

Education for All in Ghana: A Cultural Inquiry

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Introduction:

The purpose of this paper is to explore the current status of Education for All (EFA) in Ghana from a socio-cultural perspective, based on findings from an ethnographic study carried out in Northern Ghana.¹

Prescriptions for achieving EFA have focussed on supply and improvement of educational provision through analysis of reform programs, financial expenditure, economic resourcing and aid flows². Ensuring enough funding and managing adjustments to formal systems of education although very important, especially in light of the heavy indebtedness of many African countries³, remains only one dimension of the problem in achieving EFA in sub Saharan Africa.

Ensuring that the demand for schooling is generated, that it is acceptable within populations having the capacity to access it, is another crucial dimension which appears increasingly important as poverty deepens and enrolment trends decline in deprived areas of Africa.⁴ The mid term review of EFA in 1996 revealed that in Sub Saharan Africa, despite increasing primary enrolment, population growth rates are exceeding enrolment rates, which is a negative and reversed trend compared to other developing regions of the world. Since 1990, the number of out of school children in sub Saharan Africa grew by 2 million and now totals 39.3 million, two thirds of whom are girls (UNESCO, 1996). In sub Saharan Africa, the number of children without access to primary education is still growing and educational expenditure per child is declining.

This article argues that we must consider carefully the diverse contexts and cultures in which education occurs in order to meet the basic learning needs of children, particularly in deprived rural communities. Basic education needs and opportunity for participation are shaped by culture, context, and community values. Consideration and integration of these elements is crucial for any Education for ALL (EFA) strategy to succeed and meet the basic learning needs of all children.

The paper, therefore, explores the constraints for achieving three specific objectives of EFA in deprived rural areas in Ghana, in particular the constraints in using the basic school as the only vehicle for achieving Education for All, and probes deeper into the educational needs and priorities of communities.

¹ Research data was collected with the assistance of: Abdulai Tampurie, and Awulatu Inusah

² Colclough with Lewin (1993), Colclough and Al Samarrai (1998) and Bennell and Furlong (1997)

³ Sub Saharan Africa includes 30 heavily indebted countries including Ghana which has a severe impact on Governments ability to increase social sector spending and is slowly eroding per capita expenditure on schooling (UNICEF, 1999, Djangmah, 1998)

⁴ Poverty studies by the World bank categorise population within three main categories: poor, very poor and non poor. This article will define deprived communities in relation to the context and livelihood status of the community which corresponds to poverty characteristics of poor populations. Such as food crop growers living in the coastal and savannah regions of Ghana.

The paper is organised in three sections. The first section provides an overview of the current status of EFA at the macro level in Ghana, particularly related to three objectives articulated in the EFA Framework for Action (1990):

- Meeting basic learning needs
- Universalising access and promoting equity
- Broadening means and scope of EFA

The second section presents findings from one ethnographic case study, carried out in the Northern Region in Ghana which further illuminates the possibilities and challenges faced in meeting the goals of EFA in deprived areas of Ghana. The study is focussed on the community level in order to understand the socio- cultural domain, holistically, as well as in relation to formal schooling. The study, though possessing some unique characteristics, contains many of the same patterns found in neighbouring communities during a multi-case study inquiry. The final section of the article considers the implications for policy and external agency programming in Ghana.

Part 1 National analysis

Definition and goals

To begin, we will briefly revisit the EFA definition by UNESCO and the EFA goals set in Ghana. UNESCO calls upon countries to adopt policies and practices that will ensure " universal access to and completion of primary education (basic) by the year 2000... and to pursue improvement in learning achievement such that an agreed % of the appropriate age cohort (i.e. 80% of 14 year olds) attain or surpass a defined level of necessary learning achievements" (UNESCO, 1996).

- The Ghana government has set the target of achieving universal basic education by the year 2005.
- Ghana expects to reach the target of 98% intake in primary one and GER of 90% by the year 2000 based on a 1.5% growth rate in primary enrolment (Sutherland-Addy, 1997).

This paper analyses the current status of EFA in Ghana, at both macro and micro levels, by assessing how far Ghana has succeeded in implementing three objectives in the EFA Framework for Action at macro and micro levels. The following section briefly summarises these objectives.

ARTICLE 1: Meeting basic learning needs.

“Every person-- child, youth and adult--- shall benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs”. The learning needs are in turn characterised by both tools and basic learning content "required by human beings to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development and to continue learning. **The scope of basic learning needs and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures and inevitably changes with the passage of time.**" There is a strong emphasis in the framework for promoting learning which empowers individuals, building upon their "collective cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritage... the aim of which is the transmission and enrichment of common cultural and moral values".

ARTICLE 3: Universalising access and promoting equity

"All children, youth and adults must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. The most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation... An active commitment must be made to removing educational disparities. Under served groups--- the poor; street and working children; indigenous peoples; ethnic, racial and linguistic minorities; refugees; those displaced by war; and people under occupation-- should not suffer discrimination in access to learning opportunities." (5)

ARTICLE 5: Broadening the means and scope of basic education.

“The main delivery system for the basic education of children outside the family is primary schooling. Primary Education must be universal, ensure that the basic learning needs of all children are satisfied and **take into account the culture, needs, and opportunities of the community.** Supplementary alternative programs can help meet the basic learning needs of children with limited or no access to formal schooling, provided that they share the same standards of learning applied to schools and are adequately supported." (6)

The following section will now consider the status of EFA in Ghana at macro level in relation to these three objectives before presenting the findings from the ethnographic case site.

1.1 Broadening the means and scope of basic education

Since independence, Ghana has made efforts to provide basic education for all. The Government of Ghana in 1961 supported a policy for Free Compulsory Primary Education under the National Education Act. After a period of instability within the political milieu, successive Governments conceived but were unable to carry out the necessary reforms in order to make this policy a reality. In the mid 1980's, as part of the structural adjustment program, Ghana embarked on a firm course for implementation of an education reform to achieve improved equity and efficiency in the system. By 1987

the Education Reform was introduced which involved the total restructuring of the entire pre-tertiary education system, reducing the number of years of schooling from 17 to 12. Other areas of the reform focussed on improving access through the provision of infrastructure, and making the curriculum more relevant to social and economic needs (Sutherland Addy, 1997).

In 1987, a national decentralisation program was instituted in Ghana, increasing the number of districts, and giving greater powers to district assemblies which included responsibility for provision of education infrastructure. District Assemblies were created as key focal institutions for central government and external agency program implementation especially within the arena of social and economic development. A common fund was established with allocations based on revenue collection and population. In the coming section we will explore how the decentralisation program has implications and potential opportunity for ensuring equity and quality of educational provision within Ghana.

The Constitution of 1992 made provision for a program of free compulsory universal basic education (fCUBE) directing efforts at assessing and refining the initial 1987 reform. At the same time it was felt that external agencies should move away from program funding to a more sector wide approach, with emphasis placed on improving quality, and efficiency through increased community ownership of basic education. By 1996 the fCUBE program was launched with some consultation with local stakeholders such as communities and teachers. The following chart depicts the main trends within this period:

Government initiatives	External agency and donor initiatives
1961: National Education Act 1961 provided for Free Compulsory Primary Education. Enrolment doubled in five years and Ghana gained acclaim for having the most developed Education system in Africa. (Ghana Human Development report, 1998)	
1970-80 Periods of successive political coups: educational restructuring was conceived but not implemented.	
	1984: structural adjustment program introduced in Ghana with educational sector reforms and assessment World Bank launch program for educational infrastructure, building 3000 pavilion schools USAID begins Primary Education Program (PREP)
1987: Education reform program initiated-total restructuring of basic education system	Most bilateral donors begin programming within the education sector (1987-1995 and present) 1990: World Conference on Education for All Jomtien, Thailand
1994 Education Reform Review Committee	1995 UNICEF: national program of Action for

set up to revise academic programs under the reform program at basic and secondary level in order to enhance quality and performance	the Survival, Protection and Development of Children 1996: Mid term Review of progress in EFA
July 1996 announced Free Compulsory Universal Education (FCUBE) program aimed at sector wide, comprehensive change to improve teaching and learning outcomes, efficiency in management, and increased access and participation through enhanced community participation.	Sector wide fCUBE program launched; some agencies still carried out program approach within sector wide framework and others directly support Government initiative.

The Government launched a national Non Formal Education Program (NFED) for adults in 1992 in order to improve the national adult literacy rate of 48%. The program was specifically targeted at adults with little formal programming available for children.

Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) programming in the education sector was focussed on improving basic schools, with increased emphasis placed on community involvement in the process. A survey conducted by USAID of the NGO Education sector documented a wide range of services provided by NGOs working in the Education sector such as: the provision of school materials, school feeding programs, infrastructure development and strengthening school management.⁵ In 1998, an update of the survey was made with a total of 62 Non Governmental Organisations involved in the education sector; these included both national and international NGOs working in Ghana. The survey analysis found that 56.4 % of NGOs are providing services and programming within the formal education sector, while 38.7 % of NGOs are involved in providing non formal educational programming. Of these non formal programs the majority were targeting adults, with only 12 NGOs running child focussed programs for out of school children. Out of the 62 NGO's in the survey, 28 were running programs in northern Ghana.

1.2 Universalising access and promoting equity

The following section will consider the status of access and participation in Ghana using three main indicators: growth of net enrolment, provision and coverage, and number of out of school children. We will also look at the regional differences between these trends in Ghana in an attempt to highlight the diversity of educational demand and response. We will also touch briefly on the reasons for declining enrolment in the discussion section.

⁵ The NGO Survey was conducted by USAID in 1996. Data was analysed and updated by this researcher in 1998.

Provision

The Government of Ghana has made a concerted effort over the last ten years to ensure that basic infrastructure is provided for primary schooling. Several multilateral and bilateral programs have helped to raise the numbers of schools from 8,022 to 11,142 between 1981/82 and 1991/92 (Human Development Report for Ghana, 1998).

The reduced amount of time required in walking to school also indicates a major impact in educational provision. The actual distance to school has been reduced in most areas. According to the recent Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) Survey (1998), nine out of every ten primary school pupils take thirty or fewer minutes to reach the nearest school (92.1%). Figures recorded in the 1991/92 Ghana living standard survey showed that rural areas had 50% less schooling facilities than urban areas.

Enrolment trends

Despite increases in infrastructure there appears to be a levelling off of enrolment in basic and primary schools despite the relatively high population growth rate for the same period.⁶ The graph shows that there was a 1.7% growth in primary schools, and an average growth of 2% in basic schools which include both primary and junior secondary schools, over the period. The average population growth rate over the same period was 2.5% and 3.0 %, and in some regions the growth rate reached as high as 3.4% (i.e. Northern Region). This means that the growth in primary enrolment has not kept pace with the population growth rate and the number of out of school children is increasing, which conforms with the overall trend in sub Saharan Africa⁷. According to the MOE (1998), across the country the absolute number of children admitted to P1 in 1994 was less than those admitted in 1990, and the growth in enrolment does not actually come from new children but is partly the effect of repetition (Djangmah, 1998).

The Ghana Living Standard Survey (GLSS) does show that the net primary enrolment over the period between the 1987/88 and 1991/92 increased nationally from 62% to 74% respectively. This trend occurred in all localities except the rural Savannah where enrolment declined between the first two rounds and then went up in the third round. Most recently, another Government survey conducted by the Ghana statistical department in 1997 placed the net primary enrolment at 82%.⁸

Regional trends of out of school children

The number of out of school children varies quite dramatically between regions of Ghana. The latest figures in the Patterns of Poverty Report (1995), based on data from three Ghana living standards surveys, revealed that some regions of Ghana have as many

⁶ Please refer to annex 1 for graphs depicting enrolment trends between 1990 to 1996.

⁷ See the UNESCO EFA mid term report for Africa, 1996

⁸ Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire (CWIQ) Survey. 1997 in collaboration with the World Bank.

as 51% of children out of school (Northern Region), compared with only 11% for Accra and 26 % for the entire country.

Another indicator of the problem of out of school children is revealed in CWIQ survey (1997). According to this survey 38.8% of Ghanaians aged 15 and above have never attended school. The differences are particularly acute between the urban (26.1%) and rural (45.5%) areas and within different regions of the country. The Northern Region has the lowest literacy rate at 8.9% in rural areas and 37.9% in urban areas. It also changes according to the poverty quintile. The northern region also recorded the highest proportion of persons who never attended school in both rural (83.7%) and urban (54.2%) areas.

Net enrolment rates vary widely between deprived areas of the country, with the Upper East, Upper West and Northern Regions having lowest enrolment compared to highest enrolment in the Western and Accra Regions. These educational enrolments reflect the socio-economic or poverty profile of the country. The figures for girls' enrolment in these regions were disproportionately low.

Equity:

As one moves from the very poor to the non poor category there are increasing numbers of children enrolled in school. For males, we move from 63.8% (poor) to 82.5% (non poor) and for females 44% (poor) to 73.6% (non poor). This is in sharp contrast to the figures for urban areas and males in the rural forest zone. These same patterns exist within the previous Ghana living standards surveys. According to the Government of Ghana's report (1995) "The Pattern of Poverty".

Generally, the proportion of children not attending school decreases as one moves up the expenditure quintiles. Similarly the proportion not in school declines with increased urbanisation... A strong and positive relationship is also observed between enrolment and poverty status. Generally a steady decline in the proportion of children in school is noticed when the poverty groups are examined.

Studies revealed a close relationship between poverty indicators and schooling achievements and effectiveness within these deprived areas of Ghana (Chao, 1997 and Canagarajah, 1997). Canagarajah also sees the high prevalence of child labour within these areas as a major factor in reducing school enrolment, high drop out rate and poor school indicators. As one moves from non poor to poor categories the percentage of children enrolled in primary schooling declines.

Chao's (1997) work also reveals significant trends within particular language groups in the Northern Region. Through bivariate and multivariate analysis Chao finds several areas which constrain access to basic schooling in Ghana:

- Credit constraints: income and parental occupation
- Sociological constraints: number of siblings in household (aged 0-4), religion, household language

- Educational constraints: education of parents, quality of education
- Social service constraints in community: household access to water and schools
- Geographic constraints: location of community regionally and whether rural or urban
- Demographic constraints: fertility rate and status of women

1.3 Meeting the basic learning needs

Over the last eight years successive testing has been carried out on a country wide scale sampling 5% of pupils in Primary 6 in schools across the country. The results have been disappointing but show some signs of improvement. The criteria reference test has provided the main indices on which government and external agencies monitor the progress and effectiveness of the education system, through analysis of basic literacy and numeracy achievements at the first stage of basic education - the primary 6 level.

The chart below presents the percentage of children reaching the 60% mastery level for English in all regions of Ghana. Most areas have performed relatively poorly with only some regions achieving slightly higher levels of mastery. The mean scores for 1995 showed English between 26.1% in Upper West and 40.5% in Greater Accra.

Regional percentage reaching the criteria in English over five year period.

Region	Percentage reaching criterion in 1993 (Rural)	1994 ⁹	1995 ¹⁰	1996	1997 ¹¹
Ashanti	.7	.6	2.9	4.5	1.4
Brong Ahafo	1.0	1.6	1.7	1.7	3.7
Central	1.4	.9	1.9	1.1	11.4
Eastern	.5	1.6	2.0	5.4	3.4
Greater Accra	.9	13.4	11.1	14.8	18.0
Northern	1.9	4.4	1.8	5.2	3.1
Upper East	4.8	4.8	3.9	4.2	6.1
Upper West	2.3	0.0	3.6	1.0	11.5
Volta	1.7	3.4	3.1	4.6	4.2
Western	2.7	1.9	5.8	8.4	3.6
TOTAL	1.5	3.3	3.6	5.5	6.3

(Based on CRT reports, Ministry of Education, Accra, Ghana)

Over the years there have also been improvements in some regions of the country, particularly the Upper West and Central regions where concerted efforts have been made to improve the quality of education.

⁹ Only for public schools

¹⁰ National sample schools which may include public schools only

¹¹ Included urban and rural schools combined in public schools only

Retention and transition rates:

Lloyd and Blanc (1996) state that "the achievement of grade level four has been singled out by UNICEF (1993) as a critical marker of school progress for children". Their research across Sub Saharan Africa indicates that the education of the household head and the household standard of living are determining factors in explaining children's outcomes in schools.

Although the current net enrolment rate in Ghana is about 78% a large number of children entering the system drop out before completing Junior Secondary School (JSS 3) or basic education. According to the MOE data only 56% complete basic school (9 years basic education) and approximately 75% complete at primary 6 level. Drop out rates for girls are especially high varying by region.

Year	Completion rate for P6 (%)	Completion rate for JSS3 (%)	Completion rate for 9-year basic education (%)	Transition (pass) rate of primary school graduates to junior secondary school	Transition (Pass) rate for junior secondary school graduates to senior secondary school
1991	70.0	82.8	50.5	96.8	35.3
1992	70.1	82.8	51	93.9	33.8
1993	72.1	82.6	54.3	95.0	34.8
1994	75.4	82.4	56.8	94.5	-----

Source MOE (1995) in Staff Report: Basic Education Sector Improvement Program, 1996, World Bank.

Reflection and discussion

The status of EFA in Ghana remains a continuous challenge. What appears to be of greatest concern is the increasing number of out of school children despite the improved enrolment, due to the high population growth rate. The next concern would appear to be in the areas of equity, where some regions continue to perform far below the national average. These areas are related to the poverty profile of Ghana, with the worst figures in the northern regions of the country. The main reasons for the poor drop out rate are the indirect costs involved and the need for labour on the farm. More recently studies by Stephens (1998) and Colclough (1998a) begin to point to the relationship between poverty, education and culture. The following case study helps us to further explore these relationships within the context of achieving Education for All in Ghana.

Despite the increasing enrolment trends within the formal education sector, there is alarming evidence to indicate that children have not reached a basic level of literacy by the end of P6.¹² Other reports indicate that these children may also lapse back into illiteracy once they complete the formal education system (UNICEF, 1994). Adult literacy rates in Ghana remain extremely low with little change recorded within the last

¹² According to the criteria reference testing scores.

few years according to mid term report on EFA in Sub Saharan Africa (1996). The report placed Ghana within the category of countries which recorded between 1 to 5% improvement in literacy rates despite the existence of a large non formal education campaign.

The final indicator which remains of concern is the number of people who have never accessed the formal system, according to the recent CWIQ survey (1997) which monitors key poverty indicators. The report indicates there is a high percentage of persons over 15 who have never been to school in all regions of the country, particularly in the northern regions.

So far the Government of Ghana has focussed most resources on a system wide reform which is school based, with little emphasis on exploring alternative approaches¹³. The fact that districts have become increasingly empowered to manage change through the policy of decentralisation provides a unique opportunity to work within a more regional and district context. Decentralisation will assist in the adjustment of policy and programs if the particular needs of those areas are articulated. This approach has only begun to be explored with assistance from donor agencies. A district education planning process has begun in selected pilot districts in Ghana. The following case study therefore tries to look more deeply at the change processes which appear to be even more challenging at the community level.

Before turning to the ethnographic case study a small note on ethnography. The entire purpose of ethnographic work is to study communities within their naturalistic setting, and observe the patterns and practices which form the cultural life world of the community. In presenting the following case I have therefore attempted to capture the holistic and interconnected nature of the study site in order to understand how one community in rural Ghana interacts with the formal system of schooling. Some of the webs of culture, which include the attitudes, practices and patterns, are identified and interwoven as they relate to the three main themes: access and equity, meeting the basic learning needs, and broadening the scope of provision.

¹³ Much of the strategic planning within Ministry is heavily influenced by international trends in education especially through the collaboration with external agencies

Part 2 Case study

2.1 Methodology and methods

After a series of pilot studies in deprived districts of the coastal and northern regions, one district was selected to carry out the ethnographic field work and the multi-case study. The Northern Region was selected based on its poor educational profile in Ghana. The choice of Savelugu District was based on its moderate characteristics and education profile within the region. Indicators such as girls' enrolment, educational provision and teacher-pupil ratios were considered as well as common characteristics identified within the district itself. Savelugu was generally ranked within the middle to lower bracket according to regional development plans and educational statistics.

The aim of the research was to use an in-depth case study of problems and challenges facing formal education from a community perspective in order to inform policy and the educational change process. The research also aims at exploring how schooling is used as a vehicle for human development at the community level.

Five rural communities were selected containing both diverse and similar characteristics. All communities were rural and of approximately similar population sizes, located in different parts of the district. One case was used for an in-depth ethnographic study. A predominantly qualitative orientation was taken employing participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods such as: community mapping, family tree diagramming, social survey, focal group and individual discussions when appropriate. Apart from these participatory techniques the usual ethnographic techniques of living with, and participating in the lives of people in the community were carried out over a two and a half year period. Two intensive phases of field work were conducted based on seasonal variations and the school calendar between June-December 1996 and March to August 1998. The following chart describes the main characteristics of each community.

	Sankafo¹⁴	Panzo	Chaphi	Nalli	Kpaa
Enrolment	Poor	Poor	Poor to medium	Excellent	Good
Population Size¹⁵	600	651	1200	430 ¹⁶	949
Religion	Islamic and traditionalist	Islamic and traditionalist	Islamic and traditionalist	Islamic, Christian and traditionalist population	Islam, Christian and traditionalist
Ethnic	Dagomba	Dagomba	Dagomba	Dagomba and Ewe	Dagomba
Location in relation to the ethnographic	Main case	Close to main case and part of	Close to Sankafo and feeder village to same junior	Different part of the district	Different part of the district

¹⁴ Names of communities have been changed in order to maintain anonymity.

¹⁵ Population figures were obtained from the Guinea Worm Eradication project which carries out frequent surveys in the District. This data is from 1997 survey data.

¹⁶ The Nalli population includes a small Dagomba community which is also considered part of the school community

case		same sub district area	secondary school		
External interventions and agencies	None	School for Life	Some assistance: food aid from Catholic Relief Service (CRS)	School construction by Government Poverty Alleviation Program (PAMSCAD)	Schooling Improvement Fund (SIF): teaching and learning materials School for Life

2.2 Location and characteristics:

The Northern Region has the highest illiteracy rate in the Ghana at 35% and the poorest enrolment rate for girls according to Ministry of Education figures for 1991/92. The region also has the lowest trained teacher population at 65.7% and the least number of female teachers at 26.4% (World Bank, 1996).

Savelugu is a newly created district and relatively deprived in relation to the national educational profile, with low enrolment of girls, poor teacher student ratio and poor infrastructure.¹⁷ Savelugu has relatively better educational status than other districts in the Northern Region such as Tolon and Gusheigu Karaga and was not affected directly by the ethnic conflict of March 1995, except for some influx of internally displaced people.

The Savelugu district is contained within a larger traditional ethnic area called the Dagbon, where the Dagomba, the largest ethnic grouping within the northern region, reside. See the map in annex 2 for the location of Dagbon. The Dagomba have a long history of resistance to formal education which has been well documented by researchers in the 1960s (Oppong) and 1970s (Blakemore). Both concluded that the Dagomba in particular were showing signs of resistance to formal education. Oppong (1966, 1973) pointed to the fact that the Dagomba already had a strong indigenous educational system which was meeting their needs. Blakemore (1976) also pointed to resistance to formal education among the Dagomba and other ethnic groups in Ghana placing emphasis on "rigidity" of the formal education system to "respond to local difficulties and problems". He pointed out that "the inflexibility of the education system is more marked in the north than in the south" attributing it to a centre periphery argument. In both studies, livelihood patterns and dependence on child labour were major causes for restricted participation in formal education.

2.3 District Formal educational profile:

Formal education reached the Savelugu district in the mid 1950s with the construction of the first middle school in the district located within one mile west of the ethnographic case study village. Education gradually increased during the 1960s, but was still restricted to only a few communities until the 1980s when there were concerted efforts to build local schools and establish primary schooling. The vast majority of communities built their own structures or conducted classes under trees. According to a recent report

¹⁷ The full name of the district is Savelugu/Nanton District

by the District Co-ordinating and Planning Unit (1998), there are 100 schools in the district of which only 24 were constructed as standard classroom blocks and 61 with "sub standard blocks" made of mud and thatch roofing. The remainder of the school are under trees.

In Savelugu there remains a high percentage of children out of school. According to the 1996 district development plan there are 66% of school age children out of school. The following chart presents the enrolment rates for the district which have remained very low.

District Gross Enrolment figures:

	Boys		Girls		Total	
	96/97	97/98	96/97	97/98	96/97	97/98
Nursery	651	641	342	559	993	1,200
Primary	4,329	4,849	1,511	2,105	5,840	6,954
JSS	1,366	1,477	307	402	1,673	1,879

(Savelugu District Co-ordinating and Planning Unit, 1998)

Although enrolment trends did appear to be increasing within the last few years, surveys carried out in 1996 by the District Co-ordinating and Planning Unit, found that 8,506 children in the 86/87 school year representing 31.5% of the school age population were in school and 68.5% were out of school. According to the district this was 3.5% higher than the previous year. Despite the increases in enrolment, no significant difference was made in reducing the number of out of school children due to the high population growth rate recorded in the district at 3.8% within the same time frame. The figures also revealed a particularly severe problem for access of girls to the basic education system and a high drop out rate. The district report states that at least 50% of girls drop out of school at all levels of the basic education system.

In relation to the EFA goal of meeting the basic learning needs, the criteria reference scores for the district in 1996 also revealed a very low percentage of children reaching mastery level in English and Maths; scores ranged from 0-2%. The mean score for maths was 25.2 % and the mean score for reading was 28.8% for the district, which was below the regional mean scores for maths (27.0%) and English (31.8%).

Broadening the means and scope of education within the district has meant that several donor assisted programs have provided infrastructure and attempted to improve quality of formal education within the district. Savelugu has been used for several piloting schemes by Government and donor agencies such as the Primary School Equity Program which provided furniture and head teacher bungalows in several schools. More recently, the Schooling Improvement Fund (SIF) has also stimulated community support for Basic Education through the provision of small grants to communities for the purchase of teaching and learning materials. Many of the SIF communities have also built their own teachers' bungalows as part of the program, demonstrating the capacity of communities to manage and take control of school improvement.

NGOs in the district are beginning to run alternative education programs to meet basic learning needs of children. These include after school and non formal programs for teaching literacy skills in English and in the local language. The School for Life (SFL) program, has achieved remarkable results in two other districts in Northern Region, and moved into Savelugu in 1997. The SFL provides literacy and numeracy classes for children between 8-12, targeting the large out of school population in the district. School for Life also requires that 50% of the children enrolled in the program are girls. The SFL program is in high demand in the district of Savelugu, with over 75 applications but places for only 50 communities to participate in the first year. SFL visited several communities to negotiate and assess the communities' need for and interest in participating. School for Life had a high success rate in its first year of operation in Savelugu, with almost 98% of the children completing the nine month program. These children passed out with the basic level of literacy in their mother tongue and the majority were placed in P3 and P4 classrooms for the 98/99 school year. A brief profile of the School for Life and Shepherd School programs are contained in annex 3. Both programs are targeting out of school children who have difficulty accessing the primary school.

2.4 Community case findings

We now consider the findings from the ethnographic case study of Sankafo in order to explore how a consideration of culture and context can assist us when assessing the educational provision and improvement strategies for EFA.

Sankafo, like most Dagomba communities in Northern Ghana, is characterised as "traditional", having a patriarchal and authoritative governance structure with one chief and several elders acting as advisors for making decisions within the community. The community is also a subsistence agricultural society practising traditional patterns of rain-fed agriculture for survival. The community has approx. 613 members and 32 compound houses. A community survey conducted in 32% of the compounds revealed that there is an average of 19 persons living in each compound unit. The compound households range from between 8 to 55 persons which include children.

Each compound house consists of a series of round and rectangular huts within a larger compound. The majority of men and especially better established household heads in Sankafo practice polygamy. A typical compound house is made up of several nucleated families with both direct and extended family ties to the household head, often spanning several generations. For instance the household head may have his brother and/ or sisters living in the compound along with his own sons and their wives and children. Girls are married out at an early age, in Sankafo often shortly after puberty. Each woman and man has their own hut, contained within the same compound.

Compound households farm collectively on the same land to maintain the family food supply which is cooked collectively. Men and sometimes women have their own farms but the compound farm takes priority over all other farming activities. Farming and

household responsibilities are gender and age differentiated. Although the majority of Dagomba settlements have converted to Islam, Dagomba customs and traditions take primacy over the Islamic way of life especially during funeral, and marriage ceremonies. As the *magazier* or woman leader said “we are first Dagomba and then Muslims”.

2.5 Universalising access and promoting equity:

As mentioned previously, Sankafo is a subsistence farming community relying solely on rain fed agriculture to supply basic food stuffs throughout the year. There are two main seasons in Sankafo: the farming season between April and October and the dry or lean season between November and March; although this has varied significantly within the last few years due to the fluctuations in rain fall. Food crop farming is the main livelihood, with some families rearing cattle, goats and sheep. The seasonal variations have a direct impact on the access and ability of children to enter and remain in formal schools.

Most families are dependent on child labour, relying on children to provide essential services within the home and on the farm. A list of the services performed by children is below:

Seasons:	Women's work	Girls' work	Men's work	Boy's work
Dry season (Nov to March)	Collect firewood Kayayo ¹⁸ Shea butter extraction	Collect firewood Household chores Kayayo Assisting with shea butter extraction	Building roofing for houses and mats/ ropes to sell	Rat hunting and fruit picking Cutting and weaving of grass for thatch roofing
Rainy Season (April to October)	Shea nut collection Planting and sowing of crops Ground nut harvest: rice Etc	Collect shea nut Household chores Planting and carrying food to the farm Ground nut harvest	Prepare land Sow crops	Watching the animals Weeding and assisting planting Carrying water on the farm

(based on focal group discussion with girls and boys, seasonal calendars and observational data)

According to the family mapping and survey within the community, all families use child labour to assist with the family farming activities. Only households where the labour needs have been met can afford to send a child to school. Interviews with younger and older men in the community revealed that only when enough food was secured for the family would men think of sending a child to school. Younger men, newly married resist from sending children since they have no "children to spare" and

¹⁸ Kayayo means "head carrier". In the last few years young girls and women have begun migrating to the cities on a seasonal and yearly basis to find work and improve their income. Girls interviewed stated that they went on "kayayo" to “have their eyes open” and also buy the necessary items for marriage.

have not secured enough labour to support the farming activities. The man's priority and responsibility is to secure enough food for the family. Traditional Dagomba farmers rely and learn to survive through the provision of family and communal labour. This has direct implications for the formal schooling of children.

Women are often responsible for training the girl children and depend on her labour to assist with the performance of household and income generating activities. For instance during the shea nut and ground nut seasons girls are a particularly lucrative source of income for the auntie or mother since they can increase her labour power and ultimately the amount of shea nut she picks. These trends were confirmed in the family tree survey conducted in the village. The following chart contains some of the data from the community and family tree survey in 1998. One can see that the families with children at school have a large labour pool.

Family Tree analysis of Sankafo (July 1998)

Name of House hold	Household population	Number of farm and family labour	Number of out of school G B	Number in school G B	Infant children O-5
Yayoyilli	8	3 adults	4	0 0	1
Gasablanayilli *	17	6 adults 5 youth	1 2	1 ¹⁹	2
Belisinayilli	7	3 adults	1 1	0 0	2
Salmvelnaayilli*	40	12 adults 7 youth	6 3	4 ²⁰	8
Wulanayilli	8	3 adults 1 youth	1 2		1
Bontanchayilli	9	1 adult 4 youth	3 0	0 1	
Adamyilli	12	3 adults 2 youth	3 1	1	2
Youngdooyilli *	12	3 adults 4 youth	4 1	0 0	
Gundanayilli	32	13 adults 3 youth	5 9	0 ²¹ 0	2
Yepalsinaayilli*	28	11 adults 0 youth	4 7	0 2 ²²	4
Danaayilli	58	24 adults 1 youth	12 13	4 ²³	4
Zoonayilli	33	12 adults 4 youth	10 3	0 3	1
Total	264	125	50 46	0 16	27
Percentage	100%	47.34	36.64	6.06	10.22

¹⁹ Vocational school pioneer boy

²⁰ P3 Pong Tamale, P6 Sankafo, JSS3 and SSS2

²¹ He had two girls in school at different times but Azaratu was taken out after P1 and went on Kayayo, Moshei made it to the higher primary grades and then was taken out by her mother to help in the house

²² One boy in JSS3 and the other in vocational school

²³ Three boys in primary school and one in JSS3

* signifies the pioneer children within the community.

For instance, families like Salmvelnaa, Yepalsinayilli and Daanayilli have large productive units containing several smaller family units, with adult, youth and child labour to draw on. These households also were the first to send a "pioneer child" to the formal school in Sankafo in 1988 and continue to experiment with the formal system.

Children in school and out of school

Field work in Sankafo revealed a very small proportion of children attending the primary school, with only a few girls visible at the lower primary levels. There were several children in the community who were out of school and many who would drop out before the end of Primary six. Within the two year study several techniques were used to explore this phenomenon which revealed a number of complex relations between socio-cultural practices and educational relevancy and quality. The following section will briefly review some of these socio-cultural practices and trends. The trends were very much related to the adult roles and responsibilities expected by the family.

Children attending school

The following chart presents the enrolment figures for the 95/96 to 97/98 school years. They were generated through observation at the school and verified during interviews with the teachers and students.

Sankafo School enrolment figures²⁴:

	95/96	96/97	97/98
Children (M/F)	M F	M F	M F
P1	1 2	0 3	0 3 ²⁵
P2	2 0	2 2	1 0
P3	1 0	2 0	2 1
P4	4 1	1 0	3 0
P5	3 0	4 0	2 0
P6	1 1	3 0	2 0
Total	12 4	12 5	10 4
Teacher	3	3	1
Classes	5 classes	5 classes	4 classes

²⁴These figures are based on the observations at the school and verified through interviews with the teacher during the years they do not correspond to the official enrolment figures provided to the district

²⁵ Several began attending P 1 in July, close to the end of the school year, but teacher was not sure they would remain

These figures confirmed our observational and interview data which showed that there is a high proportion of children out of school compared to those attending school in the community. The first year of the study (1996/7) there were only 16 students compared to 14 attending school in 1998/99. The teacher complained that the community members were not sending more children, but could not fully explain why. There were significant reasons why this happened which will be explored in the next section.

The reasons for non attendance are multidimensional and mainly related to securing enough food within the compound house. This means that most parents require labour within the household in order to ensure that there are enough farm hands. But deeper than this is an even more predominant reason. Most people within the community are living a traditional subsistence lifestyle. Their plans and ways of managing household income are based on seasonal livelihood patterns and immediate need. The most common phrases repeated when asked why only a few children attend school are "those on the farm feed those at school" or "how can we send all the children, who will feed the family?". Household heads that manage the family and make most of the decisions have to first ensure that there are enough children taking care of the animals and providing labour on the farm before sending a child to school. If he does not fulfil this responsibility the family will suffer, causing tension and sometimes jealousy within the compound. Many of the newly married men remarked that "they did not yet have enough children to send to school" or any "extra children to spare for the school."

As we will see in the next section parents also do not want to risk sending more than one child in case it becomes too great a burden on the family. Despite the heavy emphasis on child labour the vast majority of families are not able to secure enough food during the farming season to provide for family needs throughout the year. Families interviewed were relying increasingly on off farm activities to sustain themselves. These included women's shea butter income and the sale of animals when available.²⁶ Interviews during the drought season revealed that when the family is under severe physical stress this also creates tensions within the family compound, sometimes preventing children from attending school. Extras such as schooling are not easily accepted by other members whose children are not attending. During the drought season women complained and worried that their children would often go to school hungry due to lack of food in the household, while other children who remained at home could forage and hunt for food.²⁷

Investing in Children:

For those families who do invest in educating some of their children it means making a firm decision that they can support the child through the entire formal system all the way

²⁶ The trend of food insecurity was well documented in the last two farming seasons due to poor and unpredictable rainfall patterns. Kate Abu in a study of the Dagomba farming areas confirmed that the majority of families were not able to secure enough food for the year during the farming season. (K Abu, GCAEP Target Group Survey, 1992)

²⁷ Similar patterns were documented in the Ghana Human Development Report 1997.

up to Senior Secondary level. Families interviewed explained that they wanted the child to go all the way through the formal education system; they did not want the child to go for some time and then stop. They also wanted to avoid a situation where children or teachers may ask for funds (i.e. payment of fees, note books or clothing) and not being able to provide. Therefore, the investment in education is considered carefully, and committed most often to the boy child, and in rare cases of girl child. The boy is seen as a direct long term investment because of the benefits accruing to the family as compared with the investment in the girl. The boy continues to be "owned" by the family and household even after marriage; his labour and production is managed by the family head. The girl, once married becomes the property of the husband and will often work for her husband's extended family unit. Boys were also observed performing public and private duties for the household head such as running errands to the nearby town, reading letters and travelling to places. Elders or household heads showed pride in training one boy child and expected that the child would of benefit in future. Some families expected children to work outside the community and channel resources back to the family once graduated.

The socio-cultural beliefs in the community relate strongly to the girl child's ability to access the system. There was a consistent pattern within the Sankafo primary school. Initially the girl child was often sent to attend lower primary classes; once old enough was withdrawn to work in the household and begin training with the mother or the auntie. Girls are to be trained with "hardship" and discipline in order to bring honour to the family once married.

Some girls of Sankafo primary school did manage to move to higher levels in the basic system. Only two girls in the ten years of Sankafo primary school had ever managed to get to Junior Secondary School (JJS3) and one dropped out just before graduating due to a labour need at the family. Primary school was a place where some girls were kept until they were old enough to be fostered out of the community. Fostering was a wide scale practice in Sankafo as shown in the chart in annex 4. There were no girl children in school and the vast majority were fostered out to the father's sister or another close female relations. The survey revealed that the majority of schooled children were boy children categorised as non-fostered. There was only one case of a boy schooled in Sankafo who was a fostered child.

Finally, another significant factor which limits the number of children in the school and impacts on retention and drop out is the high absenteeism of teachers. There were three teachers posted to the Sankafo school but only one teacher attended regularly. The other two teachers "came the day before pay day".

All the teachers lived outside the community refusing to reside inside despite several attempts by the members of Sankafo. The two teachers who were absent most of the time were residing in the regional capital Tamale, more than 40km, away and were dependent on public transport to attend Sankafo primary. This meant the teachers relied on the odd chance to obtain transport from the regional capital and then find their way from the district capital and finally, walk one mile from the main road junction leading to the

community. The two absentee teachers were eventually transferred out of Sankafo to another community by the religious education unit managing them, but only after several years had passed in the community. The process of removal was very lengthy and in the meantime many community members had become disillusioned and frustrated with the education system in Sankafo. The few parents who had once supported and established the school instead decided to send their children to the nearby town schools while the others used this as an added excuse for removing children from school or not sending children at all.

2.6 Meeting basic learning needs through the school:

The Dagomba are experimenting with the formal education system in Sankafo. They were testing the system to see what benefits it would bring to the children and the families. The Sankafo school was constructed by the community in 1988 at the initiation of a few elders and a teacher who came from outside the community. The village sent a group of eight pioneer boys. These boys were the first group of children to attend primary school, except for a few who had been sent to neighbouring communities. There were no formally educated adults or youth residing in Sankafo except for one boy who was previously living in a neighbouring village and had recently come back to reside in Sankafo. This first test cohort was extremely important to the village and many families were "waiting to see" what would happen with these children. Field work using community mapping exercises in 1996 and 1998 revealed that several families had never sent any children to the school. When the research began the "pioneer boys" had just finished writing the Basic Education Certificate Exam and were awaiting results. Only two of the boys were given entrance to the senior secondary school and the others were left to either attend vocational school or go back to the farm. Half opted for the latter option and two remained in the vocational stream.

When these children were going through the system in Sankafo, the teachers lived in the community and also taught the children after school. The teachers demonstrated strong commitment toward the children and the families, which made a lasting impression on the people of Sankafo. It also encouraged them and generated interest in sending other children to the school. The new teaching staff had done just the opposite. In 1996 when the research began there were only 20 students and was gradually declining every year partly due to the lack of commitment on the part of the teachers which was translated into lack of respect by the community.

Parents were convinced that the children who had been tutored by the teachers who lived in the community were better able to speak English or write their names, compared to the children currently attending school. This was confirmed by the Head teacher of the junior secondary school who had more recently, in the 1996/97 academic year, held two Sankafo students back to repeat three years of primary schooling. These two students, who had been sent from Sankafo primary school to attend Junior Secondary School could not read or write and had to repeat P4, P5 and P6. The decision to move children back from JSS1 to Primary 3 was mutually agreed upon by the Sankafo parents. The parents

recognised that the children would learn more at the town School since the teachers were regular. Parents also recognised the disadvantage their children had coming from families who had no experience with "schooling" or any education themselves. The most important indicator for community members was that children had a better chance, if the teachers lived in the village and gave extra classes.

A typical day in the school in Sankafo would involve a process of multi-grade teaching, which involved some of the students as assistant teachers. There were three classes included: P1/P2, P3/P4 and P5/P6. The teacher would run between classrooms placing math equations up on the board and asking the children to work them out on the desks with chalk. Few of the children had note books so the backs of the table were used for the slates. At about 11:30 A.M. the children in the lower primary were hungry and some were fast asleep. The teacher usually tried to prolong the agony but school often closed one hour early. There was no food or water available at the school and the teacher himself was unable to drink the water in the community due to the guinea worm infestation. Books were available but not always used in class. There were none available in local language (Dagbani) despite the fact that teachers were to conduct Primary 1 to Primary 3 in the local language.²⁸

2.7 Broadening the means and scope for basic education

Outside the formal school there was a strong indigenous training system at work within the community. Oppong wrote in 1960s that the indigenous training system provided the main knowledge and values for children. Field work revealed a strong 'cultural curriculum' within the community, with the objective of preparing Sankafo children to be useful and acceptable citizens in Dagomba society. The training of boys and girls had three main objectives: to teach them to survive off the land, to expose them to their reproductive and familial roles and finally, to teach them respect for power and authority relations within the community and family unit. The following diagram outlines the main components of this indigenous knowledge system.

²⁸ Local language readers were not available within the Savelugu District according to interviews with teachers and confirmed by the District Education Bookshop Officer.

Indigenous Knowledge Needs	Girls Learn	Boys Learn
Survival/ Occupational Off land²⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women farm certain crops such as vegetables and "soup ingredients" - compliment the man's work by carrying out all household activities: manage the household food preparation - tasks: fetching wood and water collection - generate income: collection/ extraction of shea nut and other income generating activities - farming and marketing - become independent and not too reliant on men 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Men grow main staple crops such as maize, yam and groundnuts - survive off land and provide for the family - farming and management of farm labour to support household - contribute, support and respect household head - specific roles of men and women (i.e. men do not engage in cooking, taking care of children, selling at the market etc.)
Reproductive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - care giving to younger siblings - preparation for early marriage - child rearing and sexual roles and responsibilities - method: observation of women in the household 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - that many children will assist you on the farm - prestige and wealth comes from many wives and children
Public, power and authority related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - learn position within family and community: little decision making in the family and community - submission to men and husband's decision - limits to woman's freedom - active in women's groupings and vocal only with women's leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - some training in traditional leadership roles - understanding roles and relation to chief and elders in community and position of father
Traditional/ preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - traditional roles as a woman in festivals, funerals and child birthing rights - women leadership role as a Magazier - respect hierarchical male structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - traditional roles within the community such as the drummer, warriors, - occupational: butcher, barber and weavers - dances and traditional festivals
Spiritual and moral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - access to koranic education to learn the Islamic religion and reading the Koran 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - access to Koranic education and the traditional beliefs in Dagbon through stories
MAJOR VALUES LEARNED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - respect for authority especially male authority - submission: learn the scope of freedom and to depend on the husband / men - service and submission to authority especially male figure - co-operation and self sufficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - self sufficiency - respect for elders and those in position - be independent, how to survive and be responsible for the family - leadership abilities - co-operation

(Based on observation and interviews in Sankafo and surrounding communities, 1996 and 1998 field work)

Values and skills were part of this cultural curriculum. Men and women saw their main duty as passing on these skills to their children in order to survive off the land and carry on the "dagomba tradition". Formal education was seen as another way of training the child. Although, he or she might participate in the Dagomba way of life, parents saw the two systems as parallel. The formal education system provides a door to the modern world and the indigenous system ensures continued survival and acceptance within the community.

²⁹ Girls and boys work patterns reflect those of the women and men in the community

Elders viewed the system of formal education as a bridge to the modern world, in which some children, but not all, would enter and pass. Sustaining the Dagomba way of life both physically and culturally required some children to be trained in the ways of the "tradition".³⁰ At the same time both men and women had limits on how much they were willing to allow the children to learn in the formal school, complaining that they needed them to assist in the house or on the farm. There was an accepted and widely held view that not all children should go to school, and girls should be trained in order to be able to serve their husbands and families. The attitudes towards tradition and preserving the Dagomba way of life were strong and alive in Sankafo, but people were aware that "eye openness" or modernisation was coming to the community.

In several interviews, elders, women and children revealed that they were slowly being exposed to new ways of living through travel to the cities and many believed they needed to prepare for this process of transition. They saw the educated child acting as a bridge or interpreter between the new and the traditional ways of life. The chief and elders went as far as to say, that the educated children should become the village representatives to negotiate with NGOs who were coming into the community. For the elders, there was a strong pride and desire in having a few "Karachi" or educated youth who could ensure that resources outside the community could be tapped for the communities benefit. Children explained that several letters would arrive in the community but no one could read them. Once these letters were translated, the community had lost the opportunity for assistance. There was a recognition and need for a few "educated youth", but this was moderated by the elders' fears that too quick a change would upset the normal pattern of Dagomba life. Characteristics of a pre-figurative society were apparent in Sankafo.

A Koranic school also existed within the community which attracted a large number of children twice a week to the Imman's house. The school was run in the evenings after the daily farming work was completed. These classes consisted of learning: Arabic, prayers by heart and some letters of the Arabic alphabet in order to be able to read the Islamic holy writings. Children who had dropped out of school continued to pursue their studies in Arabic. The Imman explained that children who showed interest and ability were sometimes supported to study in higher institutions in Ghana.

Outside of the formal school there was a non formal education program for adults, which had recently been started after the previous facilitator and adult participants were no longer interested. The new class was initiated by a Senior Secondary School student, residing in the community, and had mainly attracted youth of his own age group. These included young girls and boys who had not had a chance to participate in the formal system.

³⁰ Often parents explained that they had grown up to meet their traditions and all they new was farming so this is what they had to pass on to their children.

Part 3: Implications for Policy and Practice

3.1 Reflection and discussion

The situation in Sankafo is not unique to the Savelugu district or within the Dagbon in general. This was confirmed during a multi-case study inquiry which explored many of the themes mentioned. The point is that there are strong cultural practices which are intertwined with subsistence and traditional modes of life in Sankafo. Formal education has been resisted and only recently been given some "experimental" value. Since the 1960s, Sankafo has had access to formal schooling in neighbouring communities, but only recently has begun to send children to their own primary school. This is a very long time to allow children within Sankafo and other communities within northern Ghana, to continue without access to basic literacy. This case highlights the need to negotiate education provisions on terms which are more acceptable to communities.

As some NGO programs demonstrate, education can and will be acceptable if negotiated on terms which do not upset the cultural patterns, and ways of life. The point must be made that this researcher does not agree or support all the cultural norms and practices observed within Sankafo, but the decision to change and transform, is a decision only communities and individuals can make. Basic education is a means to the transformation process, but it must be carefully negotiated within the cultural life world of a community and on terms, which support the most essential component to learning: self esteem and identity. Although schools and formal education in many parts of Africa and Ghana have been accepted, their cultures have been irreversibly transformed. The case of Sankafo, although extreme, tells us of a community still resisting the integration of formal education due to constraints related to their socio-cultural and physical life world. This life world includes the principles and patterns on which the community functions and survives. Education can and will make a difference, if negotiated on terms which the communities have more control to define and use.

A number of factors were restricting the acceptance and integration of formal schooling within the community. These factors were based on:

- Traditional beliefs and attitudes concerning preservation of the society and strong views of the school as a "modernising" force³¹
- Farming and food security to sustain the family and community were paramount. Child labour was intimately connected to this goal and the method of training the child to take on adult responsibilities in future.
- Schooling was an option for only a few who could afford it and was also regulated by the cultural desire to maintain the status quo.
- Strong cultural values and traditional practices such as fostering girl children restricted parents and women from making choices and changes within society
- Community members were frustrated and disillusioned with quality and effectiveness of formal schooling

³¹ Confirmed by studies undertaken by School for Life, 1997.

- Fear that the formal education would change the normal Dagomba livelihood pattern and with it the indigenous education system for training children

3.2 Implications for policy and external agency programming

“To serve the basic learning needs of all requires more than a recommitment to basic education as it now exists. What is needed is an 'expanded vision' that surpasses present resource levels, institutional structures, curricula and conventional delivery systems while building on the best in current practices” (World Declaration on Education for All, 1990, p4).

Need to expand vision of possibilities for achieving education for all

Bringing education into the realm of community possibilities demands investigation on both socio-economic and cultural terms. The Government has ways of investigating these changes through the district education offices and the local wings of community development agencies. Neutral facilitators are needed to understand both sides of the educational equation in order for conditions to be established for both local change and system adjustment.

To begin, there must be an acceptance that equity does not mean 'sameness', and educational provision does not have to mean schools in every village but should provide options for communities based on their needs. A broader vision of possibilities is required in Northern Ghana, which has already begun to take shape through programs like School for Life and Shepherd schools. As a first step, these programs should be supported and given the policy environment to both deepen and improve their efforts.

For schooling to become more accessible in Sankafo, basic improvements in agricultural yields and incentives for children to attend school are needed. These would have a direct impact on the family food security and livelihood.³² EFA will remain out of sight until programs consider the severe stress on family welfare and the intimate relation between physical and cultural survival. As was highlighted in the Sankafo case, communities in northern Ghana are faced with strategies for survival and are not able to experiment with formal education, which is beyond the capacity of most. Moreover, the formal system is seen as an alternative to the "cultural curriculum" which teaches children survival through collective work and co-operation. If formal education is imposed and subsidies are given, the Dagomba way of life will change and with it, their ability to sustain themselves. They will become more dependent on outside remittance from the educated workers in the cities, or government/donor support which is already the case in some communities in Ghana.³³

There are short term solutions which require decisions involving issues of cultural preservation. The research in the Northern Region shows that the non-formal programs

³² Educational Subsidies were also mentioned in the study S Chao (1997)

³³ These were observations made by this researcher on a recent poverty assessment conducted for the Ghana Government and World Bank.

which are providing basic literacy and come on terms more acceptable to the communities, without upsetting the normal patterns of work and livelihood have been accepted and embraced. If culture is not taken into account and the formal school remains as it is, then the government will have to consider programs which complement children's full participation within the basic system.

Research in the field has also revealed that food programs which were closed down, were accompanied by decreased enrolments, and communities reverting back to older patterns. It appears that Ghana has opted for large food programs, which they hope will provide incentives for girls to attend school. These programs may be more effective in the short term especially if they include teachers and further reduce teacher absenteeism. In the long term, improving access and equity for children on a more sustainable basis must involve improving farming production and yields in order to ensure food security on a yearly basis.

Improving basic learning needs: Flexible schools or alternative systems

The notion of more 'flexible school' is far from new, but it is essential in communities like Sankafo. With the current environment for decentralised educational planning there is an opportunity to improve flexibility within the system negotiated and agreed upon by communities and government. The study in Sankafo appears to lead to an even more radical conclusion, which questions whether formal education will ever be fully integrated into the cultural life of the participants and more importantly, act as a means to socio-cultural change and community development. The Sankafo case demonstrates that the formal system is running parallel to the communities' system of development. The formal system, perceived as a "modernising agent", is used in a very conservative manner and as an alternative to socialisation within Dagbon society. Elders and household heads recognise that the traditional pattern of life will be disrupted, threatening both the physical welfare and cultural identity of Sankafo. Integration of basic education will have to be carefully negotiated such that the system or the educational change innovation does not disrupt the socio-economic or cultural status of the community.

This demands skill, sensitivity and innovation from agencies implementing educational change processes. Negotiation around the kinds of literacy and numeracy, the age group and timing are all part of the negotiation process. Most literacy programs begin with this process and appear to be more acceptable in Dagbon, according to the results of the School for Life program.

Non formal literacy programs may also have a greater impact in the long run if children are able to access these programs and using community facilitators (similar to the School for Life approach). We must begin by understanding the basic learning needs which communities and families want for their children, and provide a diversity of educational options, including schools and other complimentary or alternative educational programs to make EFA a reality in all parts of Ghana.

Conclusion:

Ethnographic studies using greater participatory methods have much to teach us about Achieving Education for All in Africa. For policy makers and practitioners engaged in educational reform and change processes, ethnographic work allows a deeper understanding of the "why" questions. It challenges the assumptions on which policy is based and connects often fragmented meanings around relationships between poverty, education, culture and development. Striving for "cultural understanding" allows one to understand from a community perspective, both the socio-cultural barriers and the potential areas for change.

Understanding the problems and forging strategies to promote access, quality and effectiveness of EFA strategies will require more contextual, holistic and naturalistic data. This study has shown that if we strive for equity in providing 'Schooling For All', but ignore culture, we may not achieve the goals of 'Education for All'. What is needed is a deeper understanding of the cultural change process for both practitioners and policy makers. Investigating the lifeworld of the people may save time in the long run by an understanding of how change can be generated and taking a 'backward mapping approach'. Through understanding the cultural enabling environment, decentralised action can be taken strategically within a system wide change process.

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Annex 3: Alternative programs in Northern regions:

There are two programs in particular which are showing signs of success in meeting basic learning needs of children within the Northern Region. The School for Life Program and the Shepherd Schools are the two programs which appear most suited to the local socio-cultural conditions within the northern region. School for Life had been operating a program for three years in two adjoining districts and had entered the Savelugu district the last year of field work (1997/98). Shepherd Schools were operational for several years in the Upper East Region of the country under the auspices of Action Aid, Ghana³⁴.

The basic approaches of the School for Life and Shepherd School programs are outlined below.

	School for Life	Shepherd School program
Objectives	To provide basic literacy and numeracy skills to out of school children.	To provide basic literacy skills and prepare the child.
Area of Coverage	Working in three districts with approx. 50 classes in each district.	Working in one district with approx. 6 schools (Bawku West District)
Numbers of students	25 students per class; at least 50% are females	Unlimited number of children are allowed to come to the school
Target group: Children	Out of school children between the ages of 12-16, although in some communities visited the girls were clearly younger than this and some of the boys were older.	Children out of school, normally working on the family farm and shepherd boys. They are also targeting the communities which do not have easy access to a school in their area. The shepherd school is therefore set up in areas where there are no other schools although in some of the communities visited there was a formal school nearby.
Teachers	Teachers are paid a small stipend of approx. 10,000 cedis for soap money. Teachers are all from the locality and have some formal or non formal education. They must be able to read and write in their local language. Training takes place for about 4 weeks during the month of August. Close monitoring by the district supervisors	Action Aid pays the teachers approx. 50-60,000 cedes as a stipend. Teachers are chosen from the locality by the PTA or school committee. They also must be able to read and write in the English language. Training takes approx. 2 weeks every year. The schools are closely monitored by the PTA of the Shepherd Schools.

³⁴ This researcher is grateful to School for Life and Action Aid for supporting the research study in both project sites during the 1996 field work and 1998 field work phases.

	and co-ordinator also ensure strong in service support.	
Approach	<p>Provide class for children in hours when they are least needed on the farm or in the household. Classes are usually in the early afternoon and stop during the peak of the farming season (September to May)</p> <p>This is a nine month intensive program which gives the basic language skills in local language.</p>	<p>School is usually conducted in the early morning between 7-11 am and follows the regular calendar of the formal school system.</p> <p>The schools set up provide three years of basic education after which the child may decide to enter the formal system. They may enter P4, P5 etc.</p>
Curriculum	<p>Curriculum is designed and developed with the staff and board of SFL. All materials are produced in the local language including story books and lesson plans.</p> <p>There is also a regular newsletter which is published by SFL in the local language.</p>	<p>Use the basic books from the GES with concentration on three subjects: English, Maths and local language</p> <p>Approval for the curriculum came from the GES with some adjustments</p> <p>They are now considering using the School for Life materials.</p>
Management structure	Each class has their own community committee which oversees the program in each area	
Out of school activities/ Monitoring and evaluation	Each district has a district co-ordinator and supervisory staff who visit all the schools on a weekly basis. Each supervisor is given a motor bike and monitors at least 15 schools in the district.	Action Aid field staff visit the schools on a regular basis to assess the progress.
Linkage with the formal system	<p>Very strong linkage with the district office and constant interaction with district school and authorities to ensure the child's smooth transition from the School for Life to the formal school.</p> <p>Due to limited spaces some children are finding it difficult to be placed in the better formal schools within the district. Some parents are also resisting sending children into the formal system due to the poor quality.</p>	<p>Some linkage to the formal system; Following the program some families decide to send children to the formal system.</p> <p>Minimum support is received from the district education office and close linkages remain an area for development.</p>
Potential for growth	School for Life is working in three districts and expects to work in the district and community until they have reached all the out of school children. It will take them approx. 5 years in each district and about three years in each community.	<p>Villages are expressing an interest in starting up their own schools with the assistance of Action Aid.</p> <p>Action Aid will assist the community to organise itself and provide the training for the teachers but they are moving slowly and do not expect to expand too rapidly.</p>

Problems	<p>Poor quality of the formal system may cause learners to fall back into illiteracy once in the formal system. Some parents prefer School for Life and do not want their wards attend school after completion due to the poor quality.</p>	<p>There are signs that the Shepherd Schools may be preferred over the formal schools since some parents prefer sending children to Shepherd Schools in communities where both types of schools exist in close proximity.</p> <p>Parents and children prefer the Shepherd Schools to formal schools since the teachers are more regular in attendance, show commitment and times are negotiated. Classes begin when communities prefer and when children are freed up from work responsibilities.</p> <p>The program is in process of assessing performance of pupils and changing curriculum. The program may move away from English and work in the local language for the first few years.</p>
Achievements	<p>Proven track record of children able to achieve in the formal system once they have passed out. Majority of graduates placed in P3 or P4 and often ending at the top of the class.</p>	<p>Some children are proceeding to formal school and others remain in the community.</p>

Visits to the field confirmed that the School for Life program has a systematic approach and has been well received in the districts. There are basic standards set up to ensure a high quality program is delivered in communities. Some of these standards relate to the terms on which the program is negotiated with communities, such as the timing of the school, proportion of girls and the attendance of students. SFL register the pupils with assistance from the village chief and selection is based on age, gender and need. They also ensure that at least 50% of the class is made up of girls. There is a formal passing out ceremony in which each student is tested and passed out if they have reached a certain level of competency. In the last evaluation over 95% of the students in the program achieved this level within the nine month cycle.

More research is needed to assess the cost effectiveness of the program. Our study revealed that the program is volunteer driven; community facilitators are given only a small stipend in the form of soap money each month for their services.

Annex 5 CULTURE:

This is an attempt to bring together some of the theories based on our empirical evidence in order to introduce a conceptual framework of culture. Culture as defined in this study is a dynamic meaning making process and life world of a group which has both hidden and overt qualities and layers. There are four principal dimensions to culture:

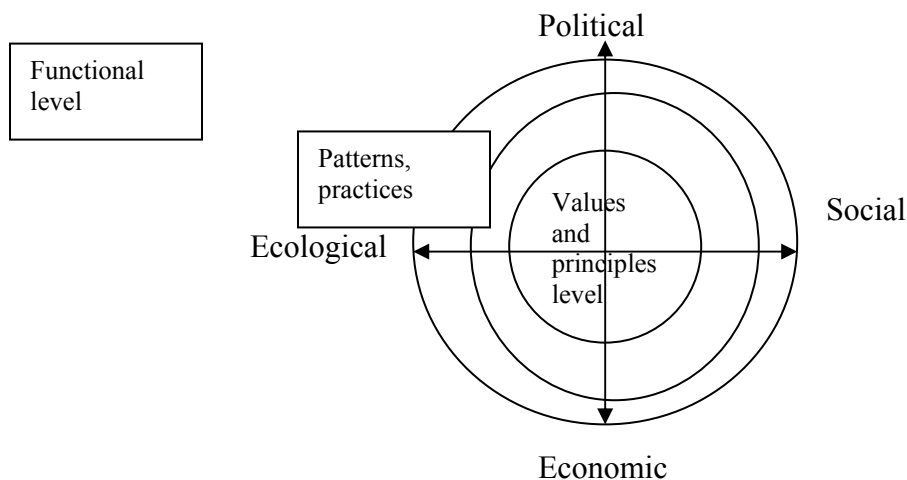
Level of principles: values and beliefs

Level of relationships: practices and patterns

Level of function: application of local knowledge and problem solving

Level of world view: ontological

The hidden elements of culture are the principles and values on which the society functions and are influenced by the environmental, social, economic, historical and political aspects of this life world. The values and beliefs are transmitted through the language and symbol within the society and therefore interpreted by the viewer. The more overt qualities of the culture are the patterns and practices on which the society functions but again have an intimate connection to the life world as defined by the environment, social and economic aspects. The underlying principles or values on which the society is founded are therefore more difficult to interpret than the more outward patterns in living. Therefore, the four levels on which culture is explored are context dependent and related to the meaning making system. What are termed: the values and principles level, the patterns and social structure level and finally the ecological, expressive and interface level and functional level.



"Cultural curriculum"

The arrows show that ones cultural exploration often begins with the outside moving inward and change can be generated on the superficial level of changing practices and patterns or more deeply affect the values and beliefs.