In School, Out-of-school and Child Labour in Africa.

Local views in 4 countries.

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This workshop presentation is meant as a preliminary report, summarizing the results of four African country-studies during 2006 and 2007. The field research of 3 months each took place in 4 countries in Africa (in addition to 3 countries in Asia -Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh): in the western province of Nyanza and in the southern coastal region of Kenya (9 villages), in the Upper East and Upper West Ghana (4 villages), in the province of Namentenga in Central-North Burkina Faso (2 villages) and in the sparsely populated southern zone of Borana and in Eastern Hararghe, a chat growing area, in Ethiopia (6 villages). The choice of the regions was based on the extent of poverty and the deficiency in primary education enrolment (IREWOC 2007).

MDG2 and MDG3) are based on the assumption that education has benign effects, also in reducing poverty, but as Kielland and Tovo [2006:17]
have observed, “a formally educated population is often more beneficial to society as a whole than it is to many of the individual households within it”. The present study does therefore focus on the perceived returns, because these ideas play an important role in the “balancing act” that finally determines the education of the children. Whilst most economic models claim that sending a child to school is an investment for future family income, this does not seem to be applicable to the poorest families, who need to rely on all possible reserves and who may appreciate the outcomes of education differently.

Deprived children can commonly be considered as children who are living under circumstances of poverty or social segregation which excludes them from partaking in the institutions of modern childhood. Not attending school is one of the basic features of such deprivation, and is often associated with child labour. Child labour has often been isolated as the important reason for not sending children to school. It is obvious that a child who regularly attends school will usually not be a child labourer. On the other hand, a child who does not attend school may not even be working.

Recently, quite a lot of work has been done on education in developing countries and on defining the causal mechanisms. EFA remains a target to be achieved in 2015, but the UNESCO monitoring reports provide a mixed picture of failure and achievement. Various obstacles, of which child labour is one, interfere with the EFA target. It has not been easy to establish the causality between the obstacles and the non-enrolment or drop-out. The variables which have been included in the explanatory exercises may tend to overlook less tangible aspects, such as the decision making incongruence within the household, and tangible aspects such as innate talents of children. Also, although work and education are competing activities, what constitutes work which interferes with school may not do so in different contexts: the relative importance of work-related factors and school-related factors remain poorly understood, constituting
an obstacle to identifying forms of work most disruptive of schooling as well as to designing policies aimed at making schooling and (benign) work more compatible’ (Guarcello, Lyon and Rosati 2006, p. 9). The authors have further argued that evidence of the effects of school quality on school attendance and child labour is limited. It is a complex relationship with many linkages which cannot always be captured as measurable indicators (Guarcello, Lyon and Rosati 2006, pp. 16-7).

**General features**

Increasing access and at the same time maintaining or even improving quality of education is an immense challenge for any country, given the limited budgets for the education sector. The rapid expansion under MDG has put a strain on infrastructure and other resources, and may lead to a situation where more children are actually in school but are imparted with education of a declining quality. Investments in quality will only show their return in the mid- and long run.

The quality of education was measured by parents in terms of the acquired skills (literacy, numeracy), language skills and examination results. But quality was also measured by the following indicators: the student-teacher ratio, the instruction time the students received and the regularity with which teachers attend school. Amidst all the complaints about shortage of teachers, it is not just the physical absence of the teacher from the school compound, but also their inactivity: teachers frequently report to school in the morning, take a roll call in their first class, and then retreat to the teachers' room. The students are sometimes given assignments, but not always.

The perceived relevance and benefits of education are related to the quality as well as the highest level of education or job position that a child is likely to achieve. In the perception of parents and students themselves, the set of skills is seen as a basic prerogative to secure even the most basic job
(outside the village). Another frequently named benefit is that of “finding one’s way around” and to acquire knowledge of the modernizing world around them, which they feel holds their future.

But where the quality is low, parents become disillusioned with the potential benefits for their children. In all four African countries, numerous parents voiced their concern that children are wasting their time at school, not being able to learn useful skills and often idling in the classroom. In such cases, parents have pointed out that these children even haven’t learned to work in the fields and might become frustrated youth in the future, susceptible to bad habits and bad influence.

One of the major shortcomings in the eyes of many is the lack of practical skills with which those students who cannot continue to secondary education should have been equipped. Without emphasis on practical, marketable skills, primary school is supposed to lay an academic foundation for secondary education. When secondary schools appear to be out of reach or when jobs even after secondary schools are scarce, the motivation to actually finish primary school is likely to lessen.

From the interviews with parents, pupils, teachers and other stakeholders across the African countries emerged a picture of the perceived importance of education which is overwhelmingly focused on formal employment opportunities. While the intrinsic value of education is also mentioned, primary school is mainly viewed as a stepping stone to a future of employment opportunities. Formal employment, a ‘white collar job’ away from the village is seen as the main goal of education. Now there appears to be a paradox with regard to expectations: many families realize that employment opportunities are in sharp decline, but that education is ever more important, even for the most basic jobs and that without any education the future perspectives are extremely narrow. In the context of declining opportunities in agriculture, families see formal education – and
subsequent employment opportunities - as an important path or even the only path which can lead to a better future.

General poverty has often been mentioned as a basic impediment to educational growth in the area. However, research on education in Africa has also established that it is too simple to take direct and indirect costs as the sole reasons for non-enrolment. The importance given to education by very poor parents is likely to depend on the way they perceive, in a difficult balancing act, the impact on their daily or long-term subsistence (Peter Matz 2003; Kielland and Tovo 2006, p. 16). Many of the “benefits” specified by the officials to encourage enrolment were accurately reiterated by parents during interviews. Notwithstanding the low enrolment rate in a number of villages, it was commonly stated about officials from the Education Department that “they don’t need to come again, we know about the importance of education”.

What do the parents know of the benefits and the missed opportunities and how do they do the balancing act between child education and child labour? A quick tour of 4 countries will provide some answers.

Kenya

Kenya has a primary school net enrolment ratio of 76 % and 77 % for boys and girls respectively (UNICEF 2007). After a decline in enrolment in the 1990s, a consequence of ‘cost sharing’ for public services (user fees), enrolment is on the increase. While in 2002, 5.9 million children were enrolled in primary school (UNESCO 2006), that number was raised to 7.2 million during 2003 and reached 7.6 million in 2005.

In case primary education is not only made free but also compulsory, the feasibility of a control mechanism is an important factor. The mechanism worked in Kenya through the local chiefs’ office, at least in the rural settings with a tight social control and with a recent history of near universal primary enrolment. National statistics show clearly that enrolment is the lowest in
urban areas, due to several factors. Migration towards urban centers has led to the creation of large informal settlement where infrastructure is lacking, where social control is missing and where opportunities for child labour abound.

While the introduction of free primary education freed parents from the burden of school fees, there are still costs which have to be covered: parents have to buy school uniforms, pay examination fees and contribute to the school’s maintenance and infrastructure. Extreme poverty can make these costs a high burden to families; cash income is scarce in rural farming communities and fluctuates greatly throughout the year. In some locations, HIV/AIDS and other diseases already take a high toll on families, both financially as well as in terms of the responsibilities shouldered by children in the affected families. Children may have to stay at home to care for sick parents, or take over some of their tasks. Especially in single-parent households and households headed by grandparents, the work contribution by children can be significant. Orphans can hope to be cared for. In the first two research locations in western Kenya, 30-40% of the households were taking care of children other than the biological children. Thus, most orphans who still have members of the (extended) family can count on some basic support. The problem gets another dimension in the case were nobody in the community is willing or able to take an orphan in. As those children do not have any means to survive in the village, they may have to leave the village and seek survival elsewhere. When the parents die, adolescent children are sometimes chased away from the village so that others can take over the property.

Those children not enrolled, and those who have dropped out of school tend to leave their villages in search for work. Where children were found at home in the villages, they were mostly enrolled but not attending, due to ‘sickness’, ‘helping at home’ or being send home by teachers. These children formally are still in school but effectively have stopped to be pupils.
At home, they may possibly be engaged in some household job, but the causation for them to stay at home as related to ambivalent relationship with school.

None of the research locations offered commercial employment opportunities to children, and work done by children was to a large part limited to the child’s own household. The work load of child was not a major cause for non-enrolment, but it did have an influence on regular attendance and performance. The daily tasks assigned to children mainly included fetching of water, collecting firewood, tending to goats and cattle, cleaning and sweeping, food preparation, looking after younger siblings and guarding the house during the absence of parents. These tasks did not stand in the way of enrolment as such but led to irregular attendance. Especially on market days was there a noticeable lower attendance rate, as children either go to the market to accompany their mothers, or to perform small jobs, or they are needed to home while the parents are out. Girls are more affected than boys, as they take a higher proportion of the workload. This also affects performance, as girls are given less time to study and to prepare for examinations.

Traditionally, certain tasks used to be mainly carried out by children, such as herding cows and goats and some of these tasks have proved to be incompatible with schooling. The introduction of Free Primary Education coupled with compulsory education therefore did have a lasting impact on the division of work within the household. Many tasks previously assigned to children are now being carried out by adults within the family, by hired labour (in cases where families can afford it), or done by children outside their regular school hours.

According to many respondents, this reorganization of the workload within the household did pose challenges for families in the initial phase. Adults had to take over some of the tasks formerly assigned to children, something that was previously unheard of: grown-up woman and elderly
men can be seen tending to the goats and herding cattle. But nevertheless, children have to help outside their schooling hours. Children whose parents own livestock declare that they have to take them out for watering or grazing when they return from school and on weekends. Some children are also kept at home once or twice per week for these tasks, especially those whose parents have other duties away from the homestead, for example going to the market.

Children working full time tend to leave the villages altogether. As there are no employment opportunities in the villages, neither for adults nor for children, those seeking employment tend to migrate. But the practice of sending children to Mombasa in order to work as domestics, though still existent, is in decline. Over the recent years, the existing legislation and controls have been sharpened and parents lament that it is getting too difficult and risky to place their children in employment. Some parents have brought their children back or the employers have sent them back home.

Remarkably, children in some research locations spent a considerable amount of time working around the school compound. In general, education is supposed to be beneficial for the child, and the school a place where the development of the child stands central, but in many incidences it was observed that school children are required to work during the school hours. Teachers and administrators frequently justify this practice as being necessary to operate the school with limited funds. Tasks assigned at school include the following: maintaining school grounds and classrooms, working in the school garden, digging irrigation or drainage trenches, fetching firewood and water, and working in the fields of the teachers. While the practice is widespread, the scope and severity differs. Work activities are sometimes part of the curriculum, or are carried out for the benefit of the school. In other cases, extra work is assigned to the children by the teachers. This includes cooking for teachers, working in the teachers’ fields, and
bringing water and firewood in excess of what would be necessary for the normal operation of the school.

Ghana

Research was conducted in the Upper East Region (Garu-Tempane district), within one traditional chieftaincy (the villages Pialogo, Kugri and Vambara) and in the Upper West Region, in the remote village of Dupare in the Wa-East district. In Garu-Tempane, all but one of the households with children of school-going age had at least one child in school. Most typical were households that had some children in school (especially the younger ones) and one or two “in the house” or living elsewhere in Ghana. In Vambara, community members stressed that all children present in the community were – since recently – attending school and it was indeed difficult to identify children who were not. In Dupare, it was estimated that primary school enrolment was below 50%. Strong differences in terms of educational behaviour could be observed between families within the same compound. Even in the few households with literate heads or members, not all children were enrolled.

An increasing number of children in the research areas are going to school, but some groups of children remain difficult to reach; for example, girls and the Fulani. Cultural, financial or social factors can partly explain why children go to school or not. However, it has also become clear that some barriers are more likely to be overcome if parents and children clearly see the benefits in the completion of a formal education. If compulsory education is not being actively enforced, as is the case in the research areas, parents and children need to believe in the benefits of education before they will invest money and energy in it.

Education is primarily perceived as a way to achieve economic advancement. Many parents commented: “I don’t want the children to be suffering like me.” Children and parents dream of white-collar (Nasala) jobs....
that can be obtained after completing a formal education. Only a few respondents mentioned so-called “small jobs”, such as carpentry, voluntary teaching and vocational work, as a desirable outcome of formal education. Parents, except in the more fertile area of Dupare, had little confidence in farming as a satisfactory way of earning an income and favoured the idea of their children leaving the traditional way of life to make a living (and support them), than of them becoming better and more productive farmers. Thus, education is primarily seen as a means to an end, whereby the end is a Nasala job and the ability to support one’s family.

People also mentioned other gains to be expected of education. Firstly, they referred to the practical benefits of knowing how to read and write, especially for activities outside the village or contacts with the outside world (reading signboards, reading letters, speaking English with Ghanaians from other ethnic groups). This is influenced by a growing exposure to the literate world and it highlights the fact that in Ghana many languages exist and that the own linguistic area is rather small. In this way, literacy is associated by many with freedom and independence.

Virtually all parents confirmed that they had noticed changes in their school-going children compared to their out-of-school siblings. A mother commented that her non-school going children wanted to do little more than play and sleep, whilst those in school showed discipline and initiative. But the dilemma of choice remained as one mother explained: “Those going to school are wiser than those who farm. But it’s because of those farming that I am not starving!”

The Ghanaian government subsidizes primary education through the Capitation Grant, which aims to cut all fees for primary education. Nevertheless, “lack of money” was still the main reason given by parents for the fact that (some of) their children of primary school-going-age were not enrolled. Teachers and governmental officials seemed to show little
understanding for the poverty argument and insisted that this could only be a question of “wrong priorities”.

However, several household heads (mainly the poorest) insisted that the indirect financial costs were the main barrier to educating all their children. Costs mentioned included uniforms, exercise books and pens/pencils and sometimes, a table and chair to be able to work at home. Although uniforms are not compulsory, parents and children indicated that it is shameful not to wear one. A significant cost for parents is the PTA fee, which is levied to pay for volunteer teachers. Whilst the Capitation Grant aimed to cut all school fees, PTA fees increased. The governmental subsidy and its education campaign have increased enrolment figures, but they have not been met with a parallel increase in numbers of trained teachers, and especially in the remote areas PTA fees cover the costs needed to provide for additional teaching staff, in the form of volunteer teachers.

The most significant cost-related reason for non-enrolment concerns the costs related to senior secondary school. Senior secondary school does indeed bring with it much higher fees, and so, with that prospect, in combination with the fact that primary education alone is not given much credit, parents sometimes choose to not even inconvenience themselves with primary school in the first place (or they enrol only the number of children whom they believe they will be able to financially support all the way through to the completion of secondary education).

According to a national census [Ghana Statistical Service 2003], the number of working children in the Upper East Region represents a little over one in three (34%) of the total boy and girl population aged 7-14 years. The child labour survey furthermore indicates that the cost of education is indeed a major reason for non-enrolment and/or non-attendance and that 88% of these children would also prefer to go to school and complete their education. Unaffordability was, with 44.2%, the most cited reason for children in Ghana to have never attended school. In the Upper East Region,
the most economically deprived region of the country, the percentage was 63.7%.

However, it also appeared that the work which children had to do was not really the decisive factor for not attending school. Children and parents in the UER, particularly in the poorer households, stressed that non-attending children are “doing nothing” and are “just sitting in the house”. The amount of work in a household is largely determined by the number of cattle and size of cultivatable land a family owns. Those with little assets have little work to perform. The households that are slightly better-off, and that own a small number of cattle and some land, often need their children to help them. But many activities that children do perform were not considered work by the families. Parents stressed that girls’ household work, cattle herding, and even farm labour can all be performed after school and should not be a reason for non-attendance – although they did admit that sometimes, during particular seasons, children are taken out of school to help on the land. In reality it turned out that many of the boys out of school were cow herds.

An important obstacle to education is child labour migration, a common phenomenon in the area. In 2001, it was found that 15% of the child population had migrated out of the village without their parents and that 50% of the households had reported having a child living elsewhere [Hashim 2005]. We met several girls who had never been to school, who had missed several years of schooling or who had started at a very late age, because of their many years in the south working as domestic servants, on cocoa farms, or as child tenders (frequently with children of relatives).

In the UWR, a more fertile area, working on the land was frequently given as a reason for non-enrolment. In addition, the layout of the village and fields in Dupare make it more difficult to combine work and school, as fields can lie up to 10 km away, and thus much time goes into travel to and fro. Many girls had dropped out, due to the work responsibilities at home.
Indeed, whereas the gender ratio is relatively equal in the lower classes, there is an overrepresentation of boys in higher primary classes and beyond. Many mothers complained that men are disadvantaging their daughters: they are willing to sell a cow for their sons’ education, but not their daughters’; and they are eager to receive a bride price so that they can in turn see their sons married as well.

The (pastoralist) Fulani were strongly underrepresented in the schools and in one village they were not participating at all, despite their presence in the village. Although they had practically no children in school, they did show an interest in education. Apparently, they poorly integration in the village and thus not associated with the school system and their history of traditional lifestyle and cattle herding meant that they had no educated role models amongst them. A young Fulani woman said: “It’s because we never see any Fulani teachers or nurses. If someone will start sending, others will follow.”

**Burkina**

Burkina Faso was one of the seven countries selected for this worldwide study on “Deprived Children and Education”. Its adult literacy rates are among the lowest in the world: only 22% of people aged 15 and older can read and write (this is just above the lowest scoring country Mali). The percentage of women who can read and write constitutes a meager 52% of the male literate population [UNDP 2006].

Net enrolment rates are low, even compared to African averages. In 2006, only 47% of children of primary school age were enrolled in school, with even lower rates in many rural areas [MEBA BF 2006]. These low primary enrolment figures can partially be explained by the lack of schools, especially in remote rural areas. Addressing infrastructural and personal shortages, as the government and NGOs are currently doing, is indeed vital for realizing the right to education for Burkinabe children. However, the
reality in Burkina Faso also shows that even in areas where schools and teachers are present, many children are not enrolled in school or stop attending before they have completed primary school. This study on perceptions of and barriers to education on a local level helps to understand why this situation persists.

Research was conducted in two villages in Namentenga, northeast Burkina, in December 2006 and January 2007. This province was selected because in 2006 it had a net primary enrolment of only 34%. The most recent figures show that performance in primary school exams of pupils in the district is low compared to the other departments in the province, with only 56% of pupils obtaining the primary school certificate. In 2006, only 12% of primary school leavers were considered at the level to continue onto secondary school (entrée en sixième).

In policy literature on Burkina Faso, as well as in informal conversations with local people and government officials, “poverty” and “ignorance” were brought up as main explanations for low enrolment figures. Ignorance, in this context, seems to refer to a lack of awareness of the benefits of education. High incidence of household poverty is believed to result in an inability or reluctance to bear the direct, indirect and opportunity costs of education. Child labour is mentioned infrequently as a reason, which is surprising as Burkina Faso has one of the highest percentages of working children in the world.

Traditional culture and antagonistic feelings towards modernisation (western influences) play an important role in the education debate in Burkina. The country has been characterized as a place where tradition and custom are deep-rooted. However, the study indicated that parents seemed to be aware of the importance of modern education for their children and that ignorance is not the reason for non-enrolment. The widespread awareness is further backed up by the observation that many households without any of their children in school at the time of the study,
had sent a child to school in the past. These cases suggest that the belief, “they do not know that school can help them”, might be a simplified explanation for the low enrolment in the area. Negative experiences with the returns on education are more likely to play a role.

Parents and children saw attaining a white collar, formal job as the main reason to attend school. Success stories were a motivation, but people’s own observations told them that few children were actually successful (even after completing secondary school). Although most also acknowledged the intrinsic value to education (literacy and numeracy), this could not compensate the investments made (indirect, direct and opportunity costs). Only about 5% of Burkinabe people work in wage-paid jobs, which is well below the percentage of people with a formal education [UNDP 2006]. Also, in Burkina, finding formal work usually requires at least a secondary education, which is only attained by a small minority of rural Burkinabe [Kazianga 2004].

The popular discourse on education among the largely illiterate research population distinguished between “those who fail” (also called students who have returned to the village, “karambi vaala”) and “those who succeed”. The local criteria to measure success evidently differ from those used in international objectives such as the Millennium Goals, which focus on the completion of Primary School. Benefits attributed, by respondents, to the completion of only primary school were minimal. People, who have completed primary school, or even Junior Secondary School, are still locally regarded as “failures”. Because little value is attributed to completing only primary school, assumed and real barriers at the secondary level have a negative consequence on the enrolment in primary school. The belief that people with some schooling will be less motivated to work on the family farm makes sending a child to school extra risky, especially because prospects of “succeeding” are uncertain. A number of elders said about
their co-villagers, who had not found formal employment: “They are at the middle, they don’t do the books and they don’t farm.”

The gender-based differences start coming to light when considering obstacles for girls at secondary level. Little investment is made in the primary education of girls, since so few girls succeed in secondary schooling.

Children are, as they grow older, increasingly play a role in their own attendance and continued enrolment. Most drop-outs mentioned the oppressive school environments (punishments, bullying etc), and distracting alternatives (such as playing with friends in the bush) as their own reason for dropping-out. When children grow up, parental control diminishes, especially if the parents themselves are illiterates, and continued enrolment thus greatly relies on the child’s own desire for education.

Primary school comes with barely any direct costs in Burkina Faso. There are no tuition fees and no uniform requirements. In the research villages, writing utensils are supplied by the NGO Plan. The only fee demanded from parents is the PTA fee, which is mainly used for school maintenance and teachers’ travel costs. Secondary schooling, however, is expensive. The data show that the expected high costs of secondary school make people hesitant to send one, let alone several, of their children to primary school. This is due to the low value attributed to obtaining only a primary education. The willingness to enroll a child, and pay the costs, hence appears to depend largely on expected returns, rather than on a social norm.

From data collected during the fieldwork, it turns out the poverty argument is often used by parents, and probably for good reasons, but it may also be an easy argument to resort to and thus may even be used by families that by local standards are not poor at all. It appeared that, in those families with no children in school, other factors are at play as well, such as child work, lack of confidence in the returns on education and plans to marry-off a daughter.
Burkina Faso has a high incidence of children performing economic and domestic activities. It has been estimated that 65% of children between 7 and 14 are engaged in economic activities, compared to an African average of 32% (ILO-SIMPOC 2002). Work is done on family farms, in the household or, in some cases, in a small family business. The few children working in a business (such as shops or as bicycle mechanics) work in unpaid jobs for their fathers or uncles.

Those children who work as paid labourers usually (temporarily) leave their home village. In the research villages, this concerned mainly boys aged 11 and older who traveled to other parts of Burkina to work in agriculture. The decision to leave is mostly made by children themselves, rather than by parents. In a study in a neighbouring area, it turned out that children sometimes return to school after their migration and that their temporary migration does not necessarily mean an end to their education [de Lange 2006]. It is not always clear if labour migration plans cause drop-out on the primary level, but in some cases it was observed to have clearly prevented them from completing their secondary education.

After about the age of six, girls’ responsibilities in the household gradually increase. They sweep the yard, fetch buckets of water from the communal tap, well, pump or lake and do the dishes and laundry. They pound grains with large wooden pestles in stone mortars, and assist their mothers with cooking. They collect firewood in the bush, and, in the rainy season, women and girls also gather sheanuts (noix de karite). Time records collected from girls living in several compounds, however, show that they are not overloaded with work, and there are many girls to share the work with. However, due to inferior resources, distant wells and pumps, and lack of electricity, their chores are extremely time-consuming, and thus an obstacle to their education. We also encountered a considerable number of girls who had worked in households elsewhere. Yet in contrast to the labour migration observed among boys, this normally concerned family
arranged placements, rather than paid labour. None of these girls attended school.

Boys and girls are expected and needed to work on the family fields, which produce food for family consumption. Teaching farming skills is seen as the responsibility of the family, rather than of the school. Farming work, however, was barely mentioned as an obstacle to school - children perform the tasks in their free time, and schools mostly accommodate the demand for extra hands during harvest season. That also applies to herding. Only among the Fulani, who consider herding a valuable and respectable way of life, is it considered a reason for children not go to school. Actually, in one of the study villages in Burkina, only one Fulani child was attending school.

In the research villages in Burkina, many households had no children in school; very few had all children in school, but even the poorest and the most remote households were aware of the benefits of education. In general, as stated, the farm work performed by children is done in their free time, and is a positive part of their overall development; it does not prove to be an obstacle to their education (with the exception of cow herding). However, the tradition for girls to move in with relatives to perform household chores is a direct obstacle to their education.

Ethiopia

The current net enrolment rate Ethiopia stands at 57%, and the overall situation in the education sector is characterized by a large rural-urban disparity, as well as a serious gender gap. According to the 2001 Child Labour Force Survey, one in seven children gave the lack of a school in the area as the reason for non-enrolment. Lack of schools in remote rural areas and overall poor infrastructure make access an important obstacle on the way to achieve UPE.

The research in Ethiopia focused on areas where schools are available, but where enrolment and/or attendance remain low. Three locations in two
zones were selected, two in the southern zone of Borana, a sparsely populated (semi-) pastoralist area bordering Kenya, and one location in the Eastern Hararghe, a chat growing area close to the border with Somaliland. Common to these locations was the rural context, dominated by a subsistence economy and small-scale trade, a lack of general infrastructure, as well as deeply-rooted traditions which dominate many aspects of daily life. Overall school enrolment in the research areas was very low, between 10% and 30%. This was the result of a combination of factors, some stemming from the communities and the families, others related to the school itself. Poverty, the high demand for child work from the families and strong traditions formed major obstacles.

Only a small proportion of families opted to educate their children. Besides various other obstacles, the perceived (lack of) quality and relevance of education played an important role. Sending a child to school means to defy convention and tradition; it is therefore a conscious decision which is related to certain expectations of what education can provide. It is therefore rather a question of why a child should be sent to school rather than why it should remain with the family at home. Staying at home, even if the child is not required for labour, is a normal thing to do.

Of those parents sending one or more of their children to school, the overwhelming majority see education as a potential path leading to employment in the formal sector. A family member with a paid job means a secure income benefiting the whole family. Such a future as become increasingly important due to the decimation of livestock, regular droughts and increasing population pressure on limited resources. But one of the problems with basic education/ primary education in rural areas is that the last grade at the village school is often the termination grade as well. Grade 10 in the eyes of many parents is considered as the minimum level of education that can pave the way for formal employment.
In the absence of opportunities for further education and training and the resulting lack of employment prospects, traditional values appear to weight far stronger than the perceived benefits of education. The benefits are only theoretical and the decision to stick to the old ways then appears as a rational decision. Awareness campaigns on education focus on the economic benefits of education, and this is generally reflected in the expectation which students and parents voice. The problem is that those benefits often do not materialize, at least not in the short term or in the expected manner, which easily leads to frustration, disillusionment, and consequently non-enrolment or drop-out.

Most of the school-going children in the research areas were first generation learners and their parents did not always have a clear idea about what their children were exactly supposed to be learning at school. When parents raise questions about the quality, they are not so much related to the curriculum or the teaching methods, but rather to the visible outcome such as the ability to read and write, to go for further education and training and/or to subsequently find employment. Another major indicator named by respondents for the quality of education was the discipline of the teachers. The low motivation and morale of the teaching force which manifests itself in frequent absence, coming late and leaving early as well as ‘passing time’ at school, is a very worrying trend.

Many of them had become teachers because they didn’t have any other training or employment option, and the teaching profession thus became a last resort. At the same time, lack of supervision at all levels enable teachers to get away with serious neglect of their duties. As the headmaster is often no exception, control mechanisms within the school are not functional. School inspection by independent officers does not take place, at least not in a structural way.

This low motivation and morale has severe consequences for the quality of education, a fact that is not lost on parents, whether they are
educated themselves or not. Especially when families have to bring sacrifices in order to send a child to school, this failure to deliver a minimum standard of education can easily tip the balance and lead parents to the conclusion that education is not worthwhile. The commitment to educate the child ultimately ends in frustration. Since education has not yet been accepted as a social norm, the work avoidance by teachers has far-reaching consequences.

Obstacles formed by factors from within the communities and families concentrated around three major issues, namely that of poverty, tradition (including traditional gender roles) and the high demand for child work within the household. The traditional economy, including the traditional division of labour, has a strong influence on school enrolment and attendance. The (semi-) pastoralist lifestyle in Borana results in a high demand of child work within the families. Children play a central role in herding the livestock (cattle, goats, sheep and camels), working on the family plots, fetching water and firewood, assisting with other household tasks and minding younger siblings.

The ways in which these tasks are organized and assigned form a major obstacle to school enrolment and regular attendance. Herding for example is time intensive and rather incompatible with regular school attendance. Especially during the dry season, the animals have to be taken out seven days a week and for long hours. Herding only in the afternoon, after schooling hours, would not provide the animals with sufficient fodder. But more than the actual work load as such, it is rather the strict division of work according to age and gender which poses the bigger challenge. Herding (especially of smaller livestock such as goats and sheep) is a task assigned to children and (young) adults will refuse to take over these tasks. Only in large families where these tasks can be taken over by other siblings do parents see the possibility to send some of their children to school. This is also part of the reason why children are often enrolled late: they have to wait until a
younger sibling is old enough to take over their work. It is also the reason why not a single family sent all children to school. The enrolment of one child depends on whether the respective work tasks can be taken over by another member of the household, usually a sibling.

A re-organization of the workload would free children of their work burden. Such re-allocation of work is possible in theory but very difficult to achieve in the short term. It is hampered both by limited resources and deeply-rooted traditions. Changes occur where the traditional modes of livelihood are under threat, as exemplified by the sharp increase in enrolment at a school in Borana after a severe drought had led to an extreme decimation of livestock, freeing children from their herding responsibilities.

Around Gursum, with predominantly small-scale agriculture, where the demand for child work was less and enrolment and attendance were higher. Many boys were found idling in the villages instead of either working or going to school. Girls on the other hand were often required to remain home and help rather than going to school. Girls assist their mothers at home and run errands for male members of the family. Girls and young women also sell chat either on the local market or along the road to traders, an activity which is incompatible with regular school attendance. Also here, the traditional division of labor is as least as decisive as the work load itself.

Apart from the higher work load of females, general notions of gender roles often prevent girls from pursuing their education once they reach puberty. Early marriages are still very widespread, even more in East Hararghe than in Borana, and many families fear that education might ‘spoil’ their daughters and lessen their chances of a ‘good match’. Girls are often married when they are as young as 12-15 years old, and even though the practice is officially discouraged it is still very widespread. An early marriage is said to be desirable as young brides are especially sought by bridegrooms and ‘more easily to be formed’ for their traditional roles. An
An educated girl or young woman is already defying her traditional role by attending school and socializing with boys. Sending a daughter to school easily exposes a family to criticism and gossip, and successful role models for girls’ education become very important. The decision by the government to employ an increasing number of female teachers has helped to encourage girls’ enrolment, but especially in the higher grades, a large gender gap remains.

As child work forms a major obstacle to school enrolment and the main demand for child work stems from within the family, those families with relatively more assets, more land and more livestock do also have more reason to keep their children out of school. This was observed to be more pronounced in pastoralist Borana than in Gursum.

Hardly any of the families felt the need to send all their children to school. While many families did not send any child, others send some of their children, as long as other siblings stayed at home to take over the tasks. A re-organization of the work load, assigning typical children’s tasks to adults as well as pooling resources of several families together, is practically possible but challenges deeply rooted norms and practices.

Poverty is an obstacle most often invoked by parents as being the major obstacle to education. Even though the fees are small, they can still be substantial for very poor families. In a subsistence economy, the ability to absorb economic shocks such as a harvest failure and loss of livestock is very limited. Cash income is very scarce and any extra investment which fails to bring short-term returns already forms a major obstacle. Having to buy pens, exercise books, clothes and shoes for school-going children can effectively prevent parents from sending their children to school. Another obstacles related to poverty is migration. In Borana, families do not have any alternative source of income and in the case of drought or failed harvests they have to migrate with their livestock. This of course impedes enrolment or regular school attendance.
Conclusions

Since this paper is still in progress, conclusions can be formulated somewhat more brazenly, overstressing some of the findings for the sake of argument.

By and large, parents are convinced of the importance of schooling and non-enrolment of the child cannot be attributed to ignorance, the failure to see the benefits of education or a fear of alienation from traditional culture. People certainly recognise the benefits, but most do not consider it a priority to send all of their children to school (or to enforce their attendance). Although education is a preferable aspect of childhood, across the cultural diversities, it indeed competes with other aspects. The final outcome, which is not always a concrete decision, may lead to dropping-out or non-enrolment. That option speaks of ambivalence in the decision making process.

Generally, education was considered as the best possible avenue for children since it was recognized that traditional employment in agriculture and in crafts will not provide sufficient employment and that, in the changing world, the child shall need certain skills, like reading, writing, and calculating, which are also needed to find one's way around in society.

The expansion of primary education indicates that childhood education is emerging as a social norm. Yet, the norm remains ambivalent and the automatic acceptance of education as associated with childhood remains disturbed by institutional factors and by individual livelihood.

The institutional factors that inhibit universal enrolment and attendance are:
- the malfunctioning of the schools, particularly the regular ‘drop-out’ by teachers and their disinterest in teaching while at school,
- class instruction is minimal and leaves most of the learning to be done in after-school hours in private tuition arrangements.
the wide schism between the school and the vast masses of illiterate parents who are not involved in school life, and who do not have an inkling about what is going on in and around school,

the prevailing hierarchy which leaves the teachers insensitive to critique of their functioning,

the rupture between elementary school and secondary school and the colonial legacy in the curriculum, which leads to the notion that children are only educated for white collar jobs.

Thus, a major obstacle and challenge with regard to the provision of education to all children is the quality. Irregularities such as internal corruption and non-teaching by the staff have been found to different degrees, and together, they form serious obstacles to the right to education. These irregularities create mutual misunderstanding between the stakeholders and take place within an established net of power relations, institutional and personal arrangements, which makes it very difficult to address these problems.

While these factors relate to the school as an institution, there are, on the other hand, individual circumstances play a specific role. Poverty and the need to have helping hands or working hands, if already frustrated about the functioning of the schools, may lead to truancy, dropping-out, or non-enrolment for some or for all of the children in the household. The following factors which affect families differently, depending on their economic position, have been singled out in most of the regions:

- indirect costs for exam and PTA fees, stationary, uniforms and pocket money,
- the incapability to pay for extra tuition classes which are necessary to compensate for the low quality of the schools,
• the necessity for some children, especially in families with an ill or absent family member, to earn money or to go in employment elsewhere so that she/he is not a burden on the family budget,
• the need for children’s contributions to household- and farm work, especially by slightly better-off families, which have more cultivatable land and animals.
• ethnic minorities are inhibited not so much by their desire to maintain traditional ways of life, but by a lack of role models in their own ethnic group and their (physical and social) position in the villages.
• the need for growing-up girls to contribute to the household and to be protected from bad influences before getting married at a young age.

In this context of poor quality education and poor formal job prospects, sending a child to school means taking certain risks and bearing both direct- and opportunity costs. The prospect of costs at the secondary level can also decrease primary enrolment, because little value is attributed to only primary school. Opportunity costs- in the context of (girl) child education - do not only refer to the loss of income or food production, but also to the potential loss of reclining to the old ways of life if the attempt at a school-driven career fails.

In many cases, these obstacles can be overcome by changing certain traditions, but people need to have good reasons for this. As long as people see the attainment of a white-collar job as the only significant outcome of a formal education, and as long as these jobs remain scarce, a change in perspective and action is unlikely to happen on a larger scale. As long as education continues to bring with it additional costs, and as long as the other obstacles persist, ambivalence in decision making will prevail.
Resources


IREWOC (2007) Education in Rural Areas. Obstacles and Relevance. Main findings from seven country studies. Amsterdam: IREWOC


