CASE STUDY:
Promoting Gender Equity and Equality of Access to Quality Basic Education in Northern Ghana — The Wing School Model

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Introduction

Ghana’s education policy framework recognises equal opportunities of access to education and provides affirmative action measures to combat inequities in access to basic education. Gender parity is a clear indicator for assessing improvement in access to education within the 2010-2020 Education Strategic Plan (ESP), which aims to “improve equitable access to and participation in quality education at the basic education level.” The access objective of the ESP states that “no child is to be disadvantaged by location (remote, rural, inner city), sex, SEN [Special Education Needs] or poverty” (Ghana 2010). This was the foundation for the Wing School intervention, a workable model that guarantees sustainability and replicability.

The Gushegu district is located in the northeastern part of the Northern Region of Ghana. It has a total of 180 basic schools, including 170 public schools and 10 private schools. These comprise 56 kindergarten, 96 primary, and 18 junior high public schools with enrolment figures of 6,010, 17,081 and 3,261 respectively. According to data

KEY FINDINGS:

- Twenty-three out of 29 Wing Schools established (nearly 80 percent) have been absorbed by the Ghana Education Service (GES). These schools enrolled more than 12,000 children, 45 percent of whom were girls.

- The 106 teachers recruited for the project, of whom 39 are women, have now become full-time professional teachers.

- Records indicate that girls in Primary 2 achieved mean scores of 62 percent in numeracy and 79 percent in literacy, compared to boys, who scored 60 percent and 75 percent, respectively.

- Of 356 girls in Wing Schools, 116 reached junior high school and now occupy leadership positions at the schools.

- The number of girls registered during the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) in the district increased from 60 in 2007 to 249 in 2014.
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from the Education Management Information System (EMIS), the teacher population in 2014 stands at 76 for kindergarten, 53.9 percent of whom are trained, 390 for primary, 37.2 percent of whom are trained, and 154 for junior high school, 77.3 percent of whom are trained. An Alliance for Change in Education (ACE) project baseline survey completed in 2007 revealed that:

- The Gushegu and Karaga (then twin districts) were the lowest performing in Ghana in terms of enrolment and gender parity, according to the EMIS, in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) at the time of introducing the project;
- An estimated 15,152 children or 49 percent of the total school-age population were out of school in Gushegu: 7,592 boys and 7,560 girls;
- Eighty percent of the population is from the Dagomba ethnic group and 20 percent from the Konkomba ethnic group. A majority of the out-of-school children are from the Konkomba group, especially girls. The Education Sector Performance reports of 2008 and 2009 further categorized the Gushegu district among the 47 hard-to-reach districts of Ghana (MoE 2008; 2009).

This briefing presents the main findings from a case study on access to quality basic education in the Gushegu district and uses this as a basis for outlining areas that need further research and development intervention for girls’ education. It discusses the impact of programmes and policies implemented by the Alliance for Change in Education (ACE) in Wing Schools in the Gushegu district on access to basic education, particularly for girls.

The case study methodology entailed mixed methods: qualitative and quantitative primary data was collected in the field using questionnaires and focus group discussions with head teachers, students, and community members and secondary data was gleaned from previous studies, office records, and both district and regional reports on enrolment, teacher population, performance, teaching and learning materials, and views about the project.

**Intervention**

The Wing School model of education was conceived by a consortium of three Danish Organisations and their Ghanaian counterparts in 2007. The consortium took up the name Alliance for Change in Education (ACE) to implement the Wing School project between 2007 and 2013 with funding from DANIDA through IBIS-Ghana. The project sought to contribute to Ghana’s education delivery by 1) expanding opportunities for rural children to enrol in school and contributing to achieving Education for All by the year 2015; and 2) improving gender parity to bridge the gap between educational achievements of male and female students.

The Wing School project contributed to achieving the goals of Ghana’s Education Strategic Plan (ESP 2010-2020), which aims at providing equal educational opportunities for boys and girls. Despite the establishment of a girls’ education unit in the Ghana Education Service, headed by girls’ education officers at national, regional and district levels, girls still faced barriers to accessing basic education, including:

- A lack of schools in deprived communities;
- A high rate of teenage pregnancy among those who enrol in school, including cases resulting from child marriages, betrothal and exchange marriages;
- Poor performance in schools BECE;
- Migration to cities in southern Ghana in search of jobs and engagement in economic activities to add to family income; and
- Long distances (of up to 10kms) to the nearest junior high school.

These factors caused girls to enrol and then drop out of school, particularly at higher levels of schooling during adolescence, or caused them not to enrol at all (ACE Baseline 2007). The barriers to access were compounded by lower learning outcomes for girls at BECE, where the pass rates for boys were higher than girls in all subjects except English (Ghana 2012).

The key project objectives were pursued by opening Wing Schools in hard-to-reach communities where there were previously no schools and doing so in a gender-sensitive manner. The project sought to achieve gender parity by reducing the socio-cultural and economic barriers to girls’ education. The two outputs linked with this outcome were building community ownership of schools and ensuring
equal representation of women and men in the school management committees (SMCs) and recruitment of teachers.

The Wing School model of education was not entirely new to Ghana’s education system. Within the GES there were isolated cases of schools designated as feeder schools, satellite schools, or streams of existing schools (Ampiah et al. 2012). The ACE project sought to implement an existing concept to serve both as a strategy for providing education at the doorstep of children in deprived communities and as a package of pedagogical approaches to delivering quality education.

The assumptions behind the Wing School project idea were that 1) the Wing Schools would increase opportunities for deprived out-of-school children, both girls and boys, to enrol in formal school; 2) the GES would embrace and support Wing Schools because the concept was not new to Ghana’s education system; 3) communities would buy into the Wing School concept and offer support to initiate, enrol, and assert their children’s right to schooling; and 4) of the estimated more than 5,000 children to be enrolled in Wing Schools, 50 percent would be girls. This would help bridge the gender gap for the attainment of a gender parity index (GPI) of 1:00.

Objectives and strategies

The key objectives of the Wing School intervention were to:

1. Facilitate enrolment in formal school by **opening Wing Schools in hard-to-reach communities**. Increase access to education by at least 25 percent, of which 50 percent would be girls in the two districts;
2. Ensure that Wing Schools deliver quality education by **recruiting community teachers** who would be trained to adapt to the context of learners and apply learner-centred, gender-sensitive, and participatory approaches to teaching and learning; and
3. Facilitate multi-stakeholder action (by state and non-state actors) to collectively achieve access to quality education by **creating platforms for dialogue and building the capacity** of the district development authorities, as well as increasing their absorptive capacity to sustain the Wing Schools.

The Wing School model aims to reduce social and economic barriers to girls’ education by using female teachers from the community as role models to educate the community and encourage women to take on leadership roles in SMCs. The model also seeks to remove geographic barriers by opening new lower primary schools accessible to children in rural areas. The approach was adapted to its setting by improvising: recruiting teachers primarily from within the target communities to teach in the children’s mother tongue and not requiring children to wear school uniforms to attend school. The schools were initiated as informal structures pending GES adoption to formalise them.

The model was thus underpinned by (a) community initiative and ownership of schools, (b) recruitment and payment of a monthly allowance to community teachers who had completed senior high school, (c) mother tongue instruction, and (d) the use of learner-centred, gender-sensitive, and participatory teaching approaches to guarantee quality education for deprived, rural, out-of-school children, particularly girls.

The targeted strategies to address girls’ enrolment, retention, and performance in school were:

**Women’s empowerment:** In the ACE Wing School model of education, women constituted the majority of the SMC (3 out of 5 members were women). The initial training of SMCs on their roles and responsibilities in the management of schools and regular coaching empowered many women representatives of Wing School SMCs to become more visible in their communities.

In communities where women were traditionally prevented from participating in decision-making processes alongside their male counterparts, the ACE project made it possible for women and men to engage in dialogue together on the education of their children and issues such as choosing the location of schools, enrolment of children, and modalities for community support to the school. Women’s participation in the Wing Schools became a jumping off point for wider impact and amplifying women’s voices: some women of the two districts were reportedly presenting themselves for election at the 2015 local government elections, after having been members of SMCs.
Gender parity “package”: The package consisted of a range of interventions to promote girls’ enrolment and retention in the Wing Schools. These were community awareness-raising and sensitization to address the root causes of gender inequality; the recruitment of female teachers; introduction of learner-centred, gender-sensitive pedagogy which enabled teachers to be gender-aware in their teaching practices and gender-sensitive in assigning roles to boys and girls in school; and provision of separate toilets for girls and boys. Annual girls’ camps or clinics were held where girls were selected randomly from the Wing Schools and taken to the public school in Tamale for a week-long program. The program consisted of sessions on personal hygiene, assertiveness, confidence building, interactive sessions with female role models who spoke to them about how to become achievers, and site visits to places of interest in the area.

Cost-effectiveness: Cost-effective expenditure analysis revealed that the Per Child Expenditure (PCE)1 in Wing Schools was GHS 177.82 (lower primary school) compared to a PCE of GHS 288 in (2013) at the kindergarten level and GHS 440 at the primary level in 2013 (MoE 2014).

Impact
The Wing School project not only increased access to and quality of education for more than 12,000 out-of-school children (including 5,400 girls) in the pilot districts of Gushegu and Karaga, it influenced the practices of adjoining districts with similar educational challenges.

Integration of Wing Schools into the public school system: The Wing School project helped to increase the number of formal schools from 63 in 2007/2008 to 182 in the Gushegu district alone. Out of the 29 Wing Schools established, 23 of them, or nearly 80 percent, have been absorbed by the Gushegu district GES. This indicates that state agencies are ensuring that almost all the Wing Schools are converted into full-fledged public schools and benefit from the accompanying necessary resources, such as teachers and textbooks.

Personal and professional development of teachers: The number of qualified teachers increased from 135 (13 women, 122 men) in 2006/2007 to 541 (61 women, 480 men) in 2012/2013. The project faced challenges in attracting more female teachers because of the remote location of the schools, however a majority of those who were recruited received professional certification. The available information indicates that the 200 community teachers, including 54 women, recruited by the ACE project became professional teachers after they enrolled in the Untrained Teachers’ Diploma in Basic Education (UTDBE)2 programme in two colleges of education. Forty women were trained at the Dambai College of Education and 160 at the Bagabaga College of Education. In the Gushegu district, about 24 of these teachers, 4 of whom were women, received appointments in the GES and are now on government payroll.

Physical infrastructure development of Wing Schools by the District Assembly: The study showed that out of 23 GES-absorbed schools, 7 schools gained offices and gender-sensitive sanitary facilities (toilets and urinals). These infrastructural developments went beyond the standard school building. From this number, 5 schools had 3 classroom blocks and 2 had 6 classroom blocks, which helps create an environment conducive to learning in the less-privileged communities.

Moreover, two Wing Schools have been upgraded and approved as junior high schools by the GES, which increases the number of junior high schools from 16 to 18. The schools will absorb 2,091 primary pupils: 1,287 boys and 804 girls graduating from 106 public and private primary schools.

Girls’ performance in Wing Schools: An examination of a cohort of pupils (boys and girls) enrolled in a particular Wing School found an 86.6 percent completion rate for girls. Girls in Wing Schools who graduated to junior high school are taking on leadership positions in the public sector.  

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1 The Government of Ghana and World Bank adopted a calculation of Per Child recurrent Expenditure (PCE) which included administrative overheads but excluded investment and management expenses. The formula used was Total Expenditure (excluding management & investment) divided by Total Enrolment in school within the given period (World Bank 2010).

2 The UTDBE Programme was introduced in 2004 as a distance teacher training programme to enable untrained teachers to become professionals. These teachers were mostly assigned to teach in deprived rural communities. This was in partial fulfilment of the ESP target of reducing untrained teachers to 5 percent by the year 2015.
schools. Records indicate that girls performed better than their boy peers, with a mean score of 62 percent proficiency in numeracy and 79 percent proficiency in literacy as compared to boys’ scores of 60 percent and 75 percent respectively (see Figure 1). The number of girls registered for the BECE increased from 60 in 2007 to 249 in 2014 in the district.

I was the first teacher taken to start this school in 2007 with 15 boys and girls each. At the moment almost all the children have graduated to their second year of Junior High School with only 2 each dropping out from both sexes. The school now has over 150 pupils.

Interview with the assistant head teacher Gumonayili D/A kindergarten and primary school

Before the Wing School program, our children travelled alone through the bush for about ten to fifteen kilometres to attend school in the next village, so the small children and girls could not attempt to go to school. This eroded their interest in schooling with time, but with the introduction of the Wing School concept my granddaughter, Amina, is now JHS 1.

Interview with a grandmother from the Zulogu community

Community mobilization and sensitization: According to the GES reports, the project contributed to a 100 percent increase in school enrolment in 6 years through awareness-raising and community mobilization. Even though the project reached 45 percent enrolment of girls compared to the target of 50 percent, it is important to note that these girls were enrolled from the most hard-to-reach areas where the socio-cultural barriers to education are significant. The project worked with the girls’ education officers at the GES district directorates and supported them in working closely with the gender desk officers at the District Assembly, the National Commission for Civic Education, and the Department of Community Development. Two civil society groups in the district, the school management committees (SMCs) and parent-teacher associations (PTAs), are now actively supporting the teachers with accommodation, feeding, and classroom space for teaching and learning to take place. Women are well-represented on the leadership of SMCs and PTAs and have contributed to increases in the enrolment, retention, and completion rates of girls (ACE Completion Report 2015).

Lessons learned

The Wing School as a workable model: Being attached to a supervising public school benefited the Wing Schools by enabling them to receive resources and professional support from teachers and allowing their students to transit to public school. The experience and practices of Wing Schools resulted in the model’s inclusion in the Ghana Complementary Basic Education (CBE) policy. The model shows that it is possible to establish lower primary schools for young children, who cannot walk several kilometres to attend school in a nearby community, that will enable them to continue to climb the ladder to junior high school. The Wing School model has contributed to fulfilling Ghana’s education policy on access (physical distance) to school, which states that school should be a walking distance of no more than 3-5 kilometres. Wing Schools have also addressed a socio-cultural issue by encouraging more girls to enrol. The low investment required to initiate Wing Schools makes it possible to sustain and replicate the model in similar geographic and demographic situations.

Effectiveness of mother tongue instruction: A key lesson learned was that teachers’ effectiveness in the classroom was linked to regular in-service training. The curriculum was translated into Dagbani and Likpakpaaln for the training and used to teach pupils from kindergarten to Primary 3. It not only upgraded their skills and knowledge,
but motivated them to teach. A study commissioned by Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and undertaken by Associates for Change in 2011 showed that Wing School pupils were much more comfortable with their mother tongue as a medium of instruction and classroom observations revealed that teachers were confident at presenting their lessons and engaging children in class.

**Gender parity package:** Tackling the root causes of gender inequality was a more sustainable solution than tackling only the symptoms, which might involve identifying girls and providing tangible items to encourage them to go to school but fail to prevent them from dropping out after the end of the project. The project achieved 45 percent girls’ enrolment against a planned target of 50 percent, which was significant considering the hard-to-reach areas and socio-cultural barriers to girls’ education that prevail in these communities.

**State-civic partnership:** Regular meetings with state and civil society organizations promoted mutual trust and accountability among stakeholders. It helped to defuse the traditional rivalry between state agencies and civil society, particularly in the project districts where the watchdog role of civil society was perceived as witch-hunting or fault-finding. A memorandum of understanding was drafted and signed, spelling out mutual responsibilities of key stakeholders involved in sustaining the Wing Schools for quality girls’ education in the district. This is an indication of the sustainability of the schools and worth replicating.

**State adoption of the Wing School concept:** The incorporation of the Wing School model in Ghana’s Complementary Basic Education Policy is evidence of achieving the project vision. The CBE policy is currently being financed by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (UK Aid) and has been implemented in 49 districts since 2013, ahead of the official government approval of the policy in 2014. Additionally Wing Schools have been included in the menu of activities of the Global Partnership for Education Grant (GPEG) for Ghana. The 2014 project completion report shows that the Wing School model is being replicated in Saboba, East Gonja, and Kpandai districts, among others.

**Teachers’ professional development:** Pre-service and in-service training and long-term professional certification lead to the attainment of professional teacher status. The project recruited young senior high school graduates, women and men, and provided opportunities for professional development that led to their employment with GES. This helped ensure the sustainability of these schools and allowed for scale-up in other districts.

**Challenges**

- District authorities were unable to fulfill their commitment to contribute to training fees and allowances for teachers.
- The cash flow challenge to the district assembly from the central government has implications for sustaining Wing School and local-level initiatives.
- The frequent change of leadership and incomplete devolution of power and resources under Ghana’s decentralization process affected local government support for the Wing School project.
- A drop in BECE performance as a result of:
  - Some candidates refusing to attend classes after registration;
  - Ineffective PTAs and SMCs;
  - Truancy and lack of commitment on the part of some teachers;
  - Poor supervision and monitoring of teachers by the GES;
  - The inability of district authorities to provide accommodation for teachers in remote areas; and
  - An inadequate and late supply of teaching and learning materials from the government.

**Conclusion**

Despite significant challenges that include the physical lack of schools, rampant teenage pregnancy, child marriage, long distances to reach schools, and disadvantaged, remote locations, the deprived rural communities targeted by this project held girls’ education in high regard. Because of this, girls’ school attendance is high and they are achieving a primary completion rate of more than 86 percent and proficiency in literacy of almost 80 percent. The fact that state agencies are making efforts to integrate and mainstream both the Wing Schools and the community teachers into the government school system shows the model to be a good practice for girls’ education that has strong sustainability prospects and is worth replicating in other parts of the world.

It is our recommendation that all stakeholders in girls’ education should advocate and campaign for the following: the absorption of the remaining 6 Wing Schools into the GES, recruiting qualified community teachers into the GES,
providing school buildings to expanded Wing Schools, reinstating the allowance scheme for dedicated community teachers and providing bicycles to girls who travel more than 15 kilometres to school. Pursuing these measures will improve the quality of girls’ education and gender equality in Gushegu district in particular and Ghana at large.

References

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The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) provided technical support to UNGEI grantees for the development of their case study summaries.

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