status
Household Survey, OOSC Mapping 2022 - Nigeria

4.2.3 Sierra Leone

In 2021 and 2022, one in five children (22%) aged 4 to 17 across all levels did not attend school. School attendance for girls was slightly higher than boys in both years across the three districts, with the exception of Pujehun district in 2022, where attendance was equal in girls and boys. The 22% of out-of-school children comprises children who have ‘never been to school’ (12%) and children who have dropped out (10%). Approximately 1% of all children currently in school are at risk of dropping out since they do not attend school regularly.

The percentage of girls who are currently in school in the districts is slightly higher than that of boys. In Kambia for instance, 82% of girls compared to 80% of boys are currently in school, for Port Loko, 81% of girls compared to 79% of boys are in school. On the other hand, slightly more girls than boys in Port Loko and Kambia have never attended school whereas the reverse is the case in Kambia (Table 12).

Table 12: Education status of the children by gender

Educational status	KAMBIA		PORT LOKO		PUJEHUN		TOTAL (N=2992)
	Percentage (%) (N=991)		Percentage (%) (N=928)		Percentage (%) (N=1073)		
	Female (N=508)	Male (N=483)	Female (N=444)	Male (N=484)	Female (N=576)	Male (N=497)	
Currently fully in school	81.69	80.12	80.93	78.83	78.93	78.88	76.84
Never Attended	13.98	16.56	15.24	14.41	15.91	15.19	12.30
Dropped Out	4.13	2.48	3.33	5.86	3.93	4.85	9.86
In school sometimes	0.20	0.83	0.50	0.90	1.24	1.08	1.00
Grand Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Household Survey, OOSC Mapping 2022 – Sierra Leone

The highest OOSC rate (6.6%) is among the senior secondary school population aged 15-17 years. As a result of endemic poverty in the areas under study, children who reach the age of puberty either enter the workforce or are married off in the case of girls. Furthermore, the

lack of secondary schools in communities often require that children leave home to continue their education. Teenage pregnancy is another significant factor leading to dropout in girls at the secondary school level. The study shows that the out-of-school situation among primary- and pre-school children is similar, at 5.7% and 5.6% respectively, largely due to the economic situation of parents and caregivers and the inability to afford basic items required for children to stay in school. Furthermore, there is a lack of schools in close proximity to communities, meaning that many young children who are unable to walk long distances, will never attend school.

The study further reveals that in general, more children in the study area have never been to school (55.5%) compared with those who have dropped out of school. Disaggregated comparison by gender indicates that more boys (64%) than girls (49.3%) have never attended school. However, girls (50.7%) are far more likely than boys (37.6%) to drop out of school (Table 13). When accounting for those who have never been to school as well as those who have dropped out, more girls (53%) than boys (47%) in the study area are out of school. Notably, when comparing across school levels, the driver for the OOSC situation in SSS is high dropout rates, whereas the main reason for the OOSC situation in the pre-primary and primary school populations is non-attendance.

Table 13: Out of school population by gender

OOS population	Female (N=1528)		Male (N=1464)		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Dropped Out	177	50.7	118	37.6	295	44.5
Never Attended	172	49.3	196	62.4	368	55.5
Total	349	100	314	100%	663	100%

Source: Household survey data, OOSC mapping 2022

Across communities, 72% of children aged 4-17 in rural deprived communities have never attended school, and 28% of children have dropped out of school. Conversely, 45% of children in extremely deprived communities have never attended school, but a much higher 55% have dropped out. Overall, the study reveals that there are more children out of school in extremely deprived communities (62%) than in rural deprived communities (38%). Across the communities under study, there are high numbers of OOSC in all intervention areas compared to non-intervention areas, suggesting that these communities were well-selected by education innovators to deliver AEP initiatives.

The study reveals that the main reason why children do not attend school is financial constraint among households, and this reason is more salient for girls than for boys in all districts. Secondly, in communities where schools are not readily accessible, age – in tandem with large distances – is often a factor that deters attendance in younger children.

4.3 Dropout Situation and Context

This section presents the findings relating to drop-out statistics across communities and households in the study countries, disaggregated by key variables including class level, sex, level of deprivation and by AEP programming.

4.3.1 Ghana

The study finds that most incidences of dropout occur at the primary school level, with the highest frequency (17%) occurring at primary 2. The data further shows that dropout rates are significantly higher among the male population (64.3%) than the female population (35.7%) at both the primary and junior high school (JHS) levels (Table 14). When disaggregating for level of deprivation, the data reveal that dropout rates are higher in rural-deprived communities than in extremely deprived communities. This is likely due to the higher prevalence of rural deprived areas in the study.

Table 14: Drop-out population by sex

Class level	Female		Male		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
KG1	3	3%	9	5%	12	3.9%
KG2	7	6%	12	6%	19	6.2%
Primary School 1	14	13%	31	16%	45	14.8%
Primary School 2	16	15%	36	18%	52	17%
Primary School 3	18	17%	25	13%	43	14.1%
Primary School 4	15	14%	27	14%	42	13.8%
Primary School 5	12	11%	25	13%	37	12.1%
Primary School 6	13	12%	15	8%	28	9.2%
Junior Secondary 1	4	4%	8	4%	12	3.9%
Junior Secondary 2	3	3%	4	2%	7	2.3%
Junior Secondary 3	1	1%	1	1%	2	0.7%
Senior Secondary 3	2	2%	2	1%	4	1.3%
Total	109	100%	196	100%	305	100%

Source: Household data, OOSC mapping survey, 2022 - Ghana

The study elucidates several factors that account for the drop-out phenomenon, based on the perspectives of household heads and primary caregivers. These include social, financial, cultural, and attitudinal factors. Notably, attitudinal factors such as limited interest in schooling or the belief that school is unimportant account for more than half the responses among participants. This was observed slightly more frequently among male dropouts compared to female dropouts. Other factors accounting for the dropout phenomenon include parental neglect (due to a lack of interest or lack of commitment); high poverty levels; as well as peer influence from other dropouts who have successfully engaged in income-generating economic activities.

4.3.2 Nigeria

The study finds that there are more children who have dropped out in the Jere LGA compared to MMC. Within each LGA, the data show that there are more female dropouts (54%) in Jere compared to male (46%), whereas the inverse is true in MMC (48% female and 52% male, respectively) – Figure 7. When disaggregating by community emergency status, the study finds that dropout is more prevalent among children in the host communities compared to IDPs.

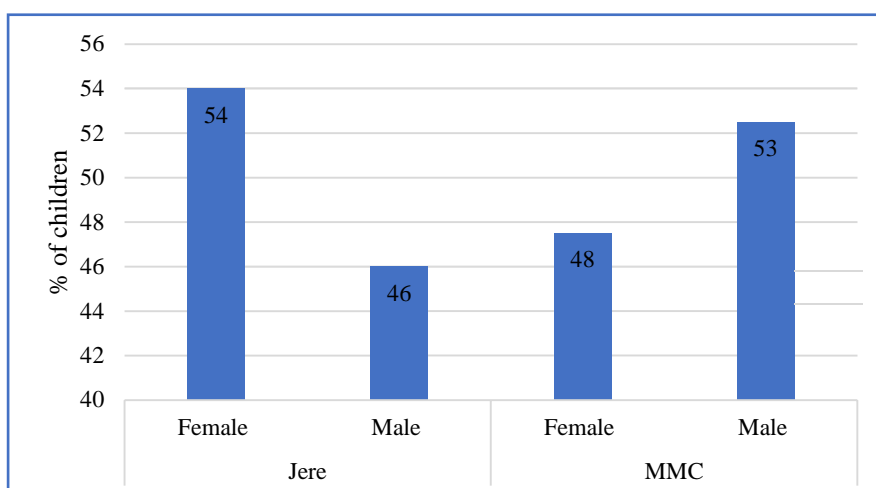


Figure 7: Proportion of dropout children by LGA
 Source: Household Survey Data, OOSC Mapping 2022

The disaggregation by intervention status shows a higher proportion of dropouts among females, 54% than males, 46% in the intervention communities (Figure 8). On the contrary, a higher proportion of males, 53% than females, 48% are dropped out in the non-intervention communities. The better retention seen for girls in the intervention community may be attributed to the effect of AEP intervention which is usually advocates equitable gender participation in education.

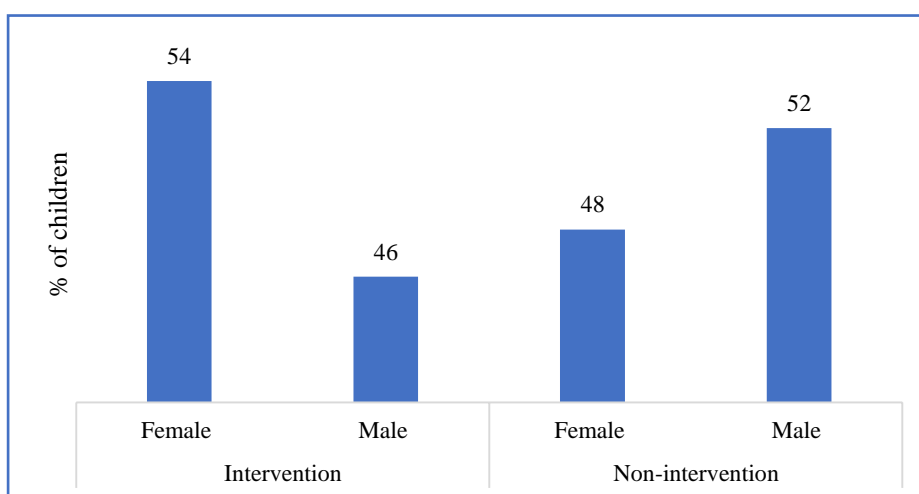


Figure 8: Figure 8: Proportions of dropout children by community intervention status
 Household Survey Data, OOSC Mapping 2022

In terms of grade level, most girls dropped out at the primary level with the highest occurrence at primary 6 for both boys (38) and girls (33). Proportionally, 53% girls compared to 46% dropped out at this level. A high occurrence of drop out is also observed at the primary 3 at equal proportion, 50% for both boys and girls. At the Junior secondary level, most children dropped out at the Junior Secondary school 3 with the occurrence of 19 and 14 for girls and boys respectively. This is in the proportion of about 58% and 42% for boys and girls respectively. At the Senior secondary level, the highest occurrence of drop out is witnessed at the Senior Secondary school 2 for girls (6) while the highest occurrence is seen at both Senior Secondary School 2 and 3 for boys (11).

Several factors accounting for the drop-out rates are highlighted. The most dominant of these factors been the *lack of finance* to support child’s education (57%). Others include *lack of school materials* (8%) and *insecurity* (6%) with *preference for Islamic studies*, *health problems* and *migration* all accounting for 4% each of the responses. Other minor reasons for drop-out levels included *economic activities of the child*, *the absence of trained teachers* (2% each), *child’s dislike for schooling*, *death of guardian*, *corporal punishment* and *challenges with transport fare*.

4.3.3 Sierra Leone

The study finds that in Sierra Leone, the higher the level of schooling, the higher the dropout rate (Table 15). Therefore, the highest dropout rate occurs among senior secondary school (SSS) students, with girls in SSS-3 having the highest dropout rate of 23%, followed by boys in SSS-1 and SSS-3 (20% and 19% respectively). There is a significant difference in the dropout situation between genders: 60% of girls in the sample have dropped out of school, compared to 45% of boys. Disaggregating for level of deprivation, the study finds that there are far more cases of dropout in extremely-deprived communities (76%) than there are in rural-deprived communities (24%). However, it should be noted that the highest dropout rate by grade level is at the SSS-3 level in rural-deprived communities.

Table 15: Dropout by level and gender

Grade	Female		Male		Total	Average
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
N2	1	1	1	1	2	1
N3	1	1	0	0	1	0
P1	4	2	7	6	11	4
P2	7	4	1	1	8	3
P3	7	4	3	3	10	3
P4	5	3	3	3	8	3
P5	13	7	6	5	19	6
P6	7	4	4	3	11	4
JSS 1	11	6	8	7	19	6
JSS 2	21	12	8	7	29	10
JSS 3	13	7	16	14	29	10
SSS 1	28	16	24	20	52	18
SSS 2	19	11	14	12	33	11
SSS 3	40	23	23	19	63	21
Total	177	100	118	100	295	100

Source: Household interviews, out of school mapping, 2022

Data collected during focus groups and interviews reveal several reasons for the difference in dropout rate by gender, including economic, socio-cultural, and attitudinal factors. By far, the most significant reason for dropout is economic – that is, the inability of parents to meet school expenses. This reason was more frequently reported among girls than boys. Furthermore, parents’ inability to provide for their children renders young girls in particular to transactional relationships with working men, and they often exchange sex for money for lunch, transport, and school materials. It follows that teenage pregnancy is reported by 5.9% of respondents as the primary reason for which girls end up dropping out of school.

Economic factors tend to be associated with other reasons for drop out, including a lack of interest or time for school (due to providing for the family), poor performance in school, far distances which render schooling inaccessible, and family members' refusal. For boys, there is the further desire to participate in income-generating activities at a young age, choosing quick earnings over attendance in school. For girls, the phenomenon of early marriage is a major barrier to continuing education, along with traditional gender expectations that women – particularly married women – take on domestic work.

4.4 Children at Risk of Dropout

The 'at risk of dropping' population was estimated using three key variables – overage for grade level, frequency of repetition and frequency of school attendance.

4.4.1 At risk of dropping population – using overage at grade level

Ghana

The study finds that out of 1,924 children currently in school, 592 are at risk of dropping out because they are over-age for their class level. 297 of these children are at the age for the junior high level, but remain at various primary levels, and 292 children are at the senior high level, but remain at various primary or JHS levels.

Nigeria

The results shows there is a prevalence of overaged children across all grades in Nigeria. Primary 1 has the highest prevalence of overaged children, having 125 and 68 children of junior secondary school age and senior secondary school age, respectively. This might be relatable since it is the inception grade for primary school entrants. There is also high prevalence of overage children at primary 6, which is the ultimate grade in the primary school. This may be attributed to inability of children to pass the Common Entrance Examination, needed for children to proceed into the secondary school. Where children are overage among their classmates, they tend to feel odd in the group. Moreso, for the reasons of bullying, compatibility of overage learners with the younger learners may pose a challenge. As a result of this, there is the tendency for the overage learner to be discouraged from continuing to attend school.

Sierra Leone

In the study area, 480 children aged 12-14 who should be in junior secondary school (JSS) and 410 children aged 15-17 who should be in senior secondary school are still in grade levels far below their age group. In total, 890 students in the study area are at heightened risk of dropping out of school because they are overage for their class level.

4.4.2 At risk of dropping population – using frequency of repetition

Ghana

Frequency of repetition (the number of times a child has repeated a class) was disaggregated by AEP and non-AEP communities. The study finds that out of the 158 students who had ever repeated a class, about 16% (25) repeated a class more than once, putting these children at a significantly higher risk of dropping out. The majority of these repetitions occurred at the primary school level. In non-AEP areas, no child was reported to have repeated a class more than twice.

Nigeria

One of the main indicators of the risk of dropping out is class repetition. The study data reveal that a higher proportion of boys (53%) than girls (47%) have repeated classes once, whereas a significantly higher proportion of girls (67%) have repeated classes three times, compared to only 33% in boys. Interestingly, the proportion of girls who have repeated classes rises with the number of repetitions, while the inverse correlation is observed in boys, suggesting that girls are at a significantly higher risk of dropping out of school.

In both AEP and non-AEP communities, class repetition occurs more at the primary level than the junior secondary level. Furthermore, more children have repeated classes in the intervention communities than in the non-intervention communities, suggesting that these areas are an ideal target for AEP intervention due to higher risk of drop out.

Sierra Leone

The study reveals that a similar proportion of pupils in both intervention communities (31%) and non-intervention communities (28%) have repeated a grade. However, there are more girls in intervention areas than boys who are at risk of dropping out, whereas the inverse is true in non-intervention areas.

4.4.3 At risk of dropping population – using frequency of attendance

Ghana

Study results show that out of 1,862 students currently in school, 435 (23%) have a higher rate of absenteeism, putting them at a higher risk of dropout in the future. The findings also reveal that a significant proportion of children who miss school in the most disadvantaged localities belonged in the lower primary school and kindergarten levels, whereas in rural-deprived regions, absenteeism is observed across grade levels. Comparatively, absenteeism was higher in the rural-deprived regions than in the extremely marginalized regions.

Nigeria

The data on school absenteeism suggest that across all class levels, absenteeism is highest at the primary 2 level for both boys and girls. Interestingly, there are no reported cases of absenteeism at the senior secondary school level. Comparing between boys and girls, the study finds that absenteeism is generally higher among boys than girls across all class levels, except primary 2.

Sierra Leone

The study shows that an average of 17% of schoolchildren from nursery 2 to SSS 1 in the study area have poor attention at school, increasing their risk for dropout. The results further demonstrate that girls are absent from school slightly more frequently than boys. Approximately 52% of the 386 children who are likely to drop out of school due to absenteeism are girls.

4.4.4 Reasons for at risk and vulnerability population

Ghana

Interviews with community stakeholders revealed that the main drivers behind children at risk of dropping out comprised of both economic and sociocultural factors. To this effect, sociocultural practices such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and fosterage will pressure

many students – particularly girls – to leave school. These sociocultural pressures are often linked to economic barriers or negative attitudes about education. Families not only struggle with the affordability of school fees and school supplies, but furthermore often believe that there are better and more cost-effective options for their children. In many families, parents often encourage children to participate in income-generating activities to support the household, at the expense of attending school.

Factors related to governmental provision of adequate school infrastructure were also cited by community respondents, including the lack of teaching and learning materials, decrepit infrastructure, and insufficient teacher deployment. Furthermore, parents point to the lack of schools in general, in particular the lack of junior and senior high schools. As a result, children often have to travel long distances to other communities to attend school, which contributes to the high rate of attrition.

Nigeria

When asked about the factors that contribute to a higher risk of dropout among these children, teachers report poverty, the lack of parental guidance, and the lack of financial support as the main reasons. Other factors include far distances from schools, low capacity of schools to absorb prospective students, conflict and insurgency, separation or loss of parents, and a lack of schooling materials.

Sierra Leone

A wide variety of factors can explain the out-of-school situation in Sierra Leone. According to community respondents. Economic factors is by far the primary reason for which children both drop out of school or fail to attend at all. The high poverty rate, partly driven by large family size, in many communities means that families cannot afford school fees and various supplies (e.g., textbooks, uniforms, activities, writing materials) for all of their children. Due to the high poverty rate, many older children also drop out of school to pursue other income generating activities to support their families.

Sociocultural factors also play a prominent role, particularly for girls. Teenage pregnancy and early marriage are the main drivers for drop-out among girls at the senior grade levels, however, this is usually a corollary of economic pressures, whereby girls are forced against their will to marry young to alleviate their families' financial responsibility or to participate in risky sexual activities in exchange for economic support with school fees. The deeply ingrained gendered division of labour also disproportionately impacts girls, who are often expected to contribute to domestic household work at the expense of receiving an education.

4.5 Summary on Out of School Context across three countries

Mapping studies across the three countries revealed that the OOSC situation is less pressing in Sierra Leone, where only 22% of school-aged children are out of school, and most severe in Nigeria, where this number increases to nearly 50%. The situation in Ghana is slightly better, with an out-of-school rate of one in three children (33%).

The study found that similar trends exist across all three countries. Despite variations in district and community type across the three countries, the study found that the percentage of OOSC who have never attended school is consistently highest at the primary grade levels, while the percentage of drop-out is highest at senior grade levels. These trends are in line with qualitative data collected from community respondents, suggesting that economic

conditions often prevent parents from enrolling their children in school when they first reach school-age. Conversely, at later ages, when peer-group influence, gender expectations, and students' own attitudes towards school play a larger role in students' enrolment, we see increased drop-out rates at the higher grade levels. Furthermore, the study finds that when disaggregated for gender, the out-of-school rate across all grade levels tends to be higher in boys across all three countries, whereas the drop-out phenomenon tends to disproportionately affect girls. Therefore, in all three countries, interventions addressing the out-of-school phenomenon must take into account the supply- and demand-side barriers that affect entrance into school and retention in school as two separate processes. An understanding of the reasons driving these trends is pivotal to creating effective solutions.

4.6 Transition, retention and completion levels on AEPs

The key determinants of the success/impact of AEPs can be seen in the proportion of AEP students transitioned, retained and completing education in the mainstream education system. This section highlights evidence related to these key variables.

4.6.1 Number of transitioned AEP learners – school level data

Ghana

In Ghana, surveys and interviews with head teachers provides details on the state of transitioned AEP learners in the study area. The data indicate that there are about 664 AEP graduates in formal schools across the study areas; on average, a greater proportion of these (69%) were girls, while may be attributable to the conscious effort made by most education innovators to create focused programs and safe spaces for girls in particular. Notably, the P2 and P6 levels saw less transitioned learners compared to P3, P4, and P5, suggesting that less children enter and complete AEPs early and late into their primary education, compared to in the middle grades.

On a district level (across the districts Gushegu, Karaga, Talensi, and Tolon), the total number of transitioned AEP learners into the formal school system was 2,230, with slightly more girls who have transitioned than boys. Comparing across the districts, Talensi saw the highest percentage of AEP transitions (nearly 90%), with the majority of these being girls. This is most likely attributed to the high level of enrolment in AEPs within this district in the first place.

Nigeria

The data collected from interviews with teachers and head-teachers give the proportion of children who have transitioned from AEPs to formal school in 2020-21. In the study area, a total of 4,701 boys and 6,602 girls made the successful transition, with the highest proportion of transitions in the upper primary levels (primary 5 for girls and primary 6 for boys).

4.6.2 Transition challenges

Ghana

Interviews with district education officers reveal that most of the challenges with transition is centred around the unaffordability of transition. Due to poverty and low income, many parents are unable to provide the learning materials required by formal education, including uniforms, books, stationery, or even bags and shoes. The lack of availability of schools within communities also remains a constraint for students who cannot travel long distances. Finally,

attitudinal ambivalence on the part of parents and a lack of interest in formal education prevents them from enrolling children in school despite having completed AEP classes.

Furthermore, focus group discussions with many AEP participants reveal that some children complete the transition back into formal education, only to drop-out again at a later time due to ongoing financial, social, or accessibility constraints. Therefore, it appears that challenges experienced by AEP learners are the same supply- and demand-side barriers faced by out-of-school children in general. While the AEP initiatives do help some children overcome these barriers, it is clear that the same problems persist and should be addressed at their root.

Nigeria

Successful transition and reintegration of out-of-school children into formal school following AEP is comprised of two processes: first, the learner's progress is evaluated and must merit re-admission into school, but second, families and caregivers must support this process through providing documentation and the necessary funding. Unfortunately, in the majority of cases (62%) where learners who have completed AEPs fail to transition to formal school, the primary constraint is lack of support from home. A significant second barrier (in 37%) is the lack of funds to continue with schooling. Only in one percent of failed transitions is the main constraint a lack of interest in education on the part of the child. The lack of attitudinal support from families and caregivers suggests that perhaps a whole-of-society approach to education is necessary.

Sierra Leone

Focus group data from the study suggest that learners in AEPs face several major constraints, such that even after successful completion of AEP classes, many are still unable to transition back into formal education. Specifically, community respondents point to the lack of financial support –due to unwillingness as much as due to incapacity – as a major obstacle. Students cannot return to formal education without the necessary supplies, such as books, stationery, food during the school day, uniforms, and other essentials. Another major obstacle is parents' negative attitudes toward education, both formal education regimes as well as AEPs. In many cases, parents of children who had been out of school for an extended period of time were unwilling to continue investing scarce resources into their children's education. For girls in particular, many families supported their early marriages in order to reduce financial burdens, at the expense of receiving an education.

4.6.3 Proportion of AEP learners completing primary school

Ghana

The study collected data on the number of AEP learners who moved from primary to junior high school (JHS) in each district in the study area. On average, the Yendi district saw more than one-fifth of AEP graduates (24%) move from primary school to JHS, which was the highest rate across all districts. Conversely, Mamprugu Moagduri district saw the lowest proportion of AEP learners who managed to transition to formal JHS. In general, however, the data show a significant proportion of pupils in each district who manage to transition into junior high school, suggesting that the impact of AEP initiatives on retention is not insignificant.

Nigeria

The number of AEP learners who completed primary school is cross-tabulated from the number of children who have completed primary school who have also attended AEPs. The

results show that 67% of AEP learners have completed primary school, while 33% have not, suggesting a relative high completion and retention rate of AEP graduates in the formal system.

4.7 Demand-side factors that influence the OOSC situation

Demand-side factors are key factors that emanate from the community and parental levels that contribute to the out of school phenomenon. This section discusses the demand side barriers that account for the OOSC context across the study countries.

4.7.1 Ghana

Interviews with stakeholders and families suggest the preponderance of different demand-side factors that influence the out-of-school situation at different age levels. For children at the primary school age, parents' financial difficulties are a major barrier to children's enrolment in school in the first place. This is particularly prevalent in large families with many children, where income-generating activities are prioritized over education. The inaccessibility of school facilities, resulting in children having to leave their communities and travel great distances, only increases the opportunity costs of attending school.

At the junior high level, some special demand-side factors disproportionately restrict girls from attending school, including the lack of personal hygiene products and sanitary facilities. At this age, gender roles and the division of labour also play a major role, as many girls drop out of school to take up economic activities such as weaving, harvesting, or selling goods in order to support their families. Others may engage in riskier activities such as illegal mining or sex work.

In general, the lack of adequate school infrastructure is a main obstacle at all grade levels. Classrooms are generally not furnished with the required furniture, such as desks and chairs, and generally do not contain the proper supply of teacher and learning materials. This makes it especially difficult for students to remain in school or keep a positive attitude about school.

4.7.2 Nigeria

Focus group interviews conducted with community stakeholders and parents found that the three main demand-side factors explaining the OOSC situation in Nigeria include financial difficulties, a lack of parental support, and a lack of student motivation. Notably, many household heads and parents in the surveyed communities have only received Qur'anic educations, and as such, there is a common ambivalence toward formal education, which negatively influences children's rates of enrolment in school. Furthermore, girls are disproportionately impacted by these barriers. The pervasive gendered expectations in Nigeria whereby girls are encouraged to be domesticated lead to girls' participation in domestic activities or early marriage at the expense of attending school. In communities with higher poverty levels, these effects are even more pronounced as both boys and girls are withdrawn from school in order to participate in income-generating activities to support the family.

4.7.3 Sierra Leone

Interviews and focus group discussions conducted with community members shed light on the main factors that increase the likelihood of children being out-of-school. In children of primary school age, the main barriers are hunger, poor health, and far distances from school. In rural and impoverished areas where many families may only eat once a day, young

children often spend the entire day on an empty stomach, which is then exacerbated by fatigue from travelling far distances to and from school. This has significant impacts on children's performance in school as well as their attitudes toward it. Although Sierra Leone's free quality education programme includes a school-feeding component, many schools – particularly in rural areas – have yet to see its implementation. Due to hunger, many children are out of school as they seek other sources of income.

In older primary school children, attitudinal factors are a major barrier to attendance in schools. Many children demonstrate apathy toward school, and instead prefer to spend their time engaging in various recreational or income-generating activities. Furthermore, embarrassment at financial difficulties is often also a barrier for older children, who are often unmotivated to continue with their education due to their families' inability to afford school supplies and materials. In children with special needs, the lack of accessibility in schools, including the lack of pedagogical training in educators of these children, is a major barrier to enrolment and retention in school. These children are also often stigmatized and even discriminated against in many schools, and as a result will drop out.

The study highlights several demand-side barriers that are particularly salient in restricting access to education among girls, many of them socio-cultural factors. Chief among these is initiation into female societies, such as the Bondo Society in many communities of Sierra Leone. According to community respondents, secret societies severely interrupt a girl's schooling schedule. Not only is participation in these societies costly for families, but these societies are also intended to prepare girls for adulthood and marriage, and thus, many girls will choose to leave the school system post-initiation.

4.8 Supply-side factors that influence the OOSC situation

4.8.1 Ghana

Qualitative data collected from community respondents indicate that the main supply factors that affect the OOSC situation in Ghana include access to schools as well as various issues related to teachers, including their availability, deployment retention, and quality. These supply-side barriers are particularly salient in deprived and hard-to-reach areas. There is a serious lack of schools within accessible distance across the majority of studied communities. In communities where schools were present, these often lacked essential infrastructure, such as furniture and basic equipment for teaching and learning. Schools also suffer from a lack of trained teachers as well as a high level of teacher absenteeism. In many districts, it is not uncommon to have one teacher supervising more than one class, resulting in high pupil-to-teacher ratios that are inconducive to learning.

4.8.2 Nigeria

The main supply side barriers to education in the surveyed communities include: the absence of teachers, distance to school, the availability of school infrastructure, and the quality of teaching. The short supply of teachers in surveyed communities is further exacerbated by the prevalence of untrained teachers across the LGAs. Both the pupil-teacher ratio as well as the pupil-trained teacher ratio are very poor at the primary level in particular, with over 100 students per teacher. These ratios improve at the senior secondary school level, but existing teachers continue to face challenges of income insecurity and low remuneration. Furthermore, the significant distance students must travel to school as well as the lack of adequate furniture and facilities within these schools significantly dissuade students from wanting to pursue an education.

4.8.3 Sierra Leone

Discussions with community stakeholders including teachers, leaders, School Management Committees (SMCs) and CTAs have identified several supply-side factors contributing to the out-of-school situation. These include the lack of adequate school infrastructure, the lack of teachers and under-provision of teaching and learning materials at school facilities. School infrastructure in Sierra Leone is significantly underfunded: children must walk long distances to get to school due to the sparse distribution of schools within communities; within schools, there is often a lack of adequate furniture, water, as well as standard toilet facilities.

According to community stakeholders, there is an even greater shortage of qualified teachers, most of whom are not attracted to the subpar school facilities in rural and remote areas. As a result, most teachers in the surveyed communities are unqualified. Furthermore, school administrations are often unable to pay teachers in a timely manner, and the lack of incentive and job motivation ultimately lead to high attrition rates in the profession. In many districts, volunteer teachers often fill in the gap. The lack of qualified teachers significantly hinders students' academic performance. The final barrier to the provision of quality education is the lack of teaching and learning materials in school facilities. Although the government of Sierra Leone is expected to support students with core textbooks and basic necessities, this has not been the case in many communities.

4.9 Presence and impact of AEP programming in the districts/communities in addressing the issues of OOSC

4.9.1 Scale, enrollment and completion levels of AEPs

Ghana

Three Education Innovators serve the study area: *Afrikids*, *GILLBT*, and *School for Life Complementary Basic Education (CBE) Programmes*. These programmes saw a total enrolment of 90,984 students, representing 31.4% of the total out-of-school children across the study districts. These three program innovators successfully transitioned 81.2% of their total enrolment, with Afrikids being the most successful intervention, with a transition rate of 96% into formal school over the years. Enrolment in the program, as well as completion and successful transition was more-or-less at gender parity throughout the program. The GILLBT CBE programme has seen very similar results with respect to gender parity. Notably, the fifth cycle of the program boasted a transition rate of 100%. On the other hand, the School for Life CBE Programme has had relatively more modest results with a transition rate of 86%.

The AEP initiatives in the study region significantly improved literacy skills in children, particularly in the local language. AEPs also created attitudinal shifts among many parents and families, sensitizing them to the benefits of education. As a result, the rate of rural-urban migration among children and youth for the purposes of seeking economic activities, as well as the rate of child labour, have slowed down, as has child fosterage. By keeping children in schools, AEPs have the added benefit of keeping children at home and in their communities. Focus group discussions and interviews with community stakeholders reveal that AEP initiatives have increased enrolment in schools, improved pupil attendance and retention, enhanced confidence on the part of students and fostered greater community investment in education.

Nigeria

Fieldwork conducted with local education officials reveal that up to three AEP initiatives have been implemented in both Jere and MMC LGAs in the past five years, spanning between five and nine communities. Enrolment in Jere was 3,390 (1890 girls and 1500 boys), while enrolment in MMC was significantly lower, at less than 100 children (50 girls, 40 boys). The AEPs were delivered using local languages such as Hausa and Kanuri, as well as English. Overall, community stakeholders observed that participants were able to transition into the formal school system by the end of these programmes.

AEPs in Nigeria had the greatest impact on children's literacy skills, including the ability to read and write and perform simple mathematical operations. Not only that, respondents observe that AEPs have raised awareness concerning the importance of and the right to education, particularly among families and communities that had previously been ambivalent toward education their young. As a result, AEPs have had the positive unintended consequence of reducing child labour in the communities, as well as the rates of early and child marriage, which is particularly impactful in the case of young women and girls.

4.10 Presence and impact of girls focused programmes

4.10.1 Ghana

In Ghana, the introduction of Girls Focused Programmes (GFPs) has particularly addressed the education access constraints faced by girls in rural and deprived societies. The implementation of the Afrikids STAGE project targeted out-of-school girls, particularly those who had dropped out of school, and helped to either facilitate their return into the formal education system or acquire hands-on skills such as catering, dressmaking, soap-making, beadmaking, or hairdressing. The STAGE project has played a significant role in the empowerment of young girls, not only enlightening parents on the importance of education for girls, but also helping girls become more aware of their own rights and ambitions.

4.10.2 Nigeria

Girls' Focused Programmes aim to specifically address the marginalization of girls in access to education that arises through a number of factors such as child labour, the gendered domestication of women and girls, financial challenges surrounding the affordability of school, parental negligence and negative attitudes toward female education, and early marriage. In Nigeria, there has only been one GFP implemented across both LGAs in the past three to five years. The programme provided girls with basic literacy and numeracy training, and included a major focus on raising awareness of reproductive health among girls. Approximately 20 communities in the study area have benefitted from the girls' focused-programme,

4.10.3 Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, the Save the Children AEP intervention, in tandem with the BRAC Girls' Empowerment Programme has had a positive influence on the lives of dropped-out girls through teaching them literacy skills, hands-on skills, self-sufficiency and self-reliance, and has influenced the attitudes of many girls in the areas of education and marriage. In particular, the provision of start-up capital under the BRAC intervention has facilitated the establishment of several small businesses run by girls, allowing these beneficiaries to become more independent and self-capable.

5.0 Conclusion and recommendation

5.1 Out of school incidence

The mapping studies across all three countries revealed that the OOSC situation is still a major educational challenge. The results show the situation is less pressing in Sierra Leone, where only 22% of school-aged children are out of school, and most severe in Nigeria, where this number increases to nearly 50%. The situation in Ghana is slightly better, with an out-of-school rate of one in three children (33%). It should be noted that in Nigeria, conflict and internal displacement plays a pre-eminent role in driving the OOSC phenomenon. Furthermore, though there still exists a number of primary and secondary schools in proximity to the surveyed communities, many are no longer accessible to children due to safety risks.

Similar trends exist across all three countries: the percentage of OOSC who have never attended school is consistently highest at the primary grade levels, while the percentage of drop-out tends to be higher at senior grade levels. These trends are in line with qualitative data collected from community respondents, suggesting that economic conditions often prevent parents from enrolling their children in school when they first reach school-age. Conversely, at later ages, when peer-group influence, gender expectations, and students' own attitudes towards school play a larger role in students' enrolment, we see increased drop-out rates at the higher grade levels.

Furthermore, the study finds that when disaggregated for gender, the out-of-school rate across all grade levels tends to be higher in boys across all three countries, whereas the drop-out phenomenon tends to disproportionately affect girls.

5.2 Drop-out situation/context

In Ghana, researchers found that drop-out rates tended to be higher at the primary school level, and that drop-out rates were higher among boys compared to girls. In Nigeria, researchers find relative gender parity between boys' and girls' drop-out rates. Unsurprisingly, the drop-out rate is also higher in children in host communities in Nigeria than in the IDPs. Finally, in Sierra Leone, drop-out rates are highest among senior secondary school students, particularly among girls. There is furthermore a significant gender disparity, with far more girls having dropped out (60%) than boys (45%).

Focus group discussions and informant interviews with children, heads of households, and community stakeholders reveal similar risk factors for the drop-out situation. By far, the primary cause of drop-out in all three countries is financial barriers, which tends to increase as poverty level and household size increase. In addition, attitudinal factors, such as ambivalence or lack of interest in education, from both children's and parents' perspectives play a significant role in lowering enrolment rates, particularly at the higher grade levels. Finally, social factors such as pervasive gender norms and divisions of labour, teenage pregnancy, and early marriage, all tend to disproportionately impact girls and keep them out of school.

5.3 Children at risk of dropping out

The population of children at risk of dropping out was estimated using three key variables: children who are over-age for their grade level, children's frequency of repetition, and children's frequency of school attendance. In Ghana, the study found that over 25% of

students in the sample are overage at grade level and thus at risk of drop-out, with half of these at primary levels, and half of these children at the junior high level. When looking at both frequency of repetition and frequency of attendance, children in primary school were more at risk of dropping out compared to children at other grade levels.

In Nigeria, the risk of drop-out as indicated by frequency of repetition and by frequency of attendance tends to be highest at the primary school level, with absenteeism generally higher among boys than girls. Conversely, in Sierra Leone, absenteeism among girls is slightly higher than that among boys.

5.4 Transition, retention and completion levels on AEPs

In all three countries, AEPs have positively contributed to increase enrolment and retention in all the districts and communities under study. In both Ghana and Nigeria, the data on completed AEPs reveal that more girls than boys completed the AEP classes and transitioned to formal education. It should also be noted that AEPs were observed to have the most significant impact in the upper primary levels.

Transition challenges cited by community respondents tended to be similar across all three countries, and overlap with the general demand- and supply-side barriers for the out-of-school phenomenon in the first place. Specifically, respondents often cite financial challenges and unaffordability of formal school fees and supplies, attitudinal ambivalence and a lack of interest in formal education on the part of parents, and the lack of availability and accessibility of schools as the main challenges to transitioning to formal education, even after the completion of the AEP intervention. In Sierra Leone in particular, transitioning to formal education is often seen as a cost-intensive alternative particularly for girls, when early marriage or taking up domestic or petty work can better ease financial burdens.

5.5 Presence and impact of girls focused programmes

In all three countries, the introduction of girl-focused programmes (GFPs) has particularly addressed the education access constraints faced by girls in rural and deprived societies. AEP interventions targeting out-of-school girls either facilitate their return into the formal education system, or help girls acquire hands-on skills that would be useful for market activities or running the households. AEPs have the added effect of empowering girls to be aware of their own rights and ambitions and realize the importance of acquiring an education.

AEPs also create positive influence in the community through reducing the gendered domestication of women and girls, increasing awareness of reproductive health and rights among girls, enhancing girls' self-sufficiency and self-reliance, and decreasing rates of early marriage and teenage pregnancy.

5.6 Demand issues

The study finds that specific demand-side barriers tend to vary with age as children progress through school. For example, interviews with stakeholders and families in Ghana and Sierra Leone suggest that for children at the primary level, the greatest barriers are financial difficulties, particularly in large families with many children, hunger and poor health for children in poverty, as well as far distances from school for those in remote communities.

At the junior and senior high school levels, there are some special demand-side barriers that disproportionately restrict girls' access, such as the lack of personal hygiene products and sanitary facilities. At this age, gender roles and the division of labour also play a major role,

as many girls drop out of school to take care up economic activities to support their families. Survey data in Nigeria further attribute a strong role to the lack of parental support and parental attitudes toward formal education, particularly given the Qur'anic educational backgrounds of the majority of heads of household.

In older schoolchildren, attitudinal factors are a major barrier to attendance in schools. Many children demonstrate apathy toward school, and instead prefer to spend their time engaging in various recreational or income-generating activities. Furthermore, embarrassment at financial difficulties is often also a barrier for older children, who are often unmotivated to continue with their education due to their families' inability to afford school supplies and materials. In children with special needs, the lack of accessibility in schools, including the lack of pedagogical training in educators of these children, is a major barrier to enrolment and retention in school. These children are also often stigmatized and even discriminated against in many schools, and as a result will drop out.

5.7 Supply issues

Qualitative data collected from community respondents indicate that the main supply factors revolve around access to schools, the quality of school infrastructure, as well as issues related to teacher availability, quality, and retention. These supply-side barrier are particularly salient in deprived and hard-to-reach areas. In Ghana in particular, there is a serious lack of schools within accessible distance from the majority of studied communities, and in those where schools were present, buildings often lacked essential infrastructure and supplies, including furniture and basic equipment for teaching and learning. Schools in the study also tend to suffer from a lack of trained teachers as well as a high level of teacher absenteeism, in conjunction with pervasively high pupil-to-teacher ratios.

5.8 Contribution of AEP/GFM to addressing the supply-side barriers to education

AEPs bring learning opportunities within the reach of OOSC, particularly in remote communities. Programming is free and most AEPs also supply learning materials to students at no cost, thereby increasing education accessibility to households that otherwise would be deprived both due to distance and due to poverty. Most AEPs are also delivered in the local language, which enhances accessibility to students who have never been in formal education. Finally, the OOSC Programme implemented by Save the Children and BRAC in Ghana further adjusts the timing of classes in order to accommodate farming obligations, given the predominance of farming as a source of livelihood in these rural communities.

5.9 Contribution of AEP/GFM to addressing the demand-side barriers to education

The data suggest that AEPs have not only improved literacy and numeracy skills among out-of-school children in deprived communities, but have furthermore improved the communities' disposition toward formal education. By supplying many students with school materials and books, stationery, sanitary pads, and other essential supplies, AEPs have enhanced the accessibility of attending school among children who would otherwise be deprived.

5.10 Key Recommendations

The study makes several recommendations to strengthen AEP and girls' focused programming with an emphasis on deepening, sustaining, and scaling up the gains achieved to date. The recommendations are grouped into four action areas, including: (1) government and policy-level actions; (2) programmatic and strategic approaches; (3) recommendations

for civil society actors and education innovators; and (4) recommendations for schools and communities.

5.10.1 Government and Policy Level Actions

1. Improve access to schools.
 - a. Access to basic education lies at the heart of development. Governments should work through the direct education directorates to re-map communities to increase the presence of schools in communities.
2. Develop a targeted approach to addressing the OOSC phenomenon.
 - a. The findings consistently show that the OOSC phenomenon is predominant among children aged 6-11 years old (at the primary level). The Complementary Education Agency (CEA) as well as the NGOs and CSOs operating within the AEP space should focus programming and interventions on children of this age.
3. Address high pupil-teacher ratios and pupil-trained teacher ratios at the kindergarten level.
 - a. Governments should make a concerted effort to train more teachers for the kindergarten level and to provide incentives to motivate teachers to accept postings in remote and hard-to-reach areas.
4. Re-evaluate Kindergarten education.
 - a. The findings consistent show that children who have never attended school by the KG age is significant. It is recommended that the Government commission a comprehensive assessment of the KG system in the countries studied in order to understand the critical areas of KG education that require support
5. Improve quality of educational facilities.
 - a. Poor school-level infrastructure negatively impacts the quality of teaching and learning and contributes to drop-out and high attrition. The study recommends the provision of adequate furniture within schools, particularly chairs and writing desks.

5.10.2 Programmatic and Strategic Approaches

6. Sustain the gains achieved on AEPs and GFPs
 - a. A sustained commitment from Governments in taking over the interventions is recommended in the long-term in order to create a substantive reduction in the number of OOSC over the next five years across the study countries.
7. Filling the teacher gap
 - a. Due to the high rate of teacher absenteeism in schools, particularly in Ghana, it is recommended that alternative teacher training models be revisited.

5.10.3 Recommendations for civil society actors and education innovators

8. Gender-neutral OOSC intervention.
 - a. Interventions should target boys as well as girls given the prevalence of the OOSC phenomenon across both genders.
9. Build a comprehensive database on OOSC.
 - a. The absence of up-to-date database on out-of-school children at both the district education directorate levels as well as the educational innovation levels impedes the design of targeted, time-sensitive, and context-specific approaches in addressing the OOSC phenomenon. It is recommended that national education services/ministries collaborate with education innovators to develop a comprehensive database on OOSC across all districts.

5.10.4 Recommendations for schools and communities

10. Continuous engagement with parents and primary caregivers.
 - a. The study revealed that parents' and caregivers' interests toward educating their children, and in particular girls, remained ambivalent. It is recommended that education directorates initiate community-level engagements between schools and parents in order to sensitize parents to the importance of education.
11. Promote active school, parent, and community partnerships.
 - a. Parents' active involvement with schools will facilitate interest and familiarity in their children's education, which is crucial to student success. Functional Parent-Teacher Associations are critical to creating a venue where parents and teachers may gather to discuss problems and obstacles to learning. Community leadership should further organize frequent community meetings in order to discuss education-related challenges in the community.
12. Cultivate an in-school mentorship program.
 - a. It is recommended that education authorities implement mentorship groups at the school-level led by fellow peers and supported by teachers, which can provide structured assistance to students who struggle with academic work. This will help to create a positive environment that promotes learning and discourages drop-out due to poor academic performance.

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