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PARTICIPATION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION IN GHANA: THE CASE OF FEMALES IN RURAL BRONG AHAFO

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ABSTRACT

Formal education, especially at the higher levels, plays a vital role in the development of human resources for both personal and social advancement. A cursory observation seems to indicate that, as elsewhere in Ghana, a vast proportion of females in rural Brong Ahafo does not participate in secondary education. The study was motivated by the desire to investigate the extent of participation in secondary education among females in Rural Brong Ahafo and to examine the possible underlying factors.

The study revealed gross under-representation of rural girls in secondary education, with the key factors observed to be poor economic circumstances of parents and socio-cultural conditioning of the rural folk. These factors would need to be addressed if the participation of girls in secondary education in rural Brong Ahafo is to improve.

Introduction

The crucial role played by education in developing human resources for both personal fulfilment and social advancement, is an indisputable fact recognised the world over (Anamuah-Mensah, 1995; Kwapong, 1993; UNDP, 1993) Educational provision takes

various forms including, among others, formal in-schooling, on-the-job training and adult literacy programmes.

In-school education offers greater opportunities for providing literacy education to more people than do the other forms of education. Especially at the early stages of life before entry into adulthood, in-school education is the most appropriate form of providing literacy education to people.

At the basic level, in-school education introduces pupils to general and basic literacy skills, and predisposes them to rudimentary practical and vocational skills which help to expose their innate practical abilities (Owusu, 1981). However, the value of schooling, socio-economic and otherwise, becomes well-defined at the secondary and tertiary levels. At these higher levels, the recipients of school education become more mature and capable of gaining a better understanding of the world around them. The exposure of students at this stage to more complex problems and skills, is a key ingredient for stimulating high level productivity (Meier, 1976), as well as promoting greater personal advancement and self-fulfilment.

Females constitute about 51% of the total population of Ghana which is an indication of the significant position they occupy in the national economy as a vast source of human capital formation (Statistical Services, 1988; Asamoah, 1997). It is again to be noted that about 69% of the Ghanaian population is found in the rural sector. This readily reveals the enormous size of the female population living in the rural communities of the nation. Participation of Ghanaian females, including the vast majority in the rural sector in schooling, especially at the secondary level onwards, as do their male counterparts, is an important factor in the process towards the attainment of the total well-being of all Ghanaians.

In principle, Ghana's education system provides equal opportunities to all its citizens regardless of sex differences or geographical location. Thus, each person is capable of pursuing any course of education to any level according to his or her ability and interest without any apparent administrative policy of restriction.

However, a cursory observation within the rural communities of the Brong Ahafo region indicates that many girls there, as elsewhere in the country, who should have been pursuing education according to their ages, are out of school with a considerable number of them engaged in petty trading and subsistence farming. Apparently most of these girls are actual non-school-goers who may have never attended school at all, who

have dropped out of the basic level, or who have completed the basic level without continuing further at the secondary level.

With such a situation one would easily conjecture that relatively a lot of girls in these areas are not sharing in the benefits of secondary and for that matter higher education to enable them adequately develop their God-given potentials for their own self-actualization and for their effective involvement in social, political and economic issues.

The desire to find out the true picture of the extent of participation in secondary education among girls in rural Brong Ahafo and to have an in-depth exploration of the factors accounting for the observed level of participation, provided motivation for the study.

Method

Two main sets of data were used in the investigation. Documentary data concerning the relative extent of girls' participation in schooling, were collected from selected basic schools and second cycle institutions in three main education districts of the Brong Ahafo Region. The data consisted of enrolment figures of pupils and students, and results of Basic Education Certificate Examinations. The second set of data involved the interviewing of subjects in the rural communities

on the factors affecting participation of girls in schooling. The subjects comprised parents, female basic school leavers and dropouts, and Heads of the basic schools and second cycle institutions in rural centres that were contacted for the documentary information. The main procedure for analysing the data was the calculation of percentages of the various aspects of the data.

Results and Discussions

The study recorded a number of findings relating to the extent of participation of females in secondary education in rural Brong Ahafo. Generally, the findings were consistent with those of other studies conducted in Ghana and elsewhere concerning females and their education (ILO-JASPA Report, 1980; UNDP Study No.3, 1980; Dugbaza, 1984; Bayo, 1985, etc).

1. The study revealed that girls were generally under-represented in schooling in the rural areas of Brong Ahafo. The under-representation was much greater at the secondary stage than it was at the basic level. Averagely there were about three boys to every two girls at the basic level in the rural areas. The sex ratios of selected basic schools over a five year period ranged between 149 and 169. At the secondary level, there were five boys to

one girl in the schools located in rural areas (with sex ratios of selected rural secondary schools ranging between 458 and 572) while those located in urban centres of the region had about three boys to one girl (with sex ratios of selected urban secondary schools ranging between 268 and 244).

2. No significant difference was found between the academic achievements of males and females in the schools at the basic level. Both the boys and the girls performed equally in their academic achievement levels. For all the selected basic schools and years put together, the rates of success for boys and girls were 49.8% and 50.2% respectively with the girls, thus, performing slightly higher. A 't' test of significance for independent samples computed on the rates of performance for the two sexes for all the schools for the period, at 0.05 level of significance with 28 degrees of freedom, showed no significant difference between the performance of boys and that of the girls. This is an indication that the performance level of girls could not be a cause for their lower rate of participation in further schooling than that of their male counterparts in the same area. It also shows that girls could pursue any type and level of course as could their male counterparts.

3. The notion that girls do not so much need more education as do boy was found to be very prevalent in the rural areas of Brong Ahafo. It was discovered that this notion was shared by the parents and the girls alike (see Table 1 below).

given greater impetus by, especially, the fear of the risk of pregnancy leading to dropout and wastage of scarce resources.

That the girls themselves shared this negative conception about girls'

Table 1
Sex Preference for Further Schooling as Provided
by Girls Themselves and Parents

Preference	Parents (P)		Girls (G)		P & G Combined	
	No.	%	No	%	No	%
Male	75	71.4	51	68.0	126	70.0
Female	19	18.1	12	16.0	31	17.2
Equal for both	11	10.5	12	16.0	23	12.8
Total	105	100.0	75	100.0	180	100.0

Even though the respondents accepted that further education and for that matter schooling generally, is important for girls, they contended that boys need it the more. The reasons offered for this view held showed that there were no definite traditional beliefs or taboos that inhibited the further schooling of girls in the area of study.

The notion was rather a sheer frame of mind developed through socio-cultural conditioning which is

further education is quite revealing. Stereotyped patterns of socialization that differentiate between roles for the two sexes are very prevalent in such areas with these patterns inherited right from childhood in the homes and in the community. Rogers (1980) notes that in the socialization process, while boys are thought to be fit for places of responsibility, girls are considered to be dependent, their important role in life being marriage. Thus right from childhood, girls themselves

lose their self-motivation for upward mobility, thinking that such is the prerogative for males and not for them.

With costs borne by education users being generally higher at the secondary level than at the basic level, the limited economic

Table 2
Parents' Occupation as Given by Parents

Occupation	No.	%
Farming	93	88.6
Trading	4	3.8
Food Processing	1	1.0
Driving	1	1.0
Teaching	3	2.9
Not working	3	2.9
Total	105	100.0

Table 3
Type Of Farming Practised By Parents

Type	No.	%
Food crops for home consumption only	58	62.4
Food crops with surpluses for sale	20	21.5
Cash crops	15	16.1
Total	93	100.0

4. The study showed that the poor economic status of the parents adversely affected the participation of their daughters in further education. As revealed by tables 2 and 3, these parents were mainly subsistence farmers.
- resources of parents, against a backdrop of their negative traditional mentality about the female gender, make them give preference to boys rather than to girls where a choice has to be made.

5 Readily available economic opportunities for the self-employment of girls were found to be existent in the rural areas of Brong Ahafo. These are mainly traditional subsistence

of satisfying their financial needs. The exposure of the girls to these ventures at such early stages of their lives could stifle their desire for any further schooling. Though the

Table 4
Available Economic Attractions Open to Girls

Type of Activity	RESPONSES					
	Parents (P)		Girls (G)		P & G Combined	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	150	100	110	1000	260	1000
Farming	86	57.3	51	46.4	137	52.0
Trading	33	22.0	37	33.6	70	26.9
Dressmaking	13	8.7	8	7.3	21	8.1
Hairdressing	3	2.0	2	1.8	5	1.9
Teaching	2	1.3	6	5.5	8	3.1
Ward Assistance	1	0.7	1	0.9	2	0.8
Food processing	8	5.3	5	4.5	13	5.0
Uncertain	4	2.7	-	-	4	1.5

farming and petty trading which invariably require little or no educational background for engaging in (see Table 4). Due to the involvement of girls in these economic activities by their parents, the girls tend to develop the desire for them as readily available means

activities are "low-productivity" and "low-income" ventures (Oppong and Abu, 1981), because of the girls' early attraction to them they are seen as perhaps the only or easiest means of getting money without the need for any further schooling.

Table 5
Level of Schooling as Given by Girls Themselves and Parents

Level	Parents (P)		Girls G		P & G Combined	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No Schooling	61	58.1	108	72	169	66.3
P1 - P6	13	12.4	8	5.3	21	8.2
M1 - M4	26	24.7	25	16.7	51	20.0
Above M4	5	4.8	3	2.0	8	3.1
Not Aware	-	-	6	4.0	6	2.4
Total	105	100.0	150	100.0	255	100.0

6. The little educational background or the lack of it of the vast majority of parents in rural Brong Ahafo, tends to limit their perception concerning the importance of formal education generally (see Table 5 above). With their lack of any inner drive, they would not be able to easily perceive the need to sacrifice the necessary means towards the further schooling of their children especially the girls who are already placed at a disadvantaged position as a result of socio-cultural conditioning.

It is worthy to note that, while the factor that apparently bears the greatest sway resulting in

the low participation of girls in secondary education is the poor economic status of families, a much closer look reveals that the main underlying factor is the negative socio-cultural orientation concerning the status of a female in life. With an improvement in the economic circumstances of females, the effects of the various other factors that militate against the further schooling of girls are likely to be minimised to a considerable degree. However, a complete eradication of the problem may be achieved to the extent that the socio-cultural orientation of people concerning the place of a woman in society is redirected.

Suggested Remedial Measures

On the basis of the findings of this study and comments of other scholars on the subject, the following remedial measures are suggested for improving the participation of females in secondary education in rural Brong Ahafo.

1. An improvement in the economic circumstances of the rural folk is of paramount importance to enable parents, in addition to their other commitments, afford the secondary education of their children including the girls. Harbison (1973) points out that as one of the ways of improving the living levels of rural dwellers, there is the need for farmers in the subsistence sector to have access to technical help and credit to enable them work out their farm holdings more intensively. To this end, positive steps would need to be taken by the Ministry of Agriculture to ensure that agricultural extension services actually reach the subsistence and small-scale farmers in the rural communities with a view to exposing them to modern and appropriate farming techniques to improve their farm yields. Credit facilities are to be extended to these farmers so as to provide them with a capital base on which to expand and improve their farms. The credit institutions and the agricultural extension services department may

need to collaborate in directing the farmers as to how to put the credit to the most effective use including the proper maintenance of their farms in order that unnecessary losses are not incurred.

2. The change in the negative traditional conception about the status of females in society and the total recovery of the self-image of womanhood constitute a key issue that need to be addressed. To this end, concerted action should be consciously and vigorously pursued from various dimensions. District assemblies would be required to take the lead in organising regular campaigns within the various constituencies to arouse public awareness on the subject of the equality of the sexes and the avoidance of any form of discrimination and abuse against the female sex.

The District Assemblies need to collaborate with the Traditional Councils to create forums to educate chiefs, regents, queen mothers and elders of the towns and villages for their thorough understanding and acceptance of the issue of the equality of the sexes, and the achievement of their total support and involvement in the awareness creation processes within their various localities.

Women organisations such as the

- National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) and the 31st December Women's Movement would need to organise regular meetings with the queen mothers and the general women folk of the towns and villages to educate them on the equality they share with men and to stimulate a sense of self-confidence and self-motivation in them. Religious organisations are to be encouraged to give expression to the subject at their gatherings.
3. During the public education processes, emphasis would have to be placed on the importance of schooling generally, and further education in particular, and the equal opportunities available to both boys and girls to develop their full potentials at all levels of education in the country. The important role women could play with their developed potentials in community and national development programmes would have to be emphasised.
 4. Parents would have to be educated during the public forums on their need to take an active interest in the overall education of their girls, making the same amount of sacrifices on them as they would on their boys.
 5. There would be the need for an intensification of education against teenage pregnancy and the encouragement of girls to lead sound moral lives to protect their dignity by not cheapening themselves out to satisfy the unrestrained passion of some men. This would go a long way to allay the fear of dropout and wastage resulting from pregnancy that has often heightened parents' lack of desire to cater for their daughters in further schooling.
 6. In the schools, girls need to be encouraged to recognise themselves as possessing similar capabilities as their male counterparts, and to strive to compete on equal basis with boys in all subject and course areas, and at all the levels of education. They are to be encouraged to, as much as possible, depend on their own female colleagues for assistance in problems they encounter in their work rather than on their male counterparts.

Teachers would need to be urged to refrain from making any remarks or doing anything that would seem to portray girls as naturally low-achievers relative to boys.

There may be the need to organise occasional career sessions in the

schools where females would be encouraged to take to the more technical and scientific disciplines which have long been styled as masculine areas in order to ensure their equal chances as males in their future employment careers. In connection with this, artificial barriers in schools in which certain courses are sex labelled are to be discouraged so that as girls consider entering certain courses they would not be haunted by the fear that they are venturing into male "sacred" zones.

7. Female resource persons may also be invited to deliver lectures to pupils in the schools occasionally in order for their presence to motivate the girls for more schooling.
8. Finally, it is recommended that periodic excursions be organised in the basic schools in the rural areas for pupils to visit establishments and institutions in urban centres where women are found in various job positions, in order to broaden the horizons of the girls in the world of work.

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