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International Development Studies/Masters thesis

4/19/2010



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION: the impact of food security on primary schooling in Dogbo, Benin.

# Acknowledgements

My research in Benin was an initially tough but overall incredible experience and could not have been the enlightening adventure that it was without the help and support of many people and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them.

To the people of Dogbo who truly enabled my research – the households, the children and the teachers – my deepest thanks for being so open and willing and to share your lives with me. In particular thank you to the community volunteers Alphonse Sossoukpoui, Simplice Kpoto and Mathias Dodo who helped me so much with my survey and especially warm thanks to Raymonde Kakpovi and Valentin Gboda who acted as my translators, you were so kind and welcoming to me and I sincerely appreciate your support with my work and your friendship more generally.

Crucially, I would also like to thank Plan Benin for being willing to host me in their organisation and allowing me to carry out my research with them. Particular thanks to Abibou Mamadou, Research and Evaluation Coordinator, for guiding me though my research, and also to the rest of the office in Cotonou. Thanks must go as well to the whole team in Azové who welcomed me so warmly and made my stay there so happy. Omer Hounnongbo and Sinatou Ganiou: a special thank you for being patient, for being so friendly towards me and for helping me with all the practicalities of life in Azové. A particular warm and personal thank you to Amélie Soukossi, Program Unit Manager in Couffo, who was so generous throughout my stay and made me feel so at home in Benin.

My thanks also go to my thesis supervisor Annelies Zoomers who was able to give me support even across so many miles! Thank you also to Ali de Jong and Paul van Lindert whose support and advice I have also valued.

Lastly, thanks as always to my mum in England who is always there for me so whole-heartedly in everything that I do – it wouldn’t be possible without her!

I am so grateful to have had the chance to spend time in such a beautiful and fascinating country.

# Executive summary

Sub-Saharan Africa has long been one of the world’s most poverty-stricken areas and despite massive flows of aid into the region the situation remains dire for the majority of the many millions of people living there.

Education is considered one vital way to break the cycle of poverty. Under the human capital approach education is seen as a “primarily an economic device” (Fitzsimons, 1999); education allows the accumulation of human capital and in this way makes individuals economically productive agents who are able to benefit the economic system within a country as a whole and hence enable development. However, education also goes further, not only does it allow expansion of human capital but it also enables an individual to expand their capabilities (Sen, 1999) so that they may be more able to explore their personal development. Capabilities expansion can be considered important irrespective to the role that an individual can play in an economy; an individual’s life can be improved by increasing personal freedoms in the form of capabilities. Primary education is a building block in capability accumulation. Some of the educational capabilities that come from basic education include reading, writing, communicating, problem solving etc – essential skills that will enable children to function, and build up more capabilities throughout their lives.

Addressing food security is also seen as an important way of helping people to alleviate their own poverty. Food insecurity can cause people to have poor diet and consequently be more susceptible to diseases and it can also cause stress as people struggle to find enough to eat from day to day making them desperate and meaning that less time is spent on other beneficial activities. Food security enables people to be healthier and therefore more productive and more able to improve their own lives rather than suffering the ill effects associated with hunger.

In the past decades both education and food security have gone through theoretical changes keeping up with development theories as a whole which have moved from the large scale theories such as modernisation during the 1950s and 1960s, which was concerned with moving developed countries from traditional societies to industrialised, ‘modern’ countries based on experiences from the western world, to the small scale, individual level where the poor themselves have been encouraged to be seen as agents of their own change. Ways to improve individual well-being and how to make livelihoods more secure have become the basis of study and as a result, both education and food security are very relevant as they enable a true focus on the individual and the improvements of both situations can allow an individual to move themselves out of poverty. The interrelations between the two topics have been expanded upon by some with the suggestion that increased food security at the household level will lead to increased enrolment rates at school and also better performance and also the reverse relationship, that improved education levels will enable individuals to have a better knowledge of how to help themselves to achieve and maintain food security. Although some of these links are debated (Behrman, 1996) what is certainly true is that both education and food security are included within household livelihood strategies and the presence of both is crucial for children to be assured a bright future.

However, although the theoretical importance can be clearly understood the reality of achieving that potential is problematic. Numerous barriers exist to providing access to basic education for all and furthermore there are many issues that prevent a quality primary education being offered to children in developing countries, particularly in rural areas. These problems are numerous and are evident on the demand side: household poverty levels for example may cause poor households to be unable to send their children to school as they need to have the children at home to help with supplying an income or with household chores. Gender issues can make parents unwilling to send their girls to school for numerous reasons. Supply side issues also exist however: lack of fully trained teachers in some areas mean that education provided is of poor quality and children therefore do not get the benefits hoped for or expand their capabilities as imagined. The list of problems to be tackled is long and the issues are interrelated and complex.

Food security is a particularly relevant issue at present due to the recent experience of high food prices and the worldwide economic crisis – both of these events have pushed more people than ever into food insecurity leaving record numbers of people hungry worldwide (FAO, 2008). As with education, the issues to be considered in order to solve the problems of food security are numerous – for example, old-fashioned farming techniques prevent many farmers becoming as productive as they could be and the global markets leave access to certain goods impossible for many in developing countries.

The importance of addressing education and food security and the problems that exist mean that both topics are high on the world development agenda; achievement of universal of primary education and the elimination of hunger both figure prominently in the Millennium Development Goals. In addition, numerous world conferences over recent years have discussed ways to tackle the issues surrounding both education provision and food security.

Benin demonstrates low indicators for many categories including literacy rates and enrolment rates. In 2006 the Beninese government introduced free primary school education and has since then put an increased emphasis on improving education but as in so many developing countries many of the issues still remain.

Furthermore, Benin’s economy is particularly underdeveloped leaving it a very poor country struggling to find a place in the world economy. Although agriculture is the main economic activity problems of self-sufficiency remain – throughout the country there is a current focus on improving the technology of farming methods in order to make farmers more productive in a bid to tackle food security issues.

The study area is located in a pocket of Benin that suffers especially badly from the problems the country experiences as a whole making it an apt place for study as solutions and improvements are desperately needed.

Although there are many primary schools in the area school conditions are low. Infrastructure within schools is poor with limited classroom space and many of the basic amenities are lacking – latrines are in short supply and many schools do not have drinking water on site. Furthermore, the quality of the education provided is also flawed in many cases – teacher numbers are limited and the shortfall is often made up by the recruitment of community volunteers which can seriously lower the standard of education provided as these volunteers receive no official training and often have not even passed primary school finishing exams.

There is an extremely high number of very poor households in the study area. These households are large but have very limited space and facilities and amongst parents education levels are low. In addition, most parents have only very basic forms of employment and consequently obviously very low income; the majority of people work in agriculture reflecting the country’s main economic activity.

Despite these obstacles enrolment rates are relatively high suggesting a change in attitude of parents in the area towards education which could, in part, be attributed to the campaign by government and NGOs to promote the importance of a primary school education. Nevertheless, problems do still exist and although attendance rates were better than expected and retake and dropouts were relatively low they still pose big struggles to achieving quality education for all primary school children.

Particular problems encountered concerned teacher numbers and quality – community volunteers were present in every school. Language was also a key concern – few parents spoke French but children must learn their lessons at school in French and this was clearly difficult for many children indicating that they will be unable to reap the maximum benefits of the education that is on offer. At the household level gender roles were particularly significant; although there seemed to be a recognition of the importance of enrolment girls were required to spend more out of school time on household tasks than boys disabling them from spending any extra time on school work which is particularly significant during exam periods and can lead to negative effects on success rates which then have a knock on effect on retake rates and in some cases dropout rates. These problems limit children’s accumulation of the basic capabilities that they should expect to receive from primary school education.

Food security was an issue for the majority of children; although its direct effects were more limited than expected the indirect effects were numerous. Food insecure children in school are often unable to concentrate effectively leading lack of motivation that can trigger dropout for example. Furthermore attendance rates are affected when children do not return to school after lunch having found little or nothing to eat at home. School canteens were considered to be an overriding solution to the problem of food security but evidence of successful canteens was not observed.

Overall, although some of the barriers concerning primary school education are being broken down food security remains a real concern. Moreover, a lack of opportunities for children after primary school leave parents with little ambition for their children and determined hopes of many children will not be realised if the situation does not change. The capabilities learnt at primary school will mean little if they cannot be further expanded at higher levels.

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# Acronyms:

CEP: Certifcat d’Etude Primaire (Certificate of Primary School Study).

Couffo/Kouffo

ECVR : Enquête sur les Conditions de Vie des ménages en milieu Rural (Survey of living conditions of rural households).

EPP: Ecole Primaire Publique (Public Primary School)

FNSP : Food and Nutrition Security Program.

INRAB : Institut National des Recherches Agricoles du Benin (National Institute of Agricultural Research in Benin).

INSAE: Institut National de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Economique (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis).

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

RGPH3: 3ème Recensement Général de la Population et de l'habitation (3rd General Census of Population and Housing).

SCRP : Stratégie de croissance pour la réduction de la pauvreté (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper)

SSA : Sub-Saharan Africa.

UPE : Universal Primary Education.

# Chapter 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Rationale of the study

Sub-Saharan Africa is the world’s poorest region and therefore studies into the countries which comprise it are very important in order to try and understand the dilemmas that are keeping these countries so poor. A study into primary education is particularly relevant: primary school age children “constitute a large and growing share of the population in SSA” (Velkoff and Kowal, 2007). Children of primary school age are young and malleable and willing to learn, it is an ideal time to start with education as the older a child is the harder it becomes for them to master basic skills (Hunt, 2008). Improving levels of primary education can help a country’s development by improving its economic situation overall through increased human capital (Saito, 2003; Becker, 2002; chapter 2.1) and it certainly gives greater life possibilities to the individuals who receive that education by expanding their capabilities (chapter 2.1). Therefore, support for basic education is justified not only by humanitarian concerns for individuals themselves but also by the economic and social benefits it brings to the country as a whole.

There has long been an emphasis worldwide on improving primary education and this has, in some countries, led to positive changes to some extent. However, “High levels of enrolment can mask erratic attendance, irrelevant curricula, poorly trained teachers, gender insensitivity and lack of facilities that often combine to result in low completion levels” (Bowden, 2002: 406 in Desai and Potter). It is for this reason that the “impressive global progress” (Mertaugh et al., 2009: vii) that has been made in education coverage has sometimes been interpreted to mean that further investments in education are no longer a priority, however, “this impression is false” (Mertaugh et al., 2009: vii), huge flaws remain in primary education systems across the globe, not least in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Benin is one of SSA’s poorest countries; literacy rates are low, access to, and quality of, primary education are poor and despite the efforts of the government and (I)NGOs to make progress, enrolment rates still remain inadequate, particularly amongst girls, and school failure and dropout rates “keep increasing” (Plan Benin, 2008: 7). It is clear therefore that numerous problems face the education system in Benin and establishing “which constraints are most important” to a child’s primary school education is a question that has “provoked much research” (Glewwe and Jacoby, 1995: 157) but as so many issues clearly still remain continued research and understanding is vital. It is evident that there are no simple solutions to the problems of low education enrolment and attendance; the problems are complex as they are interrelated and influenced by so many factors both on the micro-scale within households but also on the more macro-scale in terms of national government for example, and upwards to international donors. Furthermore, the situation in each individual country, and within each area of a country, is unique and consequently universal solutions are impossible to formulate – different situations must be studied and assessed independently if effective changes are to be made.

Food is a fundamental necessity. Food security is a worldwide issue as a lack of food security can cause hunger which reduces the human body’s natural defences against most diseases and as a result of this it can make those suffering from food insecurity much more likely to contract illnesses. Furthermore, for those unsure of the source of their next meal the negative effects on their well-being overall is clearly detrimental. Many millions of people are in this situation and it is partly as a result of this that food insecurity is a major constraint to a country’s immediate and long term economic, social and political development (POST, 2006). Despite numerous promises from the global community over recent decades to improve the situation the world has only made modest progress in increasing food security (Pinstrup-Anderson and Herforth, 2008) and world hunger is continuing to increase (FAO, 2008).

Factors such as war and natural disasters can negatively affect the food security situation in a country whilst global problems, such as the recent food and financial crisis for example, can have effects on the food security of countries across the world and impact each to differing degrees. In addition to suffering from the negative effects of these recent global crises Benin also endures the problems triggered by inappropriate farming methods, lack of farming land and difficult access to credit facilities which serve to keep many Beninese too poor to ensure the satisfactory intake of food or to meet other basic rights for children and families (Plan Benin, 2008: vii). These factors combine to leave many households across Benin in a dangerously precarious food security situation.

Consequently, it may be said that lack of education and food security “are two of the most dramatic deprivations developing countries are currently experiencing” (Burchi and De Muro, 2009); with this in mind a study into the relationship between the two factors is clearly interesting and relevant when considering the development path of a particular country.

With food security also standing as a significant challenge across Benin it is extremely likely that it has a major knock-on effect on education and indeed that it is one of the factors that impacts negatively on rates of primary school education, indeed, a strong correlation is recognised between poverty, hunger and education (Burchi and De Muro, 2009). Children are one of the groups at highest risk of suffering from food insecurity (FAO, 2008) and consequently it is likely that if a child is not receiving enough food to be food secure then this will influence all areas of their lives including schooling, both directly and indirectly.

Some argue (Jyoti et al., 2005) for example that food security has a negative effect on children’s performance rates in primary school demonstrating the belief that an undernourished child will be unable to perform as well as a child that is well nourished. This argument is difficult to substantiate however as so many other aspects affect a child’s school performance and it is difficult to control for them all (Behrman, 1996; Alderman et al., 1997). As a result, the effects of food security on primary school performance rates will not be directly considered in this research. Instead the study will focus on the effects of the concept on primary school enrolment, attendance, drop out and retake rates. Here the arguments in favour of the relationship are more concrete: as food insecure areas tend to have low enrolment rates there is clearly the suggestion of a relationship between the two. Food insecurity can cause low enrolment and attendance rates as hungry children are often less inclined to go to school (Jamison, 1986). Furthermore food insecure households may require that children remain at home to help to find food or work to raise the family income to buy food (Ahmed and Del Ninno, 2002; Hunt, 2008) forcing them to take absences from school; these absences can often negatively affect both drop out and retake rates.

## 1.2. Research objective

A clear picture of the problems that cause the poor education levels in Benin, and the issues that provoke these problems, is crucial if the situation is to be resolved. Understanding the extent to which food security, amongst other factors, influences schooling can generate a better comprehension of the barriers to primary education and potentially produce recommendations for solutions enabling higher numbers of children to enrol, and stay, in school thereby offering them a brighter future. In order to better understand these issues this study will look at barriers at the household and school level, recognised in literature on this subject, and try to establish what effects they are actually having on primary schooling rates in the research area.

Establishing the quality of the education provided in the research area will serve as a backdrop to help put this research into context. It is necessary to take into account considerations such as teacher quality and classroom facilities in order to understand the conditions that the children face when attending school. The quality of education provided is likely to have a relatively similar impact on all households as a determinant of enrolment rates more generally but a broad recognition of the situation is nevertheless important in order that all aspects and dynamics of primary schooling may be ascertained.

A consideration of the above situation then culminated in the formulation of the following research objective, based on state run primary education[[3]](#footnote-3):

*To what extent does food insecurity, amongst other household characteristics, impact on the primary school enrolment, attendance, retake and dropout rates of the children from poor households in Dogbo, Couffo.*

## 1.4. Conceptual Model

This model is presented here (below) to illustrate the main concepts and relationships that have been recognised within the study of this research objective study and demonstrates those links that will form the focus of the research.

The bold red arrow shows that the most important relationship, the key relationship, to be considered is between food security and education. Education is divided in four sections as these are the different key aspects of primary schooling that will be considered. As has been discussed, in order to understand the relationship between food security and primary education it is important to look at other factors that have an impact upon primary education. Therefore, the arrows shown in pale red illustrate the other relationships that must be considered – the most micro level, the households characteristics are shown below the key relationship and indicate that the relationship between these factors and primary school education will be researched. These factors also have an impact on food security but those relationships will not be focussed on in this study.

Above the key relationship are the slightly higher scale factors, community and educational context. Again an understanding of the impact these factors have on primary education is important in order to assess the significance of the relationship between food security and education. Once more, it is recognised that society also has an impact on food security to some extent but again this is a relationship that will not be explored in the study.

The final impacting box demonstrates the macro-level, the government action that has an impact on primary education and on food security. Although these links are recognised in this study the relationships themselves are not explored.

The last relationship shown in the model indicates the impact that primary school education can have upon the expansion of capabilities and human capital (this in particular is recognised to have effects both at the national and the individual level). The relationship demonstrates the way in which this research ties into the development debate and the theory behind the relationship is elaborated upon in chapter 2.1.

Finally, the possibility of an opposite relationship to that studied is shown between primary education and food security as this could also be a topic to consider for future research – by increasing levels of primary school education so children’s capabilities are expanded and hence their ability to provide for themselves is increased, potentially increasing their levels of food security. More simply perhaps, primary school education can provide information about how and what to eat which could enable children to have a nutritious diet which would again increase food security. Many dimensions of this relationship could be discussed and would provide an interesting area for further study.

**EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT**

SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE; SCHOOL FACILITIES; TEACHING ASPECTS.

**GOVERNMENT ACTION/POLICY**

**SOCIETY**

CULTURAL NORMS; ATTITUDES TOWARDS EDUCATION.

Enrolment Attendance

Drop out Retake

**HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS**

HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE; INCOME; PARENTS’ EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION; LANGUAGE; CHILDREN’S JOB/TASKS.

## 1.5. Structure of the study

In this section a brief summary is made of what will be presented in each of the following chapters in this study so that the reader can be aware of the content of this thesis from the outset.

Chapter 2: Theoretical/Thematic context – this chapter will place both of the key concepts of this study – education and food security – firmly within the development debate thereby presenting the theoretical relevance of both topics. The theories connected with the two topics will be elaborated on hence illustrating why both topics are so important. The chapter will go on to briefly explain the role both topics have in the world as a whole and the way in which they are represented on the world agenda. More specifically, a presentation of the two themes within Benin itself will be given.

Chapter 3: Geographical context – this chapter will enable the reader to gain a comprehensive understanding of the study area overall by considering geographical, economic and demographic factors at each level. An emphasis will be placed on those factors at each level which particularly influence the situation of both primary education and food security. The chapter will start at the broadest level, Sub-Saharan Africa, and then gradually narrow down from here, level by level, to Benin as a country, to the department of Couffo and then a brief account of the commune Dogbo, the location of the study villages, will be given.

Chapter 4: Methodology – in this chapter a presentation of all the research questions will be given. This will be followed by an explanation of how the research area was decided upon and the different research methods then used in the study area to collect the required data.

Chapter 5: Education context in the study area – a description will be given in this chapter of the educational situation in the study area. This will be put into context by the figures presented for higher level data from Benin as a whole and from the department of Couffo.

The school environment discovered in the study area will be explained by picking out different infrastructural aspects such as buildings, facilities and classroom materials. The teaching situation in the area will also be presented in this chapter.

Chapter 6: Education results in the study area – in this chapter there will be a presentation of the results gathered for each different category of ‘education’ as developed in the conceptual model. The data gathered around enrolment, attendance, drop out and retake rates at both the school and household level will be explored.

Chapter 7: Characteristics of households and their impact on children’s schooling – the various household factors established as potentially significant for children’s education, from the literature studied, will be presented in this chapter. Each household characteristic will be taken separately and qualitative and quantitative data will be shown for each of these and their impact upon children’s schooling will be discussed.

Chapter 8: Food security and education – this chapter will commence with a brief description as to what food security is understood to be following discussions with household members. After this will come a presentation of the data collected at household level as to their experiences of food (in)insecurity and this information is then followed up by the data gathered in schools from children and teachers: their views and experiences of food insecurity are presented in a mainly quantitative manner. The subject of school canteens, as an important issue, is discussed and the present situation is explored, alongside the potential that lies ahead, following interviews with school teachers.

Chapter 9: Conclusions and limitations/reflections – this final chapter serves to round off the research by presenting the conclusions drawn from the different aspects considered. Limitations of, and reflections on, the research are then given to help identify areas of weakness in the study and where further work could perhaps go in the future.

# Chapter 2: THEORETICAL AND THEMATIC CONTEXT

This chapter intends to present what are considered to be the most important theories behind the two main study focuses in this research: primary school education and food security. The aim is to briefly explore and understand these theories in order to give an overall grounding to this thesis and to position the topics firmly in the development debate by indicating their importance to development in general. The two concepts will then be linked and the main hypotheses behind the relationship will be identified. Finally, an idea of the both education and food security situation in Benin itself is presented in order that it may be clear to what extent a study of the two concepts is significant in the country.

## 2.1 Education

Education has and will most probably continue to play a key role in development worldwide: “while paradigms and orthodoxies of education as well as development may change, the development process itself will continue, as will the role of education in that process” (Brock-Utne, 2002: 62). As a result, general themes in the development debate from the basic needs paradigm to globalisation, for example, can be recognised within education – education has moved with the theories and has been treated differently over time according to the general debate on development and the different paradigm in vogue at any specific time (Brock-Utne, 2002). Furthermore, over the decades, there has been an expansion in the focus placed on education in developing countries and as the individual has become a more central focus of development so education has increasingly become seen as a way of improving a person’s well-being. The importance of the individual has been reflected in the development of the human capital theory and capabilities approach and the way in which education ties into these theories is highly significant.

### 2.1.1 Human Capital Theory

“The core thesis of human capital theory is that peoples’ learning capacities are comparable to other natural resources involved in the production process; when the resource is effectively exploited the results are profitable both for the enterprise and for society as a whole” (Livingstone, 1997: 9). With this understanding, the Human Capital Theory has re-theorised education as “primarily an economic device” (Fitzsimons, 1999). A positive relationship between workers’ knowledge levels and their levels of formal schooling is recognised and this is used to defend the theory that increased schooling of an individual leads to higher productivity and macro-economic growth (Livingstone, 1997; Sen, 1997). In other words, the theory is based on the creation of economically productive agents who operate within freely competitive markets to augment production possibilities (Fitzsimons, 1999; Sen, 2003; Wigley and Akkoyunlu-Wigley, 2006). With all other factors being equal under the Human Capital Theory the amount of personal income an individual receives is directly related to the amount of investment made in their education. A widespread investment in human capital therefore will form the necessary labour force with the skills base needed for economic growth overall (Marshall, 1998). For this reason, Becker (2002) considers human capital as the most important form of capital in modern economies terming the modern era ‘the age of capital’.

In this way then human capital accumulation can be considered as vital to development; through the eyes of the Human Capital Theorists developing countries will not move out of poverty and the global economy will not reach its potential without major investment in human capital by all nations (Becker, 2002).

This theory is seen, by its many critics, to fall short however and it is argued that to view education as a panacea to achieving economic development objectives is dangerous (Marshall, 1998). Interpreting education solely as a way to create human capital and exclusively evaluating it in terms of the accumulation of resources and exchange of commodities demonstrates that the theory is purely quantitative (Robeyns, 2003; Fitzsimons, 1999). This is “an impoverished notion of capital” as it misses the point that capital is in fact an independent social force and thus the theory “severely understates the value of education” (Wigley and Akkoyunlu-Wigley, 2006: 289; Fitzsimons, 1999).

Another criticism levelled at the theory concerns its individualistic methodology: it assumes that all human behaviour is based on the economic self-interest of the individual and therefore supposes that they will act rationally to maximise utilities (Olaniyan and Okemakinde, 2008; Fitzsimons, 1999). In reality this is not always the case but these other behavioural possibilities are simply excluded from, or treated as distortions of, the theory.

In addition, in the application of the theory there is a failure to explain the fact that there is an increasing gap between people’s growing efforts to expand their learning and knowledge base and the number of jobs that are available to accommodate these people which allow them to apply their new skills, especially in developing nations (Olaniyan and Okemakinde, 2008).

Although advocates of the Human Capital Theory try to defend the model, these are nevertheless some of the key criticisms used against it.

Human Capital Theory and Children: With the human capital theory being concerned with participation in education as an investment made in human capital due to the expected returns in later life. It follows therefore that for young children this investment decision is usually made by the child’s parents. In developing countries in particular this decision has to be made by weighing up future benefits (such as child support to parents in a system that has no pensions) against the immediate costs required (books and uniform for example, and opportunity costs whereby the child will not be at home to help in the household or to work) (Huisman and Smits, 2009).

### 2.1.2. Capabilities Approach

The capabilities approach is a method of conceptualising quality of life and ultimately assessing human development. It serves to unite economic and political thought (Jayawardena, 1995 cited in Bloodworth, 2006). The approach however is not specifically defined as a theory but rather, as Robeyns (2003: 9) explains, “The capability approach is primarily and mainly a framework of thought, a mode of thinking about normative issues, hence – loosely defined – a paradigm”; as a result Sen (1993) stresses that it is an approach that can be utilised for a wide range of purposes.

Ultimately, the core characteristic of the capabilities approach is that it focuses on individuals as active agents having the means to lead the kind of life that they want to lead and that they have reason to value, to do what they want to do and to be the person they want to be by enhancing the real choices they have (Sen, 1993; Robeyns, 2003; Srinivasan, 2007). The approach involves “concentration on freedoms to achieve in general and the capabilities to function in particular” (Robeyns, 2003); hence the crux of the approach is the emphasis on and individual’s functionings, freedoms and capabilities.

A capability, as described by the UNDP (1995) is all-encompassing and can be:

“abilities, skills, understanding, attitude, values, relationships, behaviours, motivations, resources and conditions that enable individuals as well as institutions to carry out functions and identify and achieve their development objectives over time.”

Clearly therefore, there are numerous different capabilities and although they can be organised into groups there are in fact no clear boundaries between them as all interact, to a greater or lesser extent, with each other (Lanzi, 2007).

There is a “strong and mutually enhancing relationship between [the] capability approach and education” (Saito, 2003): “If we gauge the value of education in terms of the capability to achieve valued functionings (human capabilities approach) rather than the accumulation of resources (human capital approach) it becomes clear that society is duty-bound to enable each child to complete at least a basic education, irrespective of their relative contributions to growth” (Wigley and Akkoyunlu-Wigley, 2006: 289).

Educational capabilities that come from basic education include reading, writing, communicating, problem solving etc – skills that will enable children to function effectively throughout their lives. Ensuring children accumulate the capabilities for functioning is the fundamental aim of development and it is therefore the fundamental reason for ensuring that all people receive at least a basic level of education (Wigley and Akkoyunlu-Wigley, 2006).

This approach makes clear that poverty must be understood in terms of lives that people actually lead and the freedoms that they really do have which is why the expansion of human capabilities is so apt: “capability improvement helps both directly and indirectly in enriching human lives and in making human deprivations more rare and less acute” (Sen, 2001: 951).

There are however criticisms of the approach, one particularly enduring criticism, taken up by many, is that it is a problematic concept to operationalise due to empirical difficulties (Comim, 2001). There are no prescribed functionings to be considered, Sen has not stated which capabilities matter and why; this is complex as the list of functionings is probably innumerable (Srinivasan, 2007). As a result certain functions must be selected if the approach is to be quantified and depending on the person/situation this could be affected by bias. Sen though argues that in fact it is important that capabilities are not narrowly specified as this would endanger the analysis of any given situation (Tarrant, 2004).

A second key criticism is that the methodology of the approach is too individualistic and that not enough attention is given to groups and to social structures (Robeyns, 2005) – the approach puts great trust in democratic practices leaving the individual alone to be the unit of study. Furthermore, the focus on the individual leaves the approach open to additional criticisms namely that it proposes local solutions to global problems by emphasising the study of immediate causes of poverty at the expense of underlying social processes and looking structural inequalities (Frediani, 2006; Robeyns, 2005).

The Capabilities Approach and Children: As the capabilities approach is based in part on the idea of personal freedoms it may be difficult to understand how it can therefore be applied to children and their primary education. Clearly at a young age children are unable to make their own choices (freedom) in order to expand their capabilities and consequently there is a fundamental problem. However, it is argued (Sen, 2001; Saito, 2003) that the idea of freedoms in the case of the child must be considered as future freedoms – in other words, capabilities should be thought of in terms of a person’s life span, children’s freedoms can therefore be compromised now in order to give them greater freedoms in the future. Education can play a key role in expanding a child’s capabilities by making the child autonomous and therefore creating a new capability set for the child as that autonomy will benefit them later in their lives by allowing them to make independent decisions.

Box 2.1: A simple example of the benefits of expanding a child’s capabilities:

Lisa learns mathematics and as a result, she has wider opportunities to become a mathematician, a physicist, a banker and so on. These newly created opportunities and capabilities, such as becoming a mathematician or a physicist through learning mathematics, may be ones that Lisa was not aware of, and which were not in her ‘capability set’ before learning mathematics. Perhaps she did not aim to acquire those new capability sets when she started to learn mathematics. There are so many opportunities that we are not even aware of in our daily lives. Education can come to play a role here. Lisa, in this example, learns mathematics and therefore becomes more autonomous in being able to choose her way of life and to become a physicist, a mathematician and the like.

Saito, 2003.

However, expanding capabilities through education relies on the fact that a good education is being provided (Saito, 2003) and it is this issue that is such a problem in so many developing countries (Michaelowa, 2001; Huisman and Smits, 2009; Brock-Utne, 2002).

### 2.1.4. Clarification

The two theories are, in many ways very similar but it may be identified that the Capabilities Approach is generally somewhat broader than Human Capital Theory. “In order to clarify the relationship between human capital and human capability, Sen articulates the role of human capabilities in three ways:

(1) their direct relevance to the well-being and freedom of people;

(2) their indirect role through influencing social change; and

(3) their indirect role through influencing economic production” (Sen, 1999, pp. 296–297).

While human capital is considered to fit into the third category, the concept of human capability incorporates all categories. All categories relating to the role of human capabilities are composed of intrinsic value and instrumental value (Saito, 2003).

## 2.2. Food security

“Food security is an essential foundation for poverty alleviation, and also for meeting MDGs related to improved education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health and disease” (POST, 2006: 2).

Although a concern with access to food can be seen as far back as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the actual concept of Food Security was only first officially put on the world agenda by the United Nations World Food Conference held in Rome in November 1974. Representatives of 135 states convened and came to a common declaration that "every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop their physical and mental faculties" (UN, 1974). Since this initial conception the concept has evolved significantly and the changes it has gone through since 1974 can be characterised into distinctive paradigm shifts (Maxwell, 1996).

### 2.2.1. Macro to micro level

As with education, the shift from the large, macro scale to the smaller, individual, micro level reflects changes in development theories more generally from the over-arching meta-theories to more people oriented, adaptable theories such as the human capital approach (chapter 2.1.1). There has been a realisation that “food availability at the national level [does] not automatically translate into food security at the individual and household level” (Frankenberger and McCaston, 1998).

This shift is expressed through the recognition that the problem of food security is not about overall production, quite the contrary – there is enough food to in the world to go round – it is about distribution issues and the access that poor people, as households and individuals, have to food supplies (Maxwell, 1996). Amartya Sen has been credited with theorising this paradigm shift with his “access and entitlements” approach which he developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s and which emphasises the access individuals have to sufficient entitlements or assets (Sen, 1984). Prior to this, availability of food was thought to be the overriding determinant of famine. Sen’s entitlements approach now forms the basis for assessing food security (Young et al., 2001) and has laid the foundations of much of the discussion around the topic that has followed its inception in 1981.

“Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there not being enough to eat. While the latter can be a cause of the former, it is but one of many possible causes” (Sen, 1981). In summary, food security is not usually about supply but rather about access.

It is, according to Sen, people’s ‘exchange entitlements’ that reflect their ability to acquire food and these are divided as follows:

* “Production-based entitlements (crops and livestock)
* Own-labour entitlements (waged labour and professions)
* Trade-based entitlements (trading artisan products and natural resources like forestry products) and
* Inheritance and transfer entitlements (from the state, or private gifts and loan)” (Young et al., 2001).

Famine then, following Sen’s argument, occurs when a large number of people suffer a complete collapse in their exchange entitlements. Hence, the entitlement approach has created an awareness of the functioning of markets and of the fact that certain catastrophic events, such as floods, do not automatically lead to famine and food insecurity.

Although Sen’s work has evidently made a crucial contribution to the theory behind food security but it obviously does have limitations. One main criticism is that entitlements are not as clear cut as the theory suggests and furthermore, as Sen himself points out, the approach “concentrates on rights within the given legal structure in that society, but some transfers are illegal acts, and therefore not accommodated by the entitlement approach” (Sen, 1981).

As a result of these limitations the theory of food security has expanded and developed to incorporate other ideas into Sen’s initial entitlements thinking.

### 2.2.2. Food first perspective to livelihood perspective

In 1984/5 the world witnessed severe famine in Africa and this triggered extensive discussion around the causes of famine (Corbett, 1988). This discussion led to another change in theoretical thinking away from the conventional view of food alone being the necessary requirement for food security. The move represented an understanding that food, especially short-term nutritional intake, is only one of the objectives people pursue. It emerged that there is actually a time preference involved in peoples’ concept of food security – people are very aware of the future as well as the present and consequently will go hungry now to avoid going (more) hungry later (Maxwell, 1996). Expressed in terms of the livelihood approach[[4]](#footnote-4) this means that people who experience food insecurity are not only concerned with their livelihoods now but they have an understanding about secure and sustainable livelihoods in the longer term as well (Maxwell and Smith, 1996). As a result of this longer term consideration, poor people implement livelihood strategies in which food security plays an important part but is not always predominant. The strategies adopted are in fact often more focussed on maintaining the future ability of the household to generate income rather than just focussing on sustaining current levels of food consumption (Corbett, 1988).

### 2.2.3. Objective indicators to subjective perception

This move expresses the fact that looking at nutritional adequacy alone as an indicator for food (in)security is not enough – using the same objective indicator for every household member is insufficient; every person is very different and has different nutritional requirements due to size/gender/health/workload etc. Therefore each person will have different levels of nutritional adequacy and therefore have different experiences of, and attitudes towards, food security. In addition, food security is not simply about an individual getting the right ‘quantity’ of entitlement but also the right ‘quality’ – what people eat is just as important as how much they have access to – this transforms food security from a “uni-dimensional to a multi-dimensional objective” (Maxwell and Smith, 1992: 41). Peoples’ own perceptions of food needs become the most important characteristic of food security making it a people-driven concept (Maxwell and Smith, 1992: 51; Clay, 2002).

To adequately measure and comprehend food (in)security it is vital to realise how people themselves understand and respond to perceived risks and uncertainties. Only in doing so is it possible to get an in-depth understanding of the issue and to measure it effectively and this indicates why participatory research is so important.

“Flexibility, adaptability, diversification and resilience are key words. Perceptions matter. Intra-household issues are central...Food security must be treated as a multi-objective phenomenon, where the identification and weighting of objectives can only be decided by the food insecure themselves” (Maxwell and Smith, 1992).

Gender is a central aspect within household food security; Kennedy and Peters (1992) recognise the importance of studying female headed households. It has been identified that in many cases where females have access to household income more money is likely to be spent on food and the nutritional requirements of the household members are more likely to be met (Thomas, 1990). However, despite the significance of gender, gender of household head specifically appears to be less important than the relationship between household head and access to income, of course this may be influenced significantly by gender but it is that relationship in particular that is an important consideration when looking at household food security. The relationship between household head and children within that household is also significant; women may tend to have better relationships with their children but it is not gender per se that dictates children’s access to nutrients but rather their relationship with the household head (Kennedy and Peters, 1992; Thomas, 1990).

The importance of knowledge must also be understood: food security is not just about having enough food but also having enough of the right kinds of food. It is therefore necessary to educate mothers as to how best to feed their children and family. However, educating mothers is often not sufficient if mothers have no control over the household income and cannot decide which foods are bought.

### 2.2.4. Looking forward

As power becomes increasingly decentralised so the emerging local governance paradigm (Joseph, 2008; Bonfiglioli, 2007) may also become a way to consider the food security situation. As the involvement and participation of civil society becomes understood as increasingly important and an increased emphasis is placed on partnerships and co-operation between the public and private sector so it becomes more reasonable that these things would also help to improve levels of food security. Such changes would “help strengthen livelihoods of poverty-stricken and food insecure households by bolstering their assets and capabilities, supporting livelihood strategies, opening up employment opportunities and supporting the market” (Bonfiglioli, 2007). As the focus on the individual has become so important the incorporation of the thoughts and ideas of those who actually experience food insecurity, by bringing decision-making closer to their level through the concept of local governance, may help to bring about positive changes to improve their situations.

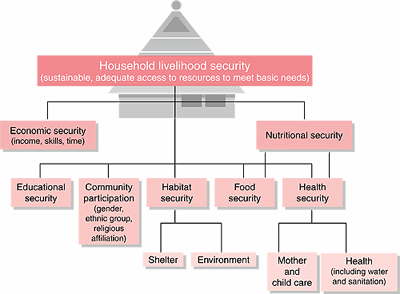
## 2.3. Linking Education and Food Security: the Livelihood approach

“A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base” (DFID, 1999).

The livelihood approach, developed during the 1990s, is broad and encompassing and puts people at the centre of development (DFID, 1999); the approach draws on the main factors that affect people’s livelihoods and the typical relationships between these various factors. People are considered to build their livelihood strategies on different capitals such as human capital which involves “labour and skills, experience, knowledge, creativity and resourcefulness” and financial capital – “money in a savings account in a bank or in an old sock, a loan or credit” (De Haan, 2006: 139). In order to maintain or obtain these different capitals and to combat their problems it is argued that poor people adopt coping strategies.

Food security is clearly a requisite for poor households but it is only “one subset of objectives” (Frankenberger and McCaston, 1998) – “household livelihood security is defined as adequate and sustainable access to income and resources to meet basic needs” and these basic needs include sufficient access to not only food but also drinking water, health facilities, educational opportunities, housing etc (Frankenberger and McCaston, 1998). Consequently, it is evident that food plays just one part in a whole wider range of factors that determine why the poor take the decisions and actions that they do to maintain their livelihood strategy (Maxwell and Smith, 1992): food needs may not necessarily come higher than any other of the basic needs required within the household.

Figure 2.1 demonstrates the way in which education and food security can be combined into one overall livelihood framework:

Figure 2.1: Components of household livelihood security:

Source: Frankenberger and McCaston, 1998.

## 2.4. Barriers to Primary School Education

In developing countries the poorest households are likely to be more vulnerable than other higher income groups to the numerous barriers that exist to getting the most from primary school education (Iyamu and Obiuni, 2006; Huisman and Smits, 2009). This is because the barriers tend to be such that they have a greater impact on rural households (often the poorest households in developing countries) and are also most hindering to households with few resources.

Although of course food insecurity is not the only potential barrier that stands to a child’s primary school education, as it is the focus of this study the theoretical arguments concerning the links between food insecurity and education will be presented first. This will be followed by a summary of the other barriers that figure significantly in the relevant literature and which may be divided into two groups – the supply side and the demand side. A consideration of the all barriers in place is vital in order to understand the importance of food security in comparison.

### 2.5.1. Food Security and Education

Across the developing world, food insecure regions also have low school enrolment and attendance and high dropout and retake rates. Although low schooling rates cannot be solely attributed to the issue of food insecurity there is, nonetheless, a body of literature that suggests that the two are indeed connected.

Recent surveys conclude that empirical studies constitute strong evidence that food insecurity and significant malnutrition levels can have direct effects on a child’s performance and achievement in school and hence on their future prospects; evidence has been gathered from both developed countries (Jyoti et al., 2005) and developing countries (Moock and Leslie, 1986; Jamison, 1986). Assuming that a food insecure child may often be a malnourished child, as is often the case, the relationship identified may be partly due to the negative effects that malnourishment can cause to the brain (Jamison, 1986; Msisika).

Although much literature supports this relationship it is clear that the studies that have drawn such conclusions may in fact demonstrate bias. Such research tends to fail to control for additional factors which may never be possible to capture, for example, innate ability, motivation and genetic robustness (Behrman, 1996). As a result of this, it is often interpreted that the associations observed in such studies imply causality whereas this in fact is not always the case – “child health and nutrition may be a fairly good indicator of cognitive achievement, but does not seem to caused cognitive achievement” (Behrman, 1996: 31).

An argument that may be easier to substantiate is that a hungry child is more likely to have lower concentration levels than classmates who receive enough to eat (Jamison, 1986) and this may, amongst other factors, have an impact on a child’s ability to perform in class. Therefore, receiving a regular breakfast, lunch and dinner leads to positive effects on a child’s learning achievements (Michaelowa, 2001).

Better nutrition and food security are positively associated with improvements in schooling in many areas (Behrman, 1996). It is argued that better fed children are more likely to enrol in school overall and also do so earlier than peers who do not have access to sufficient food or who are not food secure (Ahmed and del Ninno, 2002; Alderman et al., 1997; Moock and Leslie, 1986). Furthermore, children in this latter situation may also be less likely to attend school regularly (Behrman, 1996; Moock and Leslie, 1986) as they are more often sick (Michaelowa, 2001) and this may in turn increase the probability that the child will drop out of school (Hunt, 2008). Children from food insecure households may be required to help improve the family situation by working to provide extra income for example, or by helping their parents in the field may. These activities often take up much of a child’s time and as a result such activities can have negative effects on a child’s school attendance (Ahmed and Del Ninno, 2002).

“Food is a priceless teaching aid” (Kumanda, 2006) – a food secure child who is well-nourished is more likely to enter school earlier, stay in school and have the ability to concentrate on lessons rather than hunger. Conversely, a child whose education is threatened at an early age due to hunger is likely to have worse prospects for his future as an adult (Kumanda, 2006; Jamison, 1986).

### 2.5.2. Supply side

The supply side concerns the nature of the education provided to primary school children – this involves the availability of primary school education overall, the environment of the schools themselves and the teaching within these schools, all of which can feed into the quality of the education offered and have a negative effect on enrolment, attendance and overall quality of education.

Low availability of schools is an example of an issue that is particularly relevant in rural areas – lack of schools can make access difficult for rural households and children may have to travel long distances to reach school which may deter some families from sending their children to school at all.

The infrastructure is a particular concern in many schools throughout developing countries and covers many aspects. For example, a lack of classrooms, and high numbers of poor quality classrooms, can impact negatively on education provision as it may mean that classes must be conducted outside, that classrooms are overcrowded or that lessons must sometimes be abandoned (Hoot et al., 2004). Furthermore, some schools are plagued with chair and desk shortages leaving children forced to sit on the ground to take their lessons: not a conducive way to learn (Huisman and Smits, 2009).

In addition, lack of school amenities can cause numerous problems; for example, latrine shortages can be a concern, particularly if separate latrines for boys and girls are not provided, and can cause parents not to send their children to school due to cultural issues that arise regarding the use of shared latrines (Michaelowa, 2001).

Lack of school materials, such as textbooks, chalk and blackboards for example, can have a negative impact on the quality of education provided which again may discourage parents from sending their children to school or children from wanting to attend (Lloyd et al.,2008; Michaelowa, 2001).

On the teaching side, teacher shortages can lead to overcrowded classrooms and high teacher-student ratios and in addition a lack of trained teachers often means that community volunteers are recruited in order to make-up the shortfall in professionals and in many cases this clearly leads to a drop in teaching standards. Lack of motivation amongst teachers can also affect their teaching quality; low pay and poor benefits and working conditions may cause teachers to lack motivation and this may be particularly relevant in rural areas where the location may mean that teachers are unhappy with their situation which can impact negatively on their teaching standards (Michaelowa and Wittmann, 2007; Plan, 2008). Teacher gender is also a consideration (Michaelowa, 2001), for girls in particular – girls are generally more motivated to learn when faced with a female teacher and it also gives them role models to look up to, to encourage them to continue their education (Handa, 1999; Lloyd et al., 2008).

The language of instruction also has a clear influence on a child’s schooling; research has shown that when the foundations of education are laid in a language with which the child is familiar they will be more successful with their education at later stages (Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007). However, when children speak a different language at home to the language of instruction in school this can pose a barrier by making school more difficult for these children forced to learn their lessons in an unfamiliar language (Lloyd et al., 2008; Brock-Utne, 2002). This experience often puts children behind their peers who have spoken in French all their lives: “The experience of high-achievers has been unequivocal: ...students who have learnt to read in their mother tongue learn to read in a second language more quickly than those who are taught to read in their second language.”(Mehrotra, 1998:479 cited in Brock-Utne, 2002:56).

### 2.5.3. Demand side

Supply side factors themselves clearly impact on the demand side of the equation as poor quality local schools may deter parents from sending their children to school, hence lowering demand. However, there are copious barriers at the household level that may also impede children in going to school.

Several of these factors are connected to household income levels hence the point is again illustrated that poorer households are more susceptible. The factors may grouped under ‘financial issues’ both directly and indirectly.

Although abolishing school fees has clearly eased some financial costs for households other direct costs still remain such as purchasing uniform, exercise books, pencils and school bags for example, and poorer households in particular may still struggle with these costs (Hunt, 2008; Huisman and Smits, 2009). Additional strain may be placed on parents by the necessity to compensate for problems at the schools themselves (chapter 2.5.2) – for example, lack of necessary materials, such as text books, may mean parents are forced to pay for photocopies of books for example which are often costs they are extremely unable to afford (Iyamu and Obiunu, 2006).

For low income households in particular, the indirect costs, or opportunity cost of schooling are a very important consideration (Boyle et al., 2002; Huisman and Smits, 2009; Lloyd et al, 2008). For example, these households may require support from their children to help increase the household income – children may be expected to help directly, by doing jobs themselves, or indirectly by helping parents to work or working within the households to enable parents to go out and work. If this is the situation then a child’s schooling may well suffer (Iyamu and Obiunu, 2006) as it may be considered more beneficial to the family to keep a child at home to support the family income in the short term rather than sending them to school. However, this decision is often made by considering whether the short term income losses of sending a child to school will be outweighed by bringing long term gains as in theory an educated child will have better job opportunities in later life (Becker, 2002). The dilemma then is further influenced in part by school quality and also by the availability of job opportunities in the area – if parents see that there are few opportunities even for the educated then they are less likely to send their children to school (Huisman and Smits, 2009). Limited formal employment opportunities also discourage children themselves from attending school, particularly boys (Boyle, et al. 2002).

Parents’ levels of education have also been shown to have an impact on their children’s schooling (Handa, 1999; Huisman and Smits, 2009). Parents who are better educated are more likely to send their children to school than those who have little or no education. Moreover, parents’ attitudes to education overall is important. Research has shown that if parents see that education is of a poor quality or if they do not think education is relevant for their children then they are unlikely to send their children to school (Hoot et al., 2004). Clearly then, parents’ attitudes are important. This is particularly significant when gender comes into the equation and attitudes are often heavily influenced by the cultural norms practiced within a community. In general, parents are more reluctant to allow their daughters to go to school for a plethora of reasons; cultural norms may dictate for example that girls should marry early, or that girls have a duty to help in the household more than boys – both of these factors, and others, can have a negative impact on a girl’s enrolment, attendance and completion rates at school (Hoot et al., 2001; Iyamu and Obiunu, 2008). In relation to gender, a boy’s education may be valued more than a girl’s if parents feel that a male child will have more job opportunities after education in which case more effort is put into boys attending school. If girls are able to get beyond the barriers to enrolment and attend school their work may then be jeopardised by their role within the household: girls often receive less support in carrying on their learning outside school hours (Boyle et al., 2002).

Family size is also mentioned to have an effect on a child’s education; depending on a child’s position within a family this may have a positive or negative effect (Hunt, 2008; Boyle et al., 2002; Huisman and Smits, 2009).

### 2.5.4. Conclusion

Undoubtedly, therefore the demand for education is vulnerable to the “dynamics associated with poverty and vulnerable households” (Boyle et al., 2002: 6). In order to begin to combat this, the issues on the supply side must first be diminished as far as possible so that the demand side can be comprehensively addressed alone without interrelation to levels of quality of education complicating the household barriers.

All of these aforementioned factors can influence, to some degree, whether or not a child will enrol in school, whether a child will attend regularly and continuously, or will remove themselves from school either temporarily or permanently (Boyle et al., 2002).

Although it is clear that various factors play more important roles in some areas than others it may be recognised, across the literature, that barriers to education remain similar throughout developing countries and there remains much progress to be made before these barriers are completely broken down.

## 2.6. Thematic context

### 2.6.1. Education

Primary school education is the largest sub-sector of any education system and offers the unique opportunity to contribute to the transformation of societies through the education of young people (UNESCO, 2009). In practical terms the importance and relevance of education is mirrored in a number of key global agreements dating back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 which expressed education as an essential human right (box 2.2).

Box 2.2: Article 26 from the Declaration of Human Rights

Article 26.

* (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
* (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
* (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948).

Despite this emphasis on education more than 60 years ago the problems have not been solved. As a result, education has continued to be prominent on the world agenda and numerous world conferences have met with an aim to produce solutions to tackle the problems faced – notable examples are the World Declaration on Education for All in Jomptien, Thailand in 1990 and again in Dakar, Senegal in 2000 and the Millennium Development Goals (two of which are directly related to education, box 2.3) developed by the United Nations in 2000. All continue to make education a main priority on the world agenda.

Box 2.3: Extract from the MDGs

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.

Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE) – Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, girls and boys alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women – Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

United Nations, 2000.

Since the conference in Jomptien in 1990 education enrolment has expanded in absolute terms but unfortunately quality has not kept pace with this expansion and it is as a result of this that improving education still remains so important today. The reality of the situation is that at least 100million children are out of school worldwide (UNESCO, 2009) and amongst those that do enrol in school many do not complete the full cycle or they leave without the necessary skills due to poor teaching and educational standards overall. Due to unanimous agreement worldwide that the provision of primary school education of at least a reasonable quality is vital in designing strategies aiming to eliminate global poverty, achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) is now significant in all national poverty reduction strategies which have been/are being developed in countries across SSA.

Benin’s situation reflects what is occurring in developing countries worldwide. The demand for primary education is high: thanks to high population growth in 2008 there were 1,489,522 children of primary school age in the country (Johnson, 2009), 16.4% of the country’s entire population. Due to these high figures, enrolment rates have grown by approximately 7.2% per year (Guingnido Gaye, 2003). This boost in demand for education has not only been caused by high population growth but also by efforts on the part of civil society and government organisations to increase enrolment rates. The results however have created increased pressure on the education system and educational facilities. Although schools are meeting this expansion it simply means that class sizes are increasing and the growth rate in enrolment has not been met by an improvement in quality in schooling. An assessment of basic standards in schools across Benin (2000-2001) showed that only 48.8% of buildings were constructed from solid materials whilst only 15.3% of classrooms had seats. Low teacher quality results in low teaching standards and in 2003 it was stated that “fewer than 10% of children can speak, read and write French at the expected levels” (USAID, 2003 cited in Guingnido, Gaye, 2003).

### 2.6.2. Food Security

The definition of food security has shifted and developed significantly since the first introduction of the term. In 2003 at least 200 definitions of the term could be identified (Smith et al., 2003). The first definition given at the conference in 1974 was that food security is the:

“...availability at all times of adequate world food supplies of basic foodstuffs to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption and to offset fluctuations in production and prices” (UN, 1974).

By contrast, the most common definition used today is:

**“Food security** exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. **Household food security** is the application of this concept to the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern”.

**“Food insecurity** exists when people do not have adequate physical, social or economic access to food as defined above” (FAO, 2003).

It is ironic that world hunger has been increasing over time despite the fact that the world has become richer and is producing more food than ever, thus supporting Sen’s entitlements theory. Today, there are 1.02 billion undernourished people in the world, a figure that has increased by around 100million since 2008, which means that one in nearly six people “do not get enough food to be healthy and lead an active life” (WFP, 2009; FAO, 2009). Many of those going hungry are children: 59million children attend school hungry across the developing world and 23million of them live in Africa (WFP, 2009). Although improvements were made in reducing chronic hunger during the 1980s and early 1990s, the food security situation now, in many of the countries across SSA, is either stagnant or worsening (Rosegrant et al., 2005): 265million Africans now suffer from malnutrition (FAO, 2009).

This situation has caused the continued prominence of the topic on the world stage and this is demonstrated, in part, by the presence of food security amongst the Millennium Development Goals (box 2.3).

Due to the high prices that have been experienced globally in the past few years countries that had previously seen improvements in their food security situations have suffered setbacks. The recent problems have driven millions of people (back) into food insecurity and have also threatened global food security overall (FAO, 2008).

Benin is a country that is relatively self-sufficient in terms of food provision (INRAB, 2007) but nevertheless its location in the poverty-stricken region of SSA makes it extremely vulnerable to food security problems. Consequently, pockets of food insecurity remain across the country; 33 out of Benin’s 77 districts are “at risk of food insecurity” according to the WFP (2009). The highest rates of nutritional deficiencies are to be found in the north of the country but taking the whole country into account the effects on children of lack of food are extremely concerning – the WFP (2009) reports that 23% of Beninese children under the age of five show signs of moderate stunting and 11% suffer from severe malnutrition.

The emphasis now, in poor countries worldwide and in Benin specifically, is on expanding food production through increasing productivity in order to achieve a sustainable solution to the problem of food insecurity particularly for the poorest, landless and female headed households who are some of the people hardest hit by the situation. In order to do this, Benin’s government has recently reinvigorated its efforts to strengthen food security by putting a particular emphasis the agricultural sector, and more specifically on small rural farmers (Plan Benin, 2008).

# Chapter 3: GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

The aim of this section of the thesis is to present the overall geographical context firstly of Sub-Saharan Africa and then to narrow down to give a more detailed overview of Benin as a whole followed by a more specific focus on the region, and then local area, of study. Some general background information is presented at each level that is intended to give the factors that have an impact upon the education and food security situations.

## 3.1. Supranational level: Sub-Saharan Africa

### 3.1.1. Geography

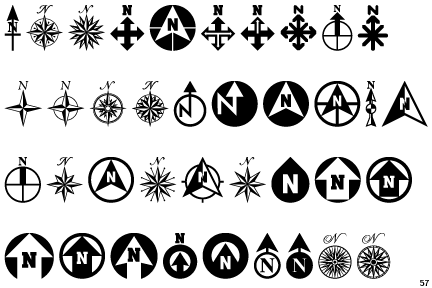
Map 3.1: Map showing Sub-Saharan Africa

Key:

Sub-Saharan Africa

North Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is the part of the African continent that lies in and south of the Sahara desert (see map 3.1) and covers an area of 24.3million km2 (World Source, 2009). Clearly, as it covers such a large and diverse area the climatic conditions in different countries throughout the region vary considerably but overall it may be said that temperatures tend to climb very high and that rain is scarce although during the wet season extreme rainfall may be experienced.



Source: World Source, 2009.

### 3.1.2. Demography

As table 3.1 shows, SSA’s population is a large proportion of the worldwide total of 6.7billion. The majority of the region’s population is young with 54% of the population falling into the 0-19years age group and only 4.7% over the age of 60years of age (table 3.3: 45).

Population growth is far higher at 2.5% than the world wide average, although life expectancy is significantly lower with the average for SSA approximately 15years less than the worldwide average life expectancy (table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Demographic and economic figures from SSA and worldwide

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **SSA** | **Worldwide** |
| **Total population** | 782.5 million | 6.7 billion |
| **Population growth (%)** | 2.5 | 1.167 |
| **Life expectancy at birth (years)** | 50.3 | 65.82 |

Source: CIA, 2008; World Bank, 2008.

### 3.1.2. Economy

Many countries throughout Sub-Saharan Africa have made significant progress in terms of their development by fighting poverty in the past fifteen years but the current global economic crisis has hit the continent hard and threatens to reverse this progress. As a result, economic performance in Africa, which had already slowed in 2008, is likely to slow steeply during the remainder of 2009 (ECA, 2009) and it has been projected that GDP growth is likely to decrease by almost 60% over the next few years, from 6.4% to 2.4% (Boh, 2009).

These problems will hit the rural poor particularly hard; having already been seriously affected by the food crisis they risk their current problems, such as water scarcity and food insecurity, being compounded by the economic crisis which would significantly worsen their situations.

If the downturn is not reversed, it could have devastating economic, financial, and humanitarian consequences across the continent; for example, 25 out of 49 countries in the region are already classified as fragile in terms of political stability and social unrest and these countries could be tipped into a state of crisis by the economic situation, if the circumstances are not handled effectively. Additionally, research in the past suggests that child mortality increases by 40 deaths per 1000 during economic down turns (Boh, 2009).

Even with the improvements that have occurred over recent years and without the effects of the current crisis, the region remains the world’s poorest and is home to the majority of the least developed countries across the globe. SSA lags behind worldwide rates for numerous different indicators and the poverty of the region is very apparent: for example, according to recent estimates, the percentage of the population living in extreme poverty in SSA overall (using the new US$1.25/day international poverty line) has almost doubled from 200million in 1981 to 380million in 2005 (ECA, 2009).

### 3.1.3. Education

Despite the increased focus on primary education through UPE by specific governments across SSA and the associated increases in enrolment rates this has triggered, particularly in francophone countries in West Africa, primary school completion rates remain a considerable concern – in 2006 the completion rate across SSA was 60%[[5]](#footnote-5) (UNESCO, 2009 cited in ECA 2009). Moreover, the quality of education across SSA also poses a grave impasse; without significant changes and improvements in the quality of primary education across the region the majority of children will continue to be unable to reap the full benefits of attending school. Many children attending primary school are not receiving basic skills (Mertaugh et al., 2009; Michaelowa, 2001) and it is estimated, for example, that 60% of children in SSA are still functionally illiterate when they leave school (DFID, 2001 cited in Bennell, 2002). The poor quality of schooling received in many cases means that numerous households will not get the returns they hoped for from investing in their children’s educations (Bennell, 2002); this obviously has repercussions and may discourage parents from investing any more, or starting to invest, in their own children’s education if they are unable to see tangible benefits. This problem is made worse by the decrease in the number of wage employment opportunities in the region (Bennell, 2002) – even if children leave school having received a good quality education it may still be difficult for them to find employment.

The barriers identified on various literatures on the subject of education generally in developing countries[[6]](#footnote-6) are evident throughout SSA and the consequences of these persistent barriers are clear. There are significant gaps in basic education coverage: of the worldwide total, SSA has by far the largest proportion, and number, of out of school children – 30% of primary school children are not enrolled in school (Mertaugh et al., 2009) – and it is the children from poorer households, rural households and socially excluded groups who really bear the brunt of these problems of access. Furthermore, attendance rates and dropout rates remain an issue across the board in SSA – Bennell (2002) reports that dropout rates are “unacceptably high in the majority of SSA countries”. There is also a significant gender difference between the number of boys who attend school and the number of girls and as a result trying to increase girls’ schooling is a particular area of concern for NGOS and governments across SSA.

### 3.1.4. Food Security

The current economic slowdown which has immediately followed the food and fuel crisis[[7]](#footnote-7) is the key reason for the sharp increase in the world’s hunger that is being observed. “The worldwide economic crash did not put an end to the food crisis, instead it complicates and exacerbates the situation” (Nabarro, 2009:1 cited in Loyn, 2009). Food prices are now, in most cases, on the decrease but nevertheless globally they remain higher than historical levels in many countries, particularly across SSA, and are likely to continue to remain so in the medium term. The FAO estimates that 75million people amongst the total of people across the world that go hungry are in that situation as a direct result of high food prices (FAO, 2009). As prices remain relatively high they are unreachable for many of the world’s poorest people and this, in combination with reduced incomes and employment opportunities because of the economic crisis, significantly reduces the ability of the world’s most vulnerable to access sufficient food (FAO, 2009). Unless careful policies are adopted in the face of the economic crisis the challenges of mounting food shortages and access to food, faced by numerous African countries, could be exacerbated further (ECA, 2009).

## 3.2. National level: Benin.

### 3.2.1. Geography

Map 3.2: Map of Benin and neighbouring countries

[](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?ethylCobjId=605)

Source: Lonely Planet, 2006.

Benin, officially named ‘Republique du Benin’ or the Republic of Benin, is a francophone country in Western SSA*.* The country shares land borders with Nigeria to the east, Togo to the west and Burkina Faso and Niger in the north (map 3.2). Benin is amongst the smallest countries in West Africa with a land mass of only 112,622km2; the greatest distance from north to south is approximately 690km whilst from east to west it is approximately 350km (CIA, 2008). The narrowest point from east to west, at only 121km wide (CIA, 2008), is along Benin’s coastline which borders the Gulf of Guinea (map 3.2).

Geographically, the country, particularly the south, is predominantly flat apart from the central Northern area of the Atakora Mountains where the mountains rarely exceed 600metres.

The north, due to its relative proximity to the Sahara desert, is semi arid and experiences one rainy season from around May or June; the rest of the time, the area is often subject to droughts. By contrast, the south is hot but also humid all year round and experiences two distinct rainy seasons from April to mid-July and from mid-September to late October.

As a result, the south has a more comfortable climate and has a high population density compared to other parts of the country; for this reason, communications and transport links are also better than elsewhere in the country. Porto-Novo, Benin’s second largest city and officially the country’s capital, is located in southern Benin as is Cotonou, Benin’s de facto capital. Cotonou is by far the country’s largest city with a population of approximately 800,000 (Gouvernement du Benin, 2008). The country’s main economic activities are centred on Cotonou and the busy port makes it a trading hub; the seat of government is also located there.

Administratively, Benin is divided into 12 different departments – Alibori, Atakora, Borgou, Donga, Collines, Plateau, Zou, Ouémé, Littoral, Atlantique, Mono and Couffo (map 3.3). These departments are then divided further into 77 communes (map 3.3), which are then split into 546 districts and these are made up of 3747 villages and city neighbourhoods (INSAE, 2003 cited in INRAB, 2007).

### 3.2.2. Economy

Benin has a high level of poverty, particularly outside the main cities; 60% of the total population of 9.1million people live in rural areas. The country is listed as 161 out of 179 in the Human Development Index (UN, 2008) and 37.4% of the total population live below the poverty line (CIA, 2008). Despite improvements in living standards for some Beninese during the 1990s, progress has been extremely slow and considerably not enough to meet the 2015 objectives[[8]](#footnote-8) (INRAB, 2007) and many Beninese households now feel that things are again becoming increasingly difficult (SCRP, 2007).

The economy[[9]](#footnote-9) has grown at a rate of 5% in the past seven years but has been offset by the rapid population growth in the country. In order to try and further expand the rate of growth of the economy Benin is trying particularly to attract increased amounts of foreign investment and put more emphasis on encouraging tourism. Recent estimates suggest that for 18.2million CFA of world wealth, Benin contributes only 0.01% (DAHOUN, 2002 cited in INRAB, 2007) whilst Benin’s GDP is only 0.62% of SSA’s total GDP.

Benin’s economy currently remains relatively underdeveloped (CIA, 2008); it is essentially an agricultural country as the activity is the base of the economy occupying 80% of the active population (INRAB, 2007). The main commodities grown are cassava, beans, yam, rice and corn (CIA, 2008; INRAB, 2007).

Although industry in Benin is still in its early stages, cotton production and textile and palm oil manufacture are vital parts of the economy.

Benin’s primary export overall is cotton though other exports include cashews, shea butter, textiles and palm products – some goods are traded internationally but on the whole Benin’s trade occurs mainly within the West Africa region. It is due to Benin’s lack of natural resources that the country’s export of goods and services is low (table 3.2) and as a result of this many goods must obviously be imported – primary imports are foodstuffs, capital goods and petroleum products thus making the country very vulnerable to price fluctuations of numerous commodities worldwide.

Table 3.2: Table showing key economic indicators for Benin and SSA

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **Benin** | **Sub-Saharan Africa** |
| **GDP ($millions)** | 4,623 | 744,731 |
| **Export of goods and services (% of GDP)** | 13 | 37 |
| **Net aid ($millions)** | 375 | 37,975 |
| **External debt ($billions)** | 1.2 | 195 |

Source: World Bank, 2008; CIA, 2008.

### 3.2.3. Demography

Benin’s population stands at 9.1million people (UN, 2008) with population growth at a rapid 2.977% (CIA, 2009) The population consists of around 40 different ethnicities divided into eight main ethnic minority groups of which the Fon are by far the most significant comprising 39.2% of the population; the Adja are the second largest group making up 15.2% of the population. Due to the French colonial legacy the official language in the country is French but the high numbers of ethnic minority groups means that there are numerous other languages spoken across the country. In the south of the country the main languages are Fon, Yoruba and Mina whilst in the north the most dominant languages are Dendi, Bariba and Ditamari (INRAB, 2007).

Table 3.3: Table showing key demographic indicators for Benin and SSA.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **Benin** | **Sub-Saharan Africa** |
| **Age structure(%)**  **0 – 19years**  **20 – 59years**  **60+** | 55.4  40.7  3.9 | 54.0  41.3  4.7 |
| **Median age (years)** | 17.3 |  |
| **Total fertility rate (children born/woman)** | 5.08 | 5.1 |
| **Life expectancy at birth (years)** | 56 | 50.3 |
| **Rural population (% of total population)** | 60 | 65 |
| **Population growth (%)** | 2.977 | 2.5 |
| **Mortality rate amongst <5s (per 1000)** | 152 | 157 |
| **Malnutrition rate, weight (% children <5)** | 23 | 28 |

Source: CIA, 2008; WDI, 2006.

Table 3.3 presents some key demographic indicators for Benin and puts them in perspective by presenting a comparison with SSA where possible. For most indicators Benin presents better figures than SSA overall – for example, child mortality rates in Benin are slightly lower at 152 per 1000 than the SSA figure of 157 whilst life expectancy at birth is nearly six years higher in Benin than in SSA. Population growth however is approximately 5% higher in Benin than in the region as a whole.

### 3.2.4. Education

Since Benin’s independence from France the country has experienced a number of reforms in order to adapt the education system to the social, political and economic realities of the country. Under the previous Marxist government the quality of the education system was “seriously eroded” and by 1989 the system was in a state of collapse (Fanu, 2007). In 1990 therefore, after the change of regime in Benin, a national conference on education was held and a national policy and strategy was adopted to improve education; the constitution on 11th December 1990 rendered primary school compulsory for all.

Despite recent reforms French colonialism has obviously left its legacy on the Beninese education system: all Beninese education in state operated primary schools is taught in French and the system follows the French educational structure (box 3.1).

In 1998 there were 3773 primary schools throughout Benin with just 290 of those (approximately 8%) operating as private institutions whilst the rest were government run (Fanu, 2007).

Box 3.1:

French schooling system operated in Benin:

**(Pre-) Nursery school:** 2 or 3years (age 2/3 – 5)

**Primary school:** 6years (age 6 – 11) – children graduate from primary school having taken the school leaving certificate (CEP).

CI (Cours d’Initiation)

CP (Cours Preparatoire)

CE1 (Cours Elementaire 1)

CE2 (Cours Elementaire 2)

CM1 (Cours Moyen 1)

CM2 (Cours Moyen 2)

**Junior High School:** 4years (age 12 – 15) – at the end of this cycle students take the BEPC exams.

6e (Sixième)

5e (Cinquième)

4e (Quatrième)

3e (Troisième)

**Senior High School:** 3years (age 16 – 18) – at the end of this cycle the Baccalaureat is taken.

2de (Seconde)

1e (Première)

Term/Tle (Terminale)

‘

A characteristic of the schooling system at primary school level is that there are three different categories of teacher: APEs, contractuels and communautaires (box 3.2).

Box 3.2:

**Teacher levels in Benin:**

Agents Permanents de l’Etat (APE) – professionals who have received their training at a teacher training college and are employed on a permanent basis by the state and consequently are entitled to a pension when they retire and other statutory work entitlements. These teachers are salaried employees of the state.

Contractuels – also professionals who have received official teacher training but are not employed on a permanent basis by the state, only on a contract basis (although these contracts maybe very long term) and as such are not entitled to the benefits that the APEs receive. These teachers are salaried employees of the state.

Communautaires – members of the local, or neighbouring community, who volunteer to help at a school when there is a shortage of teachers. These volunteers receive no official training, only what is organised by the teachers from the local schools who arrange training sessions on a relatively regular basis. Although these volunteers are not salaried by the state the state does provide some money so that these people can be paid a small salary.

The Beninese government has, in recent months, introduced a program to improve the training of communautaire[[10]](#footnote-10) teachers in order to give them official qualifications and enable them to provide a better quality of education to the children and also to receive benefits such as higher salaries and pensions for example for themselves. Clearly however it will take some time for this programme to fully come into effect.

Table 3.4: Table showing key educational indicators for Benin and SSA

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **Benin** | **Sub-Saharan Africa** |
| **Gross total enrolment (% of relevant age groups)**   * **Primary school** * **Secondary school** | 95.9  32.5 | 93.2  28.6 |
| **Literacy, total (% of population over 15 years that can read and write)** | 45 |  |
| **Youth literacy (% of population between ages 15 – 24 years who can read and write)** | 34.7 | 60.3 |
| **Primary school completion rate, total (% of relevant age group)** | 64 | 60 |
| **Student-teacher ratio, primary school** | 44 | 47 |
| **Number of female teachers (% of total teachers) (2004)** | 19.9 | 39.5 |
| **Public current primary education expenditure (% of total current education expenditure)** | 82 |  |
| **Public expenditure on education as % of GNP** | 3.2 | 3.4 |

Source: CIA, 2008; World Bank, 2008.

As table 3.4 shows Benin actually exceeds the SSA average for several indicators such as gross enrolment rates for primary and secondary school and primary school completion rates but nevertheless the indicators remain low. The problems experienced in the past in Benin’s education system can be illustrated in part by the literacy rates amongst the population above the age of 15years witnessed today – 45% (World Bank, 2008): this means therefore that over half of Benin’s adult population is unable to read and write, and according to the RGPH3 (2002 cited in INRAB, 2007) only as little as 27.7% of the population is actually able to read, write and count in French.

Figure 3.1: National campaign billboard, Dogbo

In recent years, as a result of these problems and in line with policies in other African countries, and with donor aid, Benin has made significant efforts in trying to promote education for all children. In order to achieve UPE African countries have been encouraged to pledge their commitment to reaching this goal by expanding primary education facilities and providing free primary education for their

children with support from the donor

Source: Rowett, 2009.

community. (UN, 2008 cited in ECA, 2009). In 2006 the Beninese government became part of this initiative and abolished school fees for all primary school children in EPPs. This initial move has been followed by a big push, co-ordinated with various NGOs operating within the country, to try and promote girls’ primary education hence the huge campaign “Toutes les Filles à l’école” (All Girls to School) (figure 3.1).

Enrolment rates in Benin have considerably improved over recent years: education coverage has increased by more than 50% since 1999 (UNESCO, 2009 cited in ECA, 2009). Nevertheless, numerous “chronic” problems continue to plague the school system in Benin (UNICEF, 2008), problems which, in many cases, are endemic in the majority of developing countries (Ahanhanza et al., 2006) and as a result enrolment rates are still not at universal levels. Furthermore, differences in enrolment statistics demonstrate that the picture may not be so clear: although the World Bank (2008) put gross primary school enrolment rates at 95.9% Plan Benin (2008) quote lower rates of 83% of boys enrolling in primary school and only 57% of girls. In any case, these figures mask important issues that remain entrenched within the system. UNICEF (2009) goes as far as to say that less than 60% of school aged children in Benin ever attend school and amongst those who start attending, only half will finish by completing primary school hence indicating that enrolment alone is not the sole problem but that many other problems plague the system and numerous reasons for low completion rates may be hidden by improving enrolment rates.

Part of this problem may lie with the provision of government education itself. For example, there is a recognised shortage of teachers, particularly female teachers with only 19.9% of total teachers being female (table 3.4), across the country as a whole. In addition, teacher strikes against low pay and poor professional and social conditions last year make obvious that many teachers were extremely unhappy with their working circumstances (Plan, 2008; Guingnido Gaye, 2003).

### 3.2.5. Food Security

70% of Benin’s population lives in rural areas and the majority of this population rely on subsistence farming for their livelihood, particularly in the north where market access is more difficult than in the south due to poor communication links (Bierschenk and de Sardan, 2003). Consequently, the impacts of rising food prices have been particularly severe in southern Benin, where market access is higher, regardless of the social status of the citizens (Plan Benin, 2008). As demand outstrips supply so prices rise and people find it harder, with limited incomes, to buy the foods they need and as a result both buyers and sellers suffer (World Bank, 2009a).

The food security situation has been additionally affected by the rainy season in the south during the past months where floods have destroyed large amounts of land and crops (World Bank, 2009a).

To help the population bear the food security problems, the Beninese Government has taken a set of measures including VAT suspension on some products, creation of a crisis unit on the subject, purchase and sale of maize and rice at low prices and keeping of cement and fuel prices at the level they were before the crisis (Plan Benin, 2008). It must also be mentioned however that Benin’s government has also established some long-term measures in order to try and tackle the food security problems; it has placed food and nutrition security high up on the country’s agenda by including it in the country’s PRSP for example. In the long-term, what is needed to improve the food security situation in the country is the increased mechanisation of agriculture, developing more advanced techniques will allow the country to become increasingly self-sufficient and also produce goods for export (World Bank, 2009a). In the mean time however, as the food price crisis is set to continue through 2009 (FAO, 2008) the state of food security in Benin will remain precarious.

## 3.3. Regional level: Couffo.

Map 3.3: Map of Benin’s departments

### 3.3.1. Geography

Couffo is one of Benin’s twelve departments and is located in the south west corner of the country (map 3.3), on the border with Togo. Within Benin the department is bordered by neighbouring departments Mono, Atlantique and Zou, and is made up of six communes: Aplahoué, Djakotomey, Dogbo, Klouékanmè, Lalo and Toviklin. The department as a whole covers an area of 2,404km2 and experiences two wet seasons and two dry seasons every year with the maximum rainfall experienced annually between 800 – 1,200mm.

BENIN

TOGO

Source: Gouvernement du Benin, 2008.

### 3.3.2. Economy

The general weather conditions in the area favour agriculture and as a result this is the main economic activity alongside animal breeding and fishing; the three activities together constitute 73% of the population’s economic activities in the department. The next most common employment is in the form of commercial activities (13%) and although industry in the area is almost non-existent (INRAB, 2007) there is one cotton factory located in Aplahoué (map 3.4).

### 3.3.3. Demography

Couffo’s location in southern Benin means that, like other departments in the south, it has a high population density. The population total is 524 586 and dramatically more people live in rural as opposed to urban areas: 413,528 people live in rural areas compared to 93,058 people in urban areas (RGPH3, 2007 cited in INRAB, 2007). Reflecting the country’s overall demography, the two main ethnic groups found in Couffo are Adja and Fon although the Adja are by far the most dominant comprising 88.4% of the population and the Fon only 8.3% (INRAB, 2007). As a result, aside from French, these are the two languages most likely to be encountered in the department although other dialects are also used.

The country’s propensity for polygamy[[11]](#footnote-11) is just as evident in Couffo and household sizes are generally large; most households have at least six members and often the family live only in two rooms. The ratio of men to women is one of the poorest in the country with only 87 men to every 100 women compared to the national figures of 94.2 men to every 100 women (INRAB, 2007).

### 3.3.4. Education

As the area is predominantly rural school access can be difficult for some children as many of the villages are very isolated. Overall, there is a large total of 563 EPPs in Couffo and some schools may be found to be located within only a few kilometres of one another (L’enseignement primaire dans le Couffo, 2009). The department has one teacher training college.

Table 3.5: Table showing the number of primary schools in each district in Couffo.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **District** | **Number of primary schools** |
| Aplahoué | 117 |
| Djakotomè | 98 |
| **Dogbo** | **97** |
| Klouékanmè | 88 |
| Lalo | 90 |
| Toviklin | 73 |
| Total | 563 |

Source: Direction Départementale de l’enseignement Maternel et Primaire, 2009.

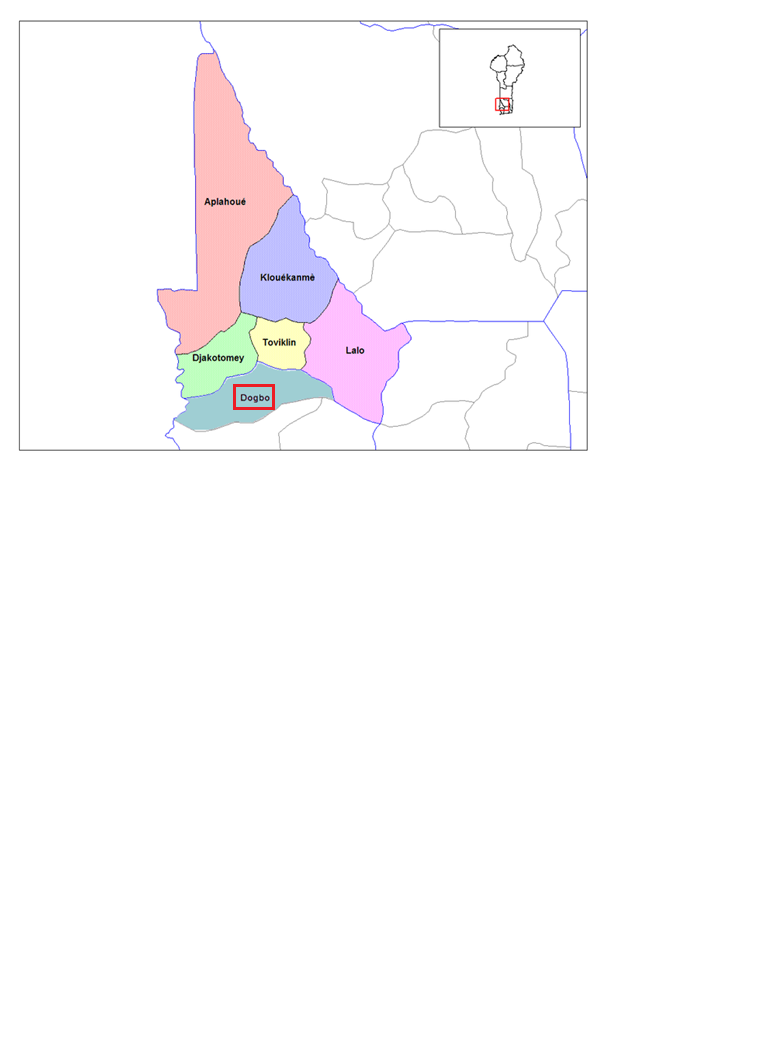
### 3.3.5. Food Security

Within the department of Couffo large areas suffer from food insecurity. The most basic level of food in southern Benin is maize, and, despite the dominance of agriculture in the region, production often falls short of need in Couffo and this consequently leads to cyclical periods of food shortages in the department which occur every year and last at least a month in certain households. As a result of this the department suffers from a higher rate of food shortage than the national average: 22% of households in Couffo against 18.6% at national level (ECVR2, 2001 cited in INRAB, 2007). In addition to this, chronic malnutrition is a severe problem amongst children under five with a prevalence of 28% (ECVR2, 2001 cited in INRAB, 2007).

## 3.4. Local level: Dogbo.

### 3.4.1. Geography

Map 3.4: Map showing Dogbo’s situation amongst the other communes within the department of Couffo



Couffo

Source: Gouvernement du Benin, 2008.

Dogbo is one the six communes within Couffo and lies at the south of the department and therefore borders the neighbouring department of Mono and is bordered to its north by the communes Djakotomey, Toviklin and Lalo (map 3.4). Dogbo itself is made up of 57 villages which are divided amongst seven different districts – Ayomi, Deve, Honton, Lokogohoué, Madré, Tota and Totchangni.

### 3.4.2. Economy

Dogbo’s economy follows the same structure as the economy of Couffo as a whole with the main activity being agriculture. A market is held in Dogbo town every five days and attracts large numbers of people from the surrounding villages, many of whom must walk long distances[[12]](#footnote-12), as women in particular gain an income for their households by selling goods, such as food stuffs for example, at the local market.

### 3.4.3. Demography

The population of Dogbo is 76,947 making it the fourth largest commune of the six that make up the department Couffo.

Table 3.6: Number of people living in Dogbo compared to the other communes in Couffo

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Communes** | **Area (km²)** | Population | | | **Population density/km²** |
| **Male** | **Female** | **Total** |
| Aplahoué | 915 | 54977 | 62011 | 116 988 | 128 |
| Djakotomè | 235 | 45189 | 57543 | 96 732 | 412 |
| **Dogbo** | **308** | **36528** | **40419** | **76 947** | **250** |
| Klouékanmè | 394 | 42794 | 50530 | 93 324 | 237 |
| Lalo | 432 | 36894 | 42791 | 79 685 | 184 |
| Toviklin | 120 | 27668 | 33242 | 60 910 | 508 |
| Total | 2404 | 244 050 | 280 536 | 524 586 | 218 |

Source: RGPH3, 2007 cited in INRAB, 2007.

Dogbo has the highest number of very poor households (the lowest category identified by the INRAB survey) of all other communes with 36.8% of households surveyed falling into that category. Combining this category with the ‘poor’ category it may be said that the majority of households have less than their sufficient needs (64.2%). Dogbo also has a lower number of rich households than any other commune with only 6.6% of households surveyed being classified as ‘rich’ (INRAB, 2007).

### 3.4.3. Education

As table 3.5 shows there are 97 EPPs overall located in Dogbo. Although the commune has only the fourth largest population this is the third highest number of schools in any one commune.

Although the commune is extremely poor Dogbo has the third highest percentage of households where all children have been/are being educated – 28.1%. By contrast however, Dogbo also has the third highest percentage of households where no children have been/are being educated – 21.5% (INRAB, 2007).

### 3.4.4. Food security

Dogbo has very favourable land conditions as the soil is easily workable and it is suitable for the cultivation many different types of crops. As a consequence of this it is subject to demographic pressure as many people want to benefit from the opportunities on the land and this obviously leads to competition and pressure on the land causing problems for farming which can clearly have knock on effects on the food security situation in the commune as the land is degraded (Plan, 2008).

## 3.5. Host organisation: Plan Benin.

Plan is an international NGO located in 48 developing countries around the world with 21 donor branches in total. It is a child-focussed organisation: all of its activities are centred on the rights of the child and working on lifting children out of poverty (Plan, 2009) and children are involved, as far as possible, in Plan’s practices in the field.

Benin is one of the 23 African countries in which Plan operates and the organisation has been located in the country since 1994. Plan Benin was the host organisation for the internship that supported this research. The NGO has three offices throughout the country: the country head office which is located in Cotonou (map 3.2) and two program unit offices which are situated in Atakora, a department in the north of the country (map 3.3), and in Aplahoué in the department of Couffo (map 3.4) where the majority of this research was carried out.

Plan Benin works in over 110 communities benefiting more than 16,000 children (Plan, 2009) and the key focus areas of Plan Benin’s work in the country are:

* “Nutritious food for households,
* Good health practices,
* HIV prevention,
* Promoting rights of the child,
* Quality basic education.” (Plan, 2009)

It is in light of the first and last points on the above list that this research was formulated and carried out. Two projects in particular provided interesting background to my research and some brief information on these projects is presented below.

**Basic Education Program:** Started in 2004 this project is about supporting and enabling children to have access to quality education both through primary and secondary school levels in order to prepare them for a productive life. The specific aims of this project are:

1. For Plan to support affiliated communities to develop their own early childhood centres;
2. For Plan to support partner communities to improve the access of their children to basic education and the quality of the education they receive;
3. For Plan to support community-based education structures;
4. For Plan to give support to local and national Ministry of Education initiatives (Plan Benin, 2008).

**Food and Nutrition Security Program:** Plan’s FNSP started up in Couffo, Benin in 2004 with the general objective to “Improve the durability of income generation within households and moreover to improve the nutritional status of women and children in the department of Couffo”. Under this broad objective a series of specific aims were formulated:

1. Improve the access of women to micro-finance services;
2. Improve group productivity;
3. Improve food and nutrition practices;
4. Increase family livelihoods and decrease post-harvest losses;
5. Improve agricultural production/intensification and diversification;
6. Improve access to information concerning the markets;
7. Improve access of the young to training techniques and professions (Plan Benin, 2007).

Research into this project indicated that a focus on child health and nutrition was important not only at the household level but also in schools. Under the FNSP another project was therefore set up in 2008 – the **School Feeding Project** – with the aim to facilitate access to health and nutrition education and food for children not only at household level but also at school through self-managed nutrition groups in ten villages in the Couffo department. Again, the overall objective was broken down into more specific aims:

1. Increase the number of schools in the program area that meet minimum requirements according to school feeding;
2. Increase the number of children having lunch at school ;
3. Decrease the malnutrition rate of the children at school in the project area;
4. Decrease the rate of dropouts due to lack of food during the school day (Plan, 2009).

# Chapter 4: Methodology

## 4.1. Research questions

In order to answer this research objective the following questions were devised:

1. What are the rates of enrolment, attendance and performance at the department (Couffo) and commune (Dogbo) levels?
2. What is the quality of primary education provided in the research area?
3. What are the levels of enrolment, attendance, drop-out and performance amongst children from poor households in the study?
4. What are the characteristics of the poor households?
5. What are the material characteristics of the house?
6. What are the characteristics of the parents within the household?
7. What are the children’s roles within the households?
8. Which household characteristics have an impact on a child’s primary school enrolment, attendance retake and dropout rates?
9. What is food security and to what extent are households food secure?
10. What perceptions do adults and children have of food security?
11. What experiences do/have households had of food insecurity?
12. What are the consumption characteristics of the household?
13. To what extent does food security impact upon a child’s primary school enrolment, attendance, retake and dropout rates?

In order for this thesis to be fully comprehensive the way in which the research was carried out must be clearly understood. Therefore the research area and the way it was chosen are now presented alongside the research methods – the techniques used to collect the data and why these specific techniques were used. These are described so that the reliability and legitimacy of the results and analysis later discussed may be made clear.

## 4.2. The research area

Initially, Couffo as a department was chosen simply through reasons of convenience – one of Plan Benin’s two program offices is located in Couffo (chapter 3.5) and hence the research there would be easier in terms of practicalities and the research produced would be of more use to the organisation. However, Plan’s office is located in Couffo as the department is one of the poorest in Benin making the area relevant outside the solely practical realm.

Within Couffo, the research area was established using Plan Benin’s Report on Typology of Households (appendix 1 for a summary of this report). From this report the commune of Dogbo was chosen, as it is the commune with the highest number of ‘very poor households’ (the poorest category listed in the report); the 18 villages within this commune, studied in the report, were taken as the research area. The very poor households were chosen as the focus for this study as it was hypothesised that it would be in these households that barriers to primary education would be most evident. Using random sampling (appendix 2) it was established that from the 919 ‘very poor households’ in these 18 villages 209 households should be surveyed to give a fully representative sample (numbers of households surveyed in each village and how these specific households were selected may be seen in appendix 2).

Once in the field however, it became clear that time constraints and practicalities generally meant that the sample size was too large to be effectively carried out. Consequently, dividing everything in the sample by two was agreed so that the sample would still be random and still accurate and reliable but to a lesser degree than had been anticipated. Therefore the overall sample size was reduced to 105 households.

In practice, assessing child performance specifically at the local level, as had been the intention, proved difficult as teachers often did not have accurate records of particular children available and therefore performance rates are only included where possible and do not form part of the general analysis.

## 4.3. Research Methods

* **Secondary data**: Secondary data was collected firstly in the form of a literature study before going to the field in order to gain a prior understanding of the area to be studied, the relevant issues, and a broad knowledge of the topics to be researched.

In addition, documentation was assembled once in Benin; documents from Plan Benin were important to understand the organisation’s role and their actions in the study area, to give information about the situations concerning education and food security in the region from the perspective of Plan Benin and also, importantly, to give access to a solid sampling frame.

Furthermore, the ministry of education was visited in the department of Couffo in order to establish an understanding of the educational situation in the region by looking at figures and the overall structure of the system.

* **Questionnaires:** A household survey took place whereby questionnaires were carried out with 105 households to gain a full picture of the characteristics of the very poor households. These questionnaires were completed with the help of four intermediaries from local villages in Dogbo, who worked as community volunteers and acted as a link between their local community and various NGOs, including Plan Benin. These intermediaries each visited 25 households to complete the questionnaires with one working directly with the researcher to speak to the 25 households and also five more in order fulfil the whole sample size of 105.
* **Interviews:** Interviews were held with people from different groups – head teachers, teachers and parents. These interviewees were randomly chosen on the basis of the household survey; out of the schools attended by children from households within the survey, 12 schools were randomly chosen and head teachers at each of these schools were interviewed and one teacher from one class level was randomly chosen, before the school was visited, to be interviewed. In addition, interviews were carried out with 15 households in order to gain a more depth understanding of the issues raised during the questionnaires.

Interviews with households needed to be carried out with a translator as the majority of the parents did not speak French, or if they did they usually found it easier to speak in their local language and so a translator was vital. With teachers however, the interviews could be carried out in French,

Interviews were held within the households with the parents, or at school, in any available private space, with the teachers and head teachers.

All interviews that took place were semi-structured allowing issues to be explored at leisure and to allow new topics to arise that may not have been previously considered.

* **Focus groups:** In order to gather information from the children themselves, focus groups were organised with ten children chosen randomly from the households surveyed. During these focus groups children’s attitudes towards school was discussed, in an interactive way, alongside their experiences of issues related to food (in)security both at home and at school. Games were played and pictures and diagrams were drawn in order to try and allow children to be open and express their thoughts and feelings on the subjects in question. These focus groups were initially organised at a local site, away from the children’s households, during the weekend but after a pilot run it was established that these groups were more effectively carried out at school where it was easier to control who attended[[13]](#footnote-13). The only drawback to this was that it was sometimes difficult to persuade the teachers not to be present and with the teachers there children seemed inhibited from expressing themselves fully.

During these focus groups it was necessary that a translator was present because although most children could speak at least some French, in many cases not all children were at a sufficient level for the group to be carried out effectively in French and therefore the support of a translator was vital to maximise the potential of the group setting.

* **Observation:** Observation was used at every opportunity; observation helps to give the researcher a fuller understanding of what is being studied. As a consequence, general observation of the surroundings was key both within the households surveyed and at the schools visited. Observation of people was also important during the interviews themselves and also during the focus groups with children – these observations help to give more informed data for the research as different aspects such as behaviour and attitudes can be taken into account.

# Chapter 5: EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT IN THE STUDY AREA

Establishing the educational context in the study area is vital as it helps to make clear the way in which education is being provided to the children in the area as a whole, and more particularly, to the children in this study; it helps provide a back drop to the rest of the research carried out and encourages a clearer comprehension of the educational situation in Dogbo and Couffo more widely.

It is first important to gather figures from the department and commune levels to see how the area compares with national averages so that the area itself may be contextualised and understood within the bigger, national, picture. Furthermore, the education system must itself be looked at – the schools and teachers themselves should be considered to help to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the system in the area. Therefore, the schooling provision in Couffo and in Dogbo will first be given in this chapter, followed by a presentation of the main characteristics of the education system as identified through interviews and observations carried out for this research.

When studying barriers to education much literature identifies problems within the educational structure in developing countries that stand as barriers to children benefiting, fully, or even at all, from primary school education (chapter 2.5.2). These factors present the same barriers to all households, both rich and poor, but the household’s ability to avoid the barriers and their attitudes towards them may differ. For example, rich households may be able to pay to send their child(ren) to a private school to avoid the problems that exist within the state provided educational structure; additionally, parents who see education as very important may consider the problems standing in the way of quality education as more serious than those parents who do not see quality primary education as a priority for their child(ren).

Presenting and considering the issues identified helps to show some of the problems children encounter during their schooling experiences which, especially with interrelation with other issues at the household level, may help to suggest reasons for low schooling rates.

## 5.1. Schooling figures

### 5.1.1. Schooling in Couffo and Dogbo

Table 5.1: Table to show a summary of figures for different geographical levels of study

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Benin** | **Couffo** | **Dogbo** |
| **Number of primary schools** | - | 563 | 97 |
| **Enrolment rate** | 94% | 84.17% | 89.22% |
| **Performance rate** | 54% | 84.23% | 85.4% |

Source: Direction Départementale de l’enseignement Maternel et Primaire, Lokossa, 2009; SCRP, 2007.

Amongst the 563 public primary schools located in the department of Couffo, 97 are situated in the commune of Dogbo. Although this is a large number when the population of Dogbo is only 76,947 as the majority of the Beninese population falls into the 0-19years age category (55.4%) it is clear that the population structure is skewed towards the younger end of the population and hence the demand for primary schools is high.

At 89.22% the overall rate of enrolment in Dogbo is higher than the department average of 84.17% (Direction Départementale de l’enseignement Maternel et Primaire, Lokossa, 2009). The approximate rate of enrolment in primary school for Benin as a whole was identified at 94% in the SCRP (2007) indicating that the rate of enrolment in both Couffo and in Dogbo are markedly lower than the country average. Although the rates are relatively high they are still a significant way from achieving figures of 100% and therefore this highlights the relevance of the results gathered for this study to try and understand some of these reasons behind the figures as they stand.

### 5.1.2. Performance Rates

In 2008 the pass rate amongst children graduating from primary school in the Mono-Couffo[[14]](#footnote-14) department was high at 84.23% whilst in Dogbo specifically the rate was again slightly higher than for the department overall at 85.4% (Direction Départementale de l’enseignement Maternel et Primaire, Lokossa, 2009). For Benin overall the number of children who successfully complete the primary school cycle is significantly lower, at 54% (SCRP, 2007). It is apparent therefore that in Dogbo and Mono-Couffo overall the numbers are dramatically higher than the country average[[15]](#footnote-15). None of these figures indicate the number of children who dropped out before reaching their final exams nor do they show the number of attempts a child took before finally graduating from primary school. As a result theses figures are presented only to help to give a broader sketch of the situation as it currently stands.

Amongst the schools studied in this research performance rates were relatively high across the board (table 5.2) with the highest achieving school, EPP Segehoumey, having recently received a commendation for its results as the second best amongst all of Benin’s EPPs.

Table 5.2: Table to show performance rates[[16]](#footnote-16) at each school studied

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **School (EPP)** | **Performance rates 2008 (%)** |
| **Adandro-Akodé** | 97 |
| **Aisso** | 91 |
| **Allada** | 54 |
| **Botagbé** | 86 |
| **Fifadji** | 65 |
| **Gbenonjou II** | 48 |
| **Godohou** | 80 |
| **Madjré-Centre** | 78 |
| **Midangbé** | 98 |
| **Segba** | - [[17]](#footnote-17) |
| **Segehoumey** | 100 |
| **Tchoulehoudji** | 97 |

Source: Survey 2010

According to interviews with both parents and teachers, performance rates within each school were recognised by parents to demonstrate the quality of the education provided at the particular school and hence influenced some parents in where they sent their children to school (box 5.1).

Box 5.1: Effects of high performance rates on enrolment

“Children travel a long way to come here...sometimes up to 5km because parents see that the output here, the work, is well done and at the end of the year almost all children pass their CEP. Do you know, in the four years since we have started to present pupils for CEP we have not presented less than a 97% pass rate? In fact the mayor of Dogbo and the director of education for the department congratulated us and gave us a prize of recognition. The parents see that and so more and more want to send their children to Tchoulehoudji.”

Head teacher, EPP Tchoulehoudji.

“I want my daughter to do well in school. We heard that the results from her school [Aisso] are the best and I wanted my daughter to have that. It is further away than other places...she could go to school closer but they are worse...I want her to go there so she succeeds.”

Parent interviewee, Allada.

This indicates that although quality may not be directly influencing whether or not a child enrols in school in the ways that many suggest is the case (Michaelowa, 2001; Lincove, 2009), it certainly may have an impact on where children enrol in school.

## 5.2. School Infrastructure

### 5.2.1. School accessibility

Amongst the twelve schools surveyed the locations varied dramatically with some schools having very central locations at the heart of large villages with others being more peripheral. Despite there being 97 schools across Dogbo the remote locations in which many villages are situated means that there are still numerous children who must travel long distances to get to school.

Table 5.3: Table showing time taken to get to school by children from different households

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Time taken to school (minutes)** | **Number of households** |
| **0 – 15** | 36 |
| **16 – 30** | 22 |
| **31 – 45** | 9 |
| **46 – 60** | 16 |
| **61 – 75** | 0 |
| **76 – 90** | 5 |

Source: Survey 2010

In 18 households children must travel 30 – 35minutes to get to school and this is the highest number of households for any five minute interval. Grouping intervals together however into blocks of 15minutes (table 5.3) indicates that in the majority of households (36) surveyed the children had to travel between 0 and 15minutes to get to primary school. The next most common category was households were children had to travel between 15 and 30minutes to get to school. Further to that there remain 30 households where children must travel more than 30minutes to school and in 16 of those households children travel between 45 and 60minutes to school.

Amongst the children interviewed and worked with, the majority stated that they had to travel “too far” to get to school – although this statement is impossible to quantify it does demonstrate that for many children getting to school is considered an issue.

In households where the children must travel between 45 and 60minutes to reach school it appears that the largest numbers of children do not attend school – six. This means that in nearly half the total number of households the children do not always attend school where as for the shorter distance categories the figures are much lower – for example amongst the 36 households where children must travel up to 15minutes to get to school only two children do not attend school. So overall it may be said that the further the distance from school a household is the higher the proportion of households where children do not always attend school – the figures are low however so the relationship cannot be definitively identified.

There does not appear to be any indication of a relationship between the distance that children must travel to school and other educational factors (enrolment, retake and drop-out).

### 5.2.2. School buildings and facilities

It is apparent that similar infrastructural problems plague all the schools researched. However, different schools have received different levels of support from the government and from various NGOs and as a consequence of this, despite the fact that each school visited was an EPP, the quality and conditions of the schools themselves varied significantly as did the degree to which schools experienced the different problems.

Electricity:

Each of the twelve schools visited operates without any access to electricity but this was not highlighted as a problem – as one teacher (EPP Midangbé) said *“we have a lot more immediate problems to solve first”*. This helps to demonstrate the extent of the problems faced by schools across the study area and suggests the dramatic differences in education provision in developed and developing countries.

Classrooms:

Photo 5.1: A classroom at EPP Segehoumey.

In all twelve schools lack of, and the poor quality of, classrooms was cited as a prominent problem. These two issues are interlinked and schools (eg. EPP Adandro-Akodé and EPP Segehoumey) with limited classroom space often have these issues exacerbated by poor quality classrooms which are in poor states of repair (photo 5.2). Lack of space can mean that classes are taught outside (photo 5.1) and in severe weather conditions this is obviously not possible and as a consequence classes must be abandoned. The same may be said for classrooms that are in poor conditions (photo 5.2) as they are unable to withstand strong rainstorms for example and then the same problem results. These disruptions can negatively impact on children’s education (Huisman and Smit, 2009; chapter 2.5.2).

Photo 5.2: A classroom at EPP Madjré-Centre

Latrines:

Latrines are obviously a key need for all schools. Only one school, EPP Segba, had no latrines at all but in all other schools the number of latrines available was insufficient and the quality of those available was often poor (box 5.2)

Box 5.2: Latrines in the schools studied

“There are some latrines but they are already out of order...they are in a bad state”.

Head teacher, EPP Botagbé.

“We have six classes and over 300 pupils...the number of latrines is insufficient”.

Teacher, EPP Godohou.

“We have latrines but not enough...and we have a problem with locals who come at night and use the latrines and leave them in a bad state...broken and dirty...”.

Head teacher, EPP Midangbé.

Photo 5.3: Latrines at EPP Midangbé (broken on far right)



However, the lack of latrines and the resultant use of same-sex latrines in schools does not appear, in Dogbo, to be the cultural barrier it is cited to be in much literature on the subject (Huisman and Smits, 2009; Michaelowa, 2001; chapter 2.5.2). At no level in this research was this identified as an issue that would impede a child’s enrolment in school or affect their attendance.

### 5.2.3. School materials

Government policy in Benin is to provide an adequate number of text books to all primary schools in the country[[18]](#footnote-18) so in theory therefore every school should have enough text books for the number of pupils in the school. In practice however this is not always the case. In the majority of schools (eight) text books were not a significant issue: *“I can make no complaints concerning text books, we are very well provided for....*[because of the state]*”* (Head teacher, EPP Aisso). However, in other cases text books were one of the most significant problems highlighted, resulting in two distinct impacts. Firstly, a lack of text books means that children in those schools do not always have access to a text book or must share between large groups which can then mean that the quality of education the teacher is providing becomes jeopardised, (Lloyd et al., 2008; Michaelowa and Wittmann, 2007; chapter 2.5.2). In order to combat this aforementioned problem, teachers explained that they were often forced to resort to requesting children to make photocopies from the books for example (box 5.3) which is often costly for very poor households and simply serves to add to the list of school expenditures they may well be unable to afford again causing negative effects on a child’s schooling (Iyamu and Obiunu, 2006; chapter 2.5.3).

Box 5.3: Text books

“In some cases the text books are sufficient but in other cases they are insufficient.....we are sometimes obliged to ask children to make photocopies in order to be able to work with the children properly.”

Teacher, EPP Allada.

Simple classroom observations and interviews with children and teachers demonstrated a shortage of desks and benches in the majority of schools (box 5.4).

Box 5.4: Classroom characteristics

“Amongst 300 children we have only 60 desks”.

Head teacher, EPP Godohou.

“In this class we have no desks...it’s not good...the children must sit on the floor...The school had desks made for other classes but the numbers were not sufficient for everybody.”

Teacher, EPP Madjré-Centre.

Children are often forced to share desks between large groups or sit on the floor during lessons (box 5.4). Such a situation clearly has a negative influence on the quality of schooling with children less able to concentrate when having to share small spaces with others or having to sit uncomfortably on the floor (Iyamu and Obiunu, 2009; chapter 2.5.2).

Children themselves made clear that smaller necessities, often not identified by teachers, were also often lacking such as chalk for example. It therefore became evident that schools lack facilities across the spectrum from the large infrastructural needs down to the basic classroom essentials.

## 5.3. Classroom realities

### 5.3.1. Teacher characteristics

Teaching appears to be a very male dominated profession in Dogbo – amongst the twelve schools visited, numbering 89 teachers, only 11 were female and all head teachers were male. However, despite the impact that such a situation can have on children due to girls’ preference for a female (chapter 2.5.2) in this research it was only highlighted by a limited number of teachers and not by pupils themselves or by parents. This demonstrates either that the impacts are less in Dogbo than literature (Michaelowa and Wittman, 2007) might suggest or that the impacts of the situation are more subtle, and will be more evident over time and through the emergence of girls’ expectations for their futures.

Of the three teacher types within the Beninese school system (chapter 3.2.4) the smallest group within the schools surveyed here was the ‘APEs’: only 23 out of the 89 teachers fell into this category. Amongst the remaining teachers, 32 were ‘contractuels’ but the largest group comprised 34 ‘communautaires’. The majority of teachers teaching children in the schools surveyed therefore were not fully trained.

The schools studied however did not only suffer from low numbers of fully trained teachers but also from low numbers of teachers overall. Of the 12 schools researched four were experiencing a shortage of teachers (table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Numbers of classes and teachers in schools studied

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **School name (EPP)** | **Number of classes in theory** | **Number of teachers/actual number of classes** |
| **Adandro-Akodé** | 11 | 9 |
| **Aisso** | 6 | 6 |
| **Allada** | 5 | 5 |
| **Botagbé** | 6 | 6 |
| **Fifadji** | 6 | 6 |
| **Gbenondjou** | 12 | 12 |
| **Godohou** | 6 | 4 |
| **Madjre-centre** | 12 | 10 |
| **Midangbé** | 11 | 11 |
| **Segba** | 4 | 4 |
| **Segehoumey** | 12 | 10 |
| **Tchoulehoudji** | 6 | 6 |

Source: Survey 2010

### 5.3.2. Classroom characteristics

The teacher shortages demonstrated above impact upon class sizes overall. The lack of teachers meant that some classes had to be merged – in three cases this was in the schools where there were parallel year groups so that although the classes were large the children were, theoretically at least, at the same learning standards. In the other case where this occurred, the two merged classes were two different year groups placing an extra strain on the teacher and making provision of an effective curriculum a challenge.

The average class size observed ranged between 30 and 60 students with the largest class size observed standing at a total of 94 students (a significantly anomalous figure) and the smallest at 24. As a result of this a significant number of teachers were left with class sizes of over 50 students.

## 5.4. Conclusion

Physical classroom realities are seen as very significant in much of the literature concerning barriers to education (Dembélé and Lefoke, 2007; Hoot et al., 2004; Michaelowa, 2001). Although the statistical relationship between these different aspects of school infrastructure and children’s schooling cannot be established from this research it is clear, nevertheless, that infrastructural problems are faced by all schools. Despite the fact that this research does not make it possible to measure the effects of the educational context on children’s schooling an understanding of the key issues is, nevertheless, vital.

**Chapter 6: EDUCATIONAL RESULTS IN THE STUDY AREA**

In order to enable a measurement to be taken of education in an understandable way ‘education’ had to be quantified and was therefore divided into four separate categories (as shown in the conceptual model in chapter 1.4). Each of these categories were thought to be important components of education considering the focus of this study. The four categories identified were enrolment, attendance, retake and dropout rates as it was considered that these were key components of education and would be possible to quantify; together then the results would give an overall understanding of education and other independent variables could be measured against these four dependent variables together comprising ‘education’ in this case. The results from each of the four categories produced from work at both the household and the school level are presented below. The information gathered at each level did, in some cases, differ somewhat but overall looking at ‘education’ as split up in this way allowed the concept to be more clearly researched and understood.

## 6.1. Enrolment

For this study, enrolment was taken as the number of children of eligible primary school age and beyond who had been enrolled in primary schooling within a household. Not all of the children had to be currently in primary school education rather the question was posed *“Amongst all of your children at or over primary school commencing age how many are/have enrolled in primary schooling”*. A picture was therefore gained of the number of children, amongst all the children within each particular household, who had either been enrolled in primary school previously, when at the appropriate age, or who were currently enrolled in primary school. Children under the age of six were not considered in this question as this is below the age of primary school enrolment (chapter 3.2.4 for the schooling system used in Benin).

Table 6.1: Frequency table to show school enrolment[[19]](#footnote-19)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Proportion of children at school in household** | **Number of households** |
| 0 - 0.24 | 3 |
| 0.25 – 0.49 | 3 |
| 0.50 – 0.74 | 10 |
| 0.75 – 0.99 | 3 |
| 1.0 | 80 |
| Missing data | 0 |

Source: Survey 2010

This table (table 6.1) shows that in the vast majority of households (80) all children are/have been enrolled in school. Nevertheless, enrolment is by no means universal; there were 16 households that indicated that not all their children enrolled in primary school. Of this number, there were three households where none of the children in the household were/had been enrolled in primary school. Although this figure is a very small proportion of the total number of households surveyed it is clearly important to highlight this fact that although, across most households visited, it appears that enrolment rates are high, certainly higher than expected, this does not mean all children in all households are enrolling in school.

From the school perspectives, results indicate that enrolment rates overall are extremely high (table 6.2). School intakes are getting to, in some schools, almost *“unmanageable levels”* (teacher EPP Adandro-Akodé) and although four teachers attributed this to the increased emphasis on education across the country rather the majority (11) identified the fact that large families are a common issue (box 6.1).

The evidence of high enrolment rates may be observed very clearly: class sizes are extremely large meaning that in some cases it is necessary for one school to divide and become a composite of two schools so that each year group has two classes within the same school complex – five of the twelve schools visited were made up of two parallel school groups (table 6.2).

Table 6.2: Table to show total number of pupils in each school studied

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **School (EPP)** | **Group A** | **Group B** | **Total of pupils in school** | **Boys** | **Girls** |
| **Adandro-Akodé** | 156 | 214 | 340 | 184 | 186 |
| **Aisso** |  |  | 193 | 95 | 98 |
| **Allada** |  |  | 286 | 150 | 136 |
| **Botagbé** |  |  | 224 | 123 | 101 |
| **Fifadji** |  |  | 204 | 108 | 96 |
| **Gbenonjou II** | 218 | 215 | 433 | 207 | 226 |
| **Godohou** |  |  | 313 | 167 | 146 |
| **Madjre-Centre** | 130 | 152 | 282 | 152 | 130 |
| **Midangbé** | 279 | 261 | 540 | 288 | 252 |
| **Segba** |  |  | 152 | 84 | 68 |
| **Segehoumey** | 290 | 310 | 600 | 313 | 287 |
| **Tchouleoudji** |  |  | 294 | 146 | 148 |

Source: Survey 2010

Box 6.1: High fertility rates in Dogbo

“There are many schools here [in Dogbo]. We create schools because here we reproduce a lot and it’s too much! A woman becomes pregnant and as soon as she gives birth she becomes pregnant again...it’s like that!

We need to regulate that, we need rules,...saying that each family should have only two children.

But parents want to make a reserve – they want children who can work for them and look after them...Because of that we’re forced to create more and more schools with large numbers of pupils.

It’s difficult for teachers...”

Head teacher, EPP Midangbé.

“We have very many pupils, our school keeps growing all the time. Why?...well there are so many children...and now more children come to school than before. It’s difficult to deal with such large numbers sometimes.”

Teacher, EPP Gebononjou II.

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It is apparent then that enrolment rates are generally high – in the majority of households all eligible children are enrolled in school and the schools themselves are experiencing rising enrolment rates; this is all clearly extremely positive. However as Bowden (2002: 406 in Desai and Potter) and Mertaugh et al (2009) warned it is important not to focus only on this aspect of education as it can easily mask other issues. High figures for school enrolment does not mean necessarily mean that many children amongst those will stay in school for example, hence the importance of looking at other aspects of education and realising where all the problems lie.

## 6.2. Attendance

Attendance was researched using the clarification that a child who ‘always’ attended school also included the children who had experienced unavoidable absences from school due to ill health for example; those that did not always attend included children who were required to take absences from school due to the need to work or help their parents for example, absences that could be avoided in an ideal situation.

Table 6.3: Frequency table to show school attendance

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Children to school | | |
|  | Yes | No | Missing data |
| Number of households | 82 | 7 | 11 |

Source: Survey 2010

As table 6.3 demonstrates, in by far the majority of households (82) parents said that their children had 100 per cent attendance at school. Only 7 households reported that the children did not attend school all the time. This question had a higher non-response rate than others with 11 cases of missing data; of course there are various explanations possible here but it could indicate that parents were less willing to respond to this question than to others potentially unwilling to reveal that children did not attend school at all times (Bujra, 2006 in Sumner and Tribe, 2008).

Data gathered on attendance rates differed somewhat between the household and school level: the problem of attendance appeared to be more recognised by the schools than by parents themselves. Even in schools however attendance rates were not immediately mentioned as a specific problem by teachers spoken to. Records were kept by head teachers as to the number of students enrolled in the school overall and also concerning the number of pupils dropping out of school each year but the more habitual records of child attendance were somewhat less regulated so accurate data collection here was difficult. However, when the subject of attendance was discussed in more detail during interviews with teachers several significant issues were mentioned; in some cases these were issues that were relevant at all times whilst others were factors that came into play only at certain times of the year (such as harvest time) or during certain conditions (extreme weather conditions for example) (box 6.2).

Box 6.2: School attendance

“We do have problems with attendance for some pupils – students are sometimes required to help in the fields of their parents, when parents cannot do it themselves or cannot find others to help. Or if mother or father is ill they are needed to stay at home and help. Sometimes children fall ill and must be absent and stay at home whilst they follow their own care to get better...”

Head teacher, EPP Botagbé.

“There are times when some children are not at school – some children who live further away for example do not come to school when there is a lot of rain, or sometimes if it is very hot they will stay at home. With some children their attendance is not reliable; they will come when there are not other things to detain them at home...when they are required at home for example they may not come to school...”

Teacher, EPP Botagbé.

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From the information available, attendance rates overall tend to be relatively high. The majority of households maintain that their children attend school all the time and schools do not seem to have severe problems with low attendance although there are some issues identified by teachers although these are relatively isolated cases rather than systematic problems with attendance levels. The indication is therefore that, generally, once children are enrolled in school they do tend to attend on a regular basis when it is possible.

## 6.3. Rates of drop-out

At the household level the rates of abandon were recorded as the number of children in each household who had dropped out of school at primary school level.

Table 6.4: Frequency table to show rates of abandon

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Number of children abandoning school | Number of households |
| 0 | 58 |
| 1 | 18 |
| 2 | 10 |
| 3 | 4 |
| Missing data | 10 |

Source: Survey 2010

As table 6.4 demonstrates by far the majority of households did not have any children who had abandoned school (58) but the numbers of households where a child/children had abandoned school, although quite low, were by no means insignificant. There were 18 households in which one child had abandoned school, in 10 households two children had abandoned school but there were only four households where three children had abandoned school. In total therefore in 32 households at least one child had abandoned school and this demonstrates a significant proportion of all households surveyed, almost one third.

The overall rates of abandon amongst the different schools themselves varied significantly (see table 6.5). In two schools (EPP Madjre-Centre and EPP Midangbé) rates of dropout in the past year had been high with between 15 and 20 pupils dropping out. In the cases where dropout rates were noteworthy the difference between the numbers of boys and girls dropping out was generally minimal. In the majority of schools however dropout rates did not seem to be an area of concern, with so few pupils, if any, dropping out each year it could not be identified as an issue in itself (box 6.3).

Box 6.3: Drop-out rates

“The rate of dropout is very low, very low; with the increasing awareness [of the importance of primary education] now the rates are very low. And with the effects of free primary education it really makes the dropout rates very weak.”

Teacher, EPP Godohou.

“Pupils do not often dropout of the school. Students and their parents like the school so they stay...”

Head teacher, EPP Tchouleoudji.

Table 6.5: Table to show rates of school abandonment

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **School (EPP)** | **Rate of abandonment[[20]](#footnote-20)** |
| **Adandro-Akodé** | 12 |
| **Aisso** | 4 |
| **Allada** | 3 |
| **Botagbé** | 3 |
| **Fifadji** | 1 |
| **Gbenonjou II** | 9 |
| **Godohou** | 2 |
| **Madjre-Centre** | 15 |
| **Midangbé** | 20 |
| **Segba** | 0 |
| **Segehoumey** | 6 |
| **Tchoulehoudji** | 1 |

## Source: Survey 2010

The question of school abandonment appears to be a larger problem within households than within schools themselves. At the household level it is relatively common for a household to have at least one child who has abandoned primary school at some stage which counteracts, in some ways, the positive impacts of high enrolment rates.

It is interesting to note that, within schools, the differences between the numbers of boys and girls who dropped out or school is minimal which contradicts literature (Michaelowa, 2001; Handa, 1999) that suggests girls are more likely to be vulnerable to abandoning school than boys.

## 6.4. Retake rates

Retake rates, at the household level, were taken as the number of children in each household who had had to retake a year at primary school due to not passing their year, for any reason.

Table 6.6: Frequency table to show retake rates

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Number of children retaking | Number of households |
| 0 | 57 |
| 1 | 23 |
| 2 | 4 |
| 3 | 1 |
| Missing data | 15 |

Source: Survey 2010

In the majority of households (57) no children had had to retake years at school (table 6.6). All the same, in a high number of households (23) one child within the household had retaken at some point but the number of households where any more than one child had dropped out is dramatically lower: in only four households have two children had to repeat a year in school and in only one household were there three children that had had to retake, and this was the highest category: no households had more than three children who had retaken a school year. In total therefore just under a third of households have encountered the problem of retake rates which is a significant proportion of the households surveyed.

School records of the numbers of children in each year group having to retake the year showed relatively low figures and on the whole the numbers of boys and girls retaking were similar. It is noticeable however that there were no schools which had zero retake rates across all years but rather was a problem experienced in all different age groups.

These results show that children having to retake remains a current problem, again particularly recognised at the household level. It is also notable that it is an issue across all schools and across all years, even if the numbers are low it remains a recurring issue.

## 6.5. Conclusion

Overall it is apparent that despite high enrolment and attendance rates problems remain in other areas. It is therefore important to focus not only on getting children into school but also on maintaining children in the school system as long as possible and helping them to learn as effectively as they can so as to allow them to efficiently complete their schooling. Understanding the reasons behind these issues is key in helping to counteract them and an attempt to establish a form of understanding is presented in the following chapters.

# Chapter 7: CHARACTERISTICS OF POOR HOUSEHOLDS AND THEIR IMPACTS ON CHILDREN’S SCHOOLING

In a general sense, considering children’s family backgrounds helps to give an understanding of where they come from and can therefore help to give a different perspective from just speaking to a child in the school setting. It is necessary to realise the conditions in which children live at home, what issues they encounter within the household and what the dynamics are at work in the environments in which they live. More specifically for this research, a consideration of the household characteristics is essential as it allows conclusions to be drawn as to the impacts, positive or negative, that these characteristics can have on a child’s schooling.

Fully appreciating household characteristics means considering many different aspects within the household itself mainly based on those most important characteristics identified, from literature on the subject, as having an impact on children’s schooling. In this way, a complete picture can be constructed of the living conditions within a household; therefore, in this research, material aspects must be considered alongside aspects of the household members themselves and what their roles are within their household. Therefore in this chapter the different household characteristics are presented and each is then followed by an evaluation of the way in which these different aspects impact, or not, upon various areas of children’s schooling.

## 7.1. Households

### 7.1.1. Household structure

The average household size in the villages surveyed was between four and ten whilst seven households numbered between 15 and 20 members. The maximum household size was 26 and in all but three cases these households are headed by the father. As the frequency table (figure 7.1) shows the highest number of households (16) had four members whilst the next most common household size was eight members. These figures overall indicate that although large household sizes are not uncommon smaller households also occurred more frequently than was expected with by far the majority of household (63) having eight members or less. Given the practice of polygamy it is perhaps surprising that the average household size is not larger as most men take more than one wife and it would therefore be expected that there might more household members on average[[21]](#footnote-21) (Elbedour et al., 2002).

Table 7.1. Frequency table showing number of household members.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Household size (members) | Frequency |
| 1 – 3 | 8 |
| 4 – 6 | 36 |
| 7 – 9 | 23 |
| 10 – 12 | 5 |
| 13 – 15 | 4 |
| 16 – 18 | 5 |
| 19 – 21 | 2 |
| 22 – 24 | 0 |
| 25 – 27 | 1 |
| Missing data | 9 |

Source: Survey 2010

Different aspects of household structure, for a range of reasons, are recognised to have an impact on a child’s schooling (Michaelowa, 2001; Huisman and Smits, 2009; Iyamu and Obiunu, 2006; Glick and Sahn, 2000). Certainly it is apparent from this research that some aspects of household structure are important to children’s education although perhaps not in the manner most commonly identified in literature. As the majority of households numbered less than eight members it is difficult to fully understand whether or not enrolment is lower in larger households as Lloyd et al. (2009) and Glick and Sahn (2002) suggest. In the minority of households with larger than eight members enrolment figures are good – in none of these households do no children attend school. With a more extensive number of large households however it might be more possible to discover whether or not these results are anomalous. In the case of this research the results demonstrate that enrolment rates are high across the board and that household size does not appear to be an influencing factor.

In the large majority of households (56) no children had dropped out of school (as discussed in chapter 6.3). Again, contrary to the evidence presented in literature (Hunt, 2008) it is most common in smaller households, households with fewer than eight members, that at least one child will abandon school than it is in larger households where very low numbers of children appear to drop out of school but again this could be attributed to the low numbers of very large households surveyed.

An issue of household structure that can have a bearing upon a child’s schooling that was picked up at the interview stage, but not during the surveys, is if children are not living with their parents. If a child is not living within a ‘typical’ household structure with his/her parents but rather with extended family for example, this can make schooling difficult for the child. This issue is particularly highlighted in literature by Iyamu and Obiunu (2009) who explain that children are often forced to shoulder more responsibility when away from their parents. This was supported by a handful of cases in this research. It appears that the situation is not extremely common but when it does arise these children are often forced to take on more tasks and duties than they would were they are living with their parents and consequently their schooling suffers; living with other family members and needing to care for these relatives puts a strain on a child generally and on child’s school attendance, and in the longer run increases the chances of retaking classes and abandoning school altogether (box 7.1).

Box 7.1: A primary school child’s experience of living with her aunt.

“I am with my Aunt and it is difficult. I have no one to help me with my studies and I must stay at home to take care of my Aunt when she needs me. Even to buy school supplies it is me myself who must find the money, my Aunt does not have money to help me and so school is very hard...I don’t know [what will happen in the future]...”

Leocadie, 12years (EPP Adandro-Akodé).

It is clear therefore that there are certain aspects of household structure that can have a bearing on a child’s schooling in some form. A child’s position and role within the household in which they live can affect their opportunities for schooling. However, from these results it is not clear that household size in itself affects any area of education but a larger survey with a higher number of large households might help to better establish this more definitively.

### 7.1.2. Household Wealth[[22]](#footnote-22)

Household wealth is recognised by many authors (Iyamu and Obiunu, 2006; Hunt, 2008; Huisman and Smits, 2009) as a significant determinant of a child’s school enrolment. Although school fees for primary school attendance are no longer a requirement in Benin (chapter 3.2.4) the other additional costs of schooling are nevertheless an issue amongst the majority of the households spoken to. This is emphasised by Lincove (2009) who explains that although school fees may no longer be a problem this does not mean that the financial burden of education is removed from parents altogether as other factors remain. Therefore, children from households with higher socio-economic resources are more likely to be in school as the costs of education are likely to be less of a barrier for wealthier families and opportunity costs (chapter 2.5.3) are also likely to be less important (Huisman and Smits, 2009). As a result, household wealth is an important characteristic to consider although it is a difficult concept to effectively assess. An effort has been made to do so in this research by considering different aspects that might represent a household’s wealth (for example number of fields owned). In this way an attempt to understand the full spectrum of different characteristics could be made in order to try and understand the full picture as far as possible in respect to households’ wealth.

7.1.2.a. Income

Table 7.2. Frequency table to show household income (points based).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Income (points) | Number of households |
| 0 – 3 | 24 |
| 4 – 7 | 36 |
| 8 – 11 | 22 |
| 12 – 15 | 12 |
| 16 – 19 | 3 |
| 20 – 23 | 1 |
| 24 – 27 | 0 |
| 28 – 31 | 1 |

Source: Survey 2010

The majority (70) of households had a points total of eight or below indicating that these households are extremely poor and own little, if anything, in the way of land, transport or amenities. Above this point there are a relatively low number of households and it is significant that just one household appears to be notably better off than all others, with an anomalously high points total of 26, as on the whole few households have more than 12 points. Overall therefore it is clear that almost all households considered in this survey are extremely poor and this is in spite of the other information gathered from the survey where 22 households stated that their income had increased over the past three years (the majority, 77 households, said that their income had either stayed the same or decreased). This suggests that peoples’ levels of income are so low that even if they increase slightly the household is likely to still remain within the ‘very poor’ category. It is clear from the information then that even within the category ‘very poor’ there is a range of wealth levels and it is for this reason that the survey incorporated questions concerning household ownership of land and modes of transport and other material possessions in addition to questions about household amenities and facilities in order to establish as comprehensive an answer as possible for each household. It is important to record the fact that six households had zero income points therefore indicating that they had none of the material wealth that was taken into consideration – land, livestock or amenities such as water and electricity – demonstrating the particularly extreme poverty that plague some households.

As almost all families had relatively similar levels of wealth it is difficult to distinguish the differences in impact upon schooling in any area. In four of the six households with zero income points all children enrolled in school and only one of those households stated that none of the children were enrolled in school. Furthermore, four households stated that their children always attended school (two households had no data for this question) whilst no households said that children had abandoned school or had had to retake. This is contrary to what might be expected: it would be hypothesised that households with lower income would be likely to encounter more problems with schooling (chapter 2.5.3) but this information indicates that those households surveyed with the lowest wealth have similar experiences to those who are slightly better off. Furthermore, the figures for those households with over 20 points remain similar – in one household all children are enrolled in school whilst in the other the majority of children are enrolled in school. In both households children attend school at all times and no children have abandoned or retaken.

These results indicate that in this way household wealth appears to have little bearing on education as all households appear to have little and wealth and therefore similar experiences.

7.1.2.b. Finances

In this study, although schooling costs do not constitute the main body of any household’s expenditure[[23]](#footnote-23) the smaller necessities (such as school books, school bags, uniform and stationery) are costs that some households are unable to always afford on top of the households essentials. This is supported by information from both teachers and children: several (six) teachers commented on the difficulty often faced of giving lessons to children who do not have the correct equipment for school (box 7.2) whilst both children and teachers emphasised the potential embarrassment children face at not having the correct equipment, a concern that appears to be little explored in the literature studied. During the group work with children the majority stated that lack of necessary equipment was a problem at some point whilst some even stated that they would rather skip school than attend without the correct and necessary materials (box 7.2). This factor can therefore obviously impact on attendance rates – when parents are unable to sufficiently equip their children to go to school they themselves will not stop their children going to school, rather it seems to be a decision made by the children who, in some cases, would rather not have to attend school in such a situation and in this case therefore attendance obviously suffers. Clearly this is an affliction that most affects the poorest households as they are the group most likely to be unable to support their children in obtaining the school necessities required.

Box 7.2: Lack of school materials

“Without the necessary equipment it is difficult – what’s worse is that some children have and some do not so they are not equal. We try to provide for all the children but at the same time we need to be fair. Normally we manage but it is difficult when not all the children have what they need.”

Teacher, Adandro-Akodé.

“I don’t have pencils, I don’t have books...[because of that] I don’t want to come here all the time...”.

Pupil, Madjre-Centre.

“...we need to buy pencils and paper, and bags, and sometimes the children’s books too...it is a lot, at some times it is too much and the children must go without and wait until we can get what they need...that can take a bit of time...”

Father, Aisso.

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Household wealth seems to have less of a direct impact than was hypothesised with rates of enrolment, attendance, abandon and retake seeming to be relatively similar across all households, regardless of wealth. More indirectly however parents’ ability to properly equip their children for school seems to have an impact on a child’s willingness to attend to school and additionally the teachers’ ability to provide the best education they can.

## 7.2. Parent’s characteristics

### 7.2.1. Parent’s education

Table 7.3: Frequency table to show number of mothers and fathers who have received an education.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Father educated | | | Mother educated | | |
|  | Yes | No | Missing data | Yes | No | Missing data |
| Number of households | 34 | 65 | 1 | 12 | 87 | 1 |

Source: Survey 2010

As figure 7.6 shows, parent’s education levels across the households surveyed were relatively low. The majority of mothers had not received any level of education in the past (87). Mothers who had received some level of education were significantly in the minority with only 12 mothers stating that they had been to school to some level and amongst these, seven had reached secondary school level whilst only two had completed the system altogether. 14 of the 34 fathers who had been educated had reached secondary school although again very few of them had actually completed the school system fully. This information indicates how important it is for past patterns of behaviour to be changed and for educational enrolment and school completion to be increased today in order to enhance the futures of young people – the majority of the adult population amongst these very poor households are uneducated or only very basically educated and for their children to go further things must change.

Much previous research (Huisman and Smits, 2008; Michaelowa, 2001; Handa, 1999; Glick and Sahn, 2000) suggests that parents’ education, particularly the mother’s, often has a significant impact on whether or not their children go to school, and subsequently how regularly the children attend and whether they drop out or retake; it is argued that it is in the households where parents are better educated that primary education will be most valued and hence education rates overall will be higher. “A lack of adult education is the most significant factor impeding primary school enrolment” (Handa, 1999). According to this hypothesis then, given the low level of education amongst the households surveyed in this study, education rates should be very low.

However, as already established (chapter 6.1), the most likely scenario is that all children will attend school so the impact of parents’ education on enrolment rate is apparently then relatively limited.

Overall therefore the relationship between parents’ education and children’s enrolment seems weak and this research does not appear to support the hypothesis that a mother’s education is more significant for a child’s enrolment than the father’s; the proportion of households where only some children are enrolled is relatively similar in both cases.

Other evidence collected during this research suggests that the majority of parents do in fact consider education to be an important asset for their children (box 7.3) contradicting the idea that parents’ lack of education will negatively impact on their children’s schooling. Despite the fact that parent’s education levels are generally low children’s school enrolment levels are relatively high across the households and schools surveyed.

Box 7.3. The importance of education.

“I want him to go to university – it is so expensive and competitive so I don’t know how but that is what I want for him. But if he does not go to school now there will be no point. It is important he has a good education now, it will help later whatever happens.”

Mother (completed primary school), Tchouleoudji.

“I think school is very important. For example for my daughter if she does not go to school she will not have the skills she needs to have. She needs maths so she can work out sums at the market and she must speak French. This will make her life easier...”

Mother (no school education), Segba.

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Based on the results collected, and the interviews conducted with parents, it appears that education is generally recognised as a necessity amongst the majority of households – the ambitions of parents for their children vary but the importance of basic education was understood by the majority of parents interviewed. For this reason it is not apparent that parents’ own experiences of education have much bearing upon their children’s schooling (box 7.3). However, although in most households parents had not received any formal education, in those that had the majority did not complete school and this is important to bear in mind. Clearly parents seem to see education as important but to what extent they feel it is necessary for their children to fully complete the system could be somewhat different and it is important that past patterns of behaviour in this respect are not repeated.

### 7.2.2. Language

Connected to parent’s education is the issue of language. Understandably, there appears to be a correlation between where parents have received an education at school and where parents are able to speak in French; due to the uneducated position of many of the parents the number of parents who can speak French to any degree is relatively low. In only 32 households can both parents speak French[[24]](#footnote-24); in none of these households was *only* the mother able to speak French. This supports the idea that there is a correlation between education and ability to speak French as the number of educated mothers is also very low.

Table 7.4: Frequency table to indicate the number of households where one or both parents speak French.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Parents French | Number of households |
| Yes | 32 |
| No | 66 |
| NA | 1 |

Source: Survey 2010

Overall there were 66 households where neither parent was able to speak French enough to communicate effectively. As a result, French was not the primary language spoken in any of the households surveyed. Adja is the main language spoken amongst household members in all but two households surveyed. In the other two households Mina (another Beninese, and Togolese, language)was the dominant language.

This situation therefore means that the large majority of children must start school with only a very basic knowledge of French, if anything at all, and are, in the majority of cases, unable to practice the language in the household with their parents.

Language is one of the most influential factors in a child’s education (Brock-Utne, 2002; Dembélé and Lefoka, 2007); children unable to fully understand the French language are bound to be unable to fully benefit from their classes and this cannot fail to have negative undertones for their education as a whole. Although it may not be important for enrolment rates specifically it can have a significant impact on how a child experiences their education and therefore can affect re-take and dropout rates to a large extent (Hunt, 2008).

Where parents speak no French the proportion of households where children have retaken is higher than where one or both parents do speak French whilst the number of households where children have not retaken is higher where one or both parents speak French.

The problems primary children experience with the French language were encountered first hand during focus groups where children were unable to comfortably express themselves in French requiring the help of a translator and when children were required to write in French the majority had significant problems despite some children having been in primary school for up to five or six years. The problems encountered were elaborated upon during interviews with the teachers themselves (box 7.4).

Brock-Utne (2002) and Dembélé and Lefoka (2007) emphasise the problems that the language of instruction can cause amongst children for whom it is not their mother tongue; as a result Dembélé and Lefoka (2007) suggest that bilingualism is a better method to employ at primary school level so that the basics of education may also be laid in the language most familiar to the child. In this respect, the high number of ‘communautaires’ in Dogbo (chapter 5.3.1) may have a benefit in that they are more able to communicate in the local language with the children than teachers who do not come from the area; this however must be offset by the lower levels of teaching that ‘communautaires’ may provide and also the negative effects it may have on children not to be always working in French permitting them less practice in the language.

Box 7.4. Problems with French fluency.

“We should always speak to the children in French, they must learn. So most of the time we do – all lessons are given mainly in French but sometimes it is clear that not all children understand an instruction they are given and then sometimes we must repeat the same thing in Adja...normally we use Adja, it is the common language for teachers and children normally. The big problem is that some children understand much more French that others and this makes it very difficult and means that some children get more out of the classes than others but we try to help all the children as much as we can...”

Teacher, EPP Midangbé.

“It is difficult sometimes not to speak in Adja with the children – it is so much easier for them and therefore so much easier for us but is it so important we try and expose them to French as much as possible. For the communautaires I think it is even more difficult sometimes as they may be less comfortable in French and it feels much better for them to speak with the children in Adja, or another local language with which they, and the children, are familiar, particularly on a one-to-one basis...But we really try to ask them not to if possible – French is so important for the children.”

Head teacher, EPP Aisso.

As Guingnido Gaye (2003) points out (chapter 2.6.1) French literacy levels are much lower than expected at primary school levels and when children are expected to carry out lessons and exams in a language in which they have significant difficulties this can obviously be a problem which can lead to children having to retake school years and exams and may also cause de-motivation which may lead to drop out.

From observation, and from interviews conducted, it was apparent that communicating in French was an issue for many people – both parents and children. In all interviews it was impossible to communicate with parents in French and it was essential to have a translator who could speak in Adja. In addition, on numerous occasions it was difficult to speak with the children in French and again it was necessary that the French was translated into Adja. Observation also demonstrated that, despite the insistence of the importance of French, teachers often communicated with children in Adja, or used a mixture of Adja and French.

### 7.2.3. Parents’ employment

Table 7.5: Frequency table showing number of mothers and fathers working.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Father work | | Mother work | |
|  | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| Number of households | 83 | 16 | 88 | 11 |

Source: Survey 2010

In by far the majority (78) of households both parents have some form of employment. The number of women working overall (88) slightly surpasses the number of men (83). The main form of employment amongst men is working in agriculture in some capacity, either to provide crops to be used for sale or to be used directly for household food. Although the latter may not directly contribute to household income it negates the need to use any household income on some types of food and was therefore considered as a form of employment.

Women are generally employed in relatively menial jobs – the most common form of employment is sale of goods of some kind, mainly food (rice and beans) and drink (sodabi[[25]](#footnote-25)) and material goods such as frippery[[26]](#footnote-26) (35 women stated these activities as their main form of employment). The second most common form of employment is working in agriculture with women from 15 households stating this as their main employment. Although the majority of women stated that they do have one form of employment that they consider as their primary activity (it is this that has been used throughout the results) it is nevertheless important to note that almost all women stated that they do various small jobs to bring in money to the household, alongside a ‘main’ employment. The other employment activities carried out by women tend to be taken up as and when such activities are available and when the woman is able, or needs (financially), to do them.

Parents’ employment situations are argued to have a significant impact on their children’s schooling (Glick and Sahn, 2000; Iyamu and Obiunu, 2006). For example, unemployed parents may require that their children work to generate income for the household. It can also be true that in households where both parents are working children may be more likely to be required to stay at home to help with younger siblings or with housework more generally (Huisman and Smits, 2009). These factors may affect enrolment rates but are more likely to have a significant influence on attendance – the children may enrol in school initially but over time attendance may be affected by the roles they are required to play within, or for, the household.

Again, in this situation it appears that there is little impact of parents’ employment, or unemployment, on children’s schooling. Amongst all households the levels of schooling was relatively similar and additionally parents’ employment levels were relatively high and there was no apparent relationship between the two factors.

However, related to this issue of employment is the subject of parents who remove their children from school in order to go and work abroad[[27]](#footnote-27) which, although not apparent during the survey, appears to be a relatively common phenomenon mentioned by six teachers interviewed. In this situation, parents move elsewhere in search of a (better) income and take their children out of school either to take the children with them or to leave them with other family members in different areas. Often schools may not immediately be aware of the situation (box 7.5) and in many cases such absences are recorded as cases of drop out although in fact the children may continue their schooling elsewhere.

Box 7.5. Reasons for abandonment of education.

“Children don’t normally abandon because they don’t want to go to school any more, no... There are parents who move to make more money elsewhere or to be with family who have moved away... and they may therefore take their children with them or leave their younger children with older siblings, elsewhere. This week I had a case...a parent who is not from here, but from elsewhere, his child came to the school here and then we didn’t see him for some days and so I contacted his older sister who lives nearby who said her father had taken the boy with him to Côte d’Ivoire. Just like that, they say nothing to the head teacher; they take the children and go. It’s like that that children abandon...”

Teacher, EPP Aisso.

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## 6.....Children’s characteristics

## 7.3. Children’s characteristics

### 7.3.1. Children’s work

Table 7.6: Frequency table showing number of households where children work.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Children work** | **Number of households** |
| Yes | 36 |
| No | 58 |
| N/A | 5 |

Source: Survey 2010

In the majority of households surveyed (58) children did not contribute to the household income. However, in 36 of the 100 households in the study, parents state that their children do contribute to the household income (figure 7.6). The most common way for children to contribute though is indirectly, by helping with work in the family fields for example rather than having their own direct form of employment. The children’s main tasks appear to be supporting their parents in some way in the jobs that they themselves are doing rather than compensating for parents’ lack of work by taking on their own jobs. One of the more common jobs done by children is resale and as already observed this is one of the most common forms of employment amongst women indicating that children support their parents in what they are doing. Some children (seven) do take up their own jobs though to help bring extra income into the household but this was reported (by parents) to be only done during school holidays so that the child’s schooling would not suffer[[28]](#footnote-28).

Table 7.7: Frequency table to show the number of households where children help with housework.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Children housework | Number of households |
| Yes | 66 |
| No | 25 |
| N/A | 8 |

Source: Survey 2010

In 66 cases parents stated that children helped with various tasks around the house indicating that the majority of children support their parents in the day to day running of the home more than directly aiding income generating activities for the household.

From the figures collected this research demonstrates that there is no identifiable relationship between children’s workload within the household (either income generating or domestic work) and enrolment and the same may be said of the relationship with attendance rates.

The lack of relationship between these factors contradicts literature (Boyle et al., 2002) that children’s roles within the household and their school enrolment and attendance are closely connected.

Photo 7.1. Girl (6years) with sibling on her back, Tchouleoudji

However, although working to help parents at home, with income generating activities, or more generally, may not often affect children’s schooling directly (not affecting their initial enrolment and attendance for example) there may be more indirect impacts, particularly so for girls. For example, interviews with both parents and teachers, and observations more widely, demonstrated that in most cases female children are expected to help much more with household tasks than boys (such as helping with housework, cooking and looking after younger siblings for example, even extremely young girls are expected to carry out these duties (photo 7.1)) and as a result their schooling may suffer, as Lincove (2009) elaborates. For example, girls often have less time to spend on their work out of school and therefore their work in school can then suffer which can have negative impacts on girls’ confidence which may then lead to poor attendance (Lincove, 2009); in addition, this situation can impact on performance which may cause girls to fail exams and therefore either have to re-sit or drop out (box 7.6). For girls in particular therefore, schooling can be difficult; responsibilities at home are obviously difficult to avoid in many cases but missing vital lessons at school or being unable to carry out homework in the home, outside school hours, can cause severe problems at later stages.

Box 7.6: Conflict between school work and a girl’s responsibility in the home

“Generally, girls really have a desire to work but they often don’t have the time to study at their house due to domestic work, demands from their parents, from their mothers...The girls are told “*come here and do this*” and “*come here and do that*”, “*come to the kitchen*”; they have a lot of demands. Often if I organise study groups for the children before their exams, the girls don’t arrive to participate because they are at home in the kitchen, or because they must go and help their mother...It is another fundamental problem we have.

We are now in the exam period and yesterday, for example, I worked with the children on revision. When I took the register I noticed that there was a girl who was absent and when I asked where she was the other children told me that the girl’s mother told her that she must go to the market with her mother.

These problems will have many bad consequences for these girls. They miss lessons and study and they will not pass their exams. ”

Teacher, Allada.

“...You have parents who are very poor. For example, last year amongst the candidates that I sent to the exams, I had an 80% pass rate – those children can go to college. Afterwards I met one of the girls and she was not at college and I said ‘Why? Why do you not go to college?’ and she just said she could not, that she wasn’t able to as she had to help her parents now. So like that, the children drop out and abandon their education.”

Head teacher, EPP Godohou.

### 7.3.2. Child’s school enrolment age

This particular issue was not identified at the household level but was brought up by teachers in schools, and supported by observation; it was not questioned during the survey as it was not picked up prior to the field research. The issue being the negative impact that late school enrolment or prolonged absences from school, due to illness for example, can have on a child’s schooling as the children are, as a consequence, habitually left in classes below their normal age groups. According to teachers this is often a key reason for children not attending school regularly and even, in some cases, dropping out. As children themselves stated, being in a class with a younger age group can be embarrassing (box 7.7) and this is underlined by actions taken by teachers to minimise the effects of this situation – a child who is older than his classmates is commonly given a different age from his real age to use in school. Amongst the children spoken to some, although in primary school, were as old as fifteen and were therefore given the age of eleven for example to allow them to feel better at ease with their classmates of that age. However, such a situation can, in some cases, leave a child feeling too uncomfortable to attend school (box 7.7) and habitual absence may eventually lead to drop out as teachers stated and as is supported by Hunt (2008).

Box 7.7. Issues of children’s age at school

“It is embarrassing at school; sometimes I do not want to go...sometimes I do not go at all. I am with young children and I am much older and I still have to work with them. I should be in a higher class but I can’t. It makes me feel ashamed.”

Pupil, male, 15years, EPP Fifadji.

“In some cases we give children a new age for school. Often there are children in a class who are much older than most of their peers, for lots of reasons – they started school late, they failed a year, often more than once...; this can cause embarrassment for those children and difficulties in the class. So it is for this reason that we give children another age, more appropriate to their class, so that they can feel less embarrassed.”

Teacher, EPP Segehoumey.

## 7.4. Conclusion

Household characteristics are clearly important but had less of an impact on children’s schooling that had been hypothesised and this is really because the rates of non-enrolment, non-attendance, abandon and retake were much lower than had been expected prior to the study. In addition, in several cases the characteristics were not as pronounced as had been anticipated – for example, house sizes were smaller and parents’ attitudes towards education were generally extremely positive. Nevertheless there were also issues that were more pronounced than had been hypothesised and specific issues were brought to light that had not been considered beforehand, such as the age of children’s enrolment. The issue of language was apparent as a key issue and the importance of this had been highlighted in the literature studied and this research helped to show the reality of the issues faced – language is key to children’s success and yet barriers do clearly still remain there.

Despite the generally overall positive situation that has emerged from this research it is nevertheless apparent that that there are still barriers that are struggled with to further children’s education. Aspirations remain quite low in several households; although the majority of children are enrolled in primary school are high the numbers who will complete their full education are questionable and their potential to use that education they receive may not be high. Furthermore, issues are still encountered that can hinder education, for example the support that girls are expected to give in the household is high and the results of this, in a number of cases detailed, seem to be negative and significant.

# Chapter 8: FOOD SECURITY AND EDUCATION

## 8.1. What is food security?

In order to understand the links between food security and primary school education it was essential to gain a basic understanding of food security as defined by those who formed the basis for this study. Therefore the concept of food security was explored during this research, through interviews and observations, and the following points have been developed to be considered as ways to understand food security:

* Food security is about knowing that you will always have a secure food source, knowing everyday where your food will come from for that day and for the foreseeable future. If this safety is not there, then the household is no longer food secure.
* Food security concerns having a regular intake of meals it is also important, whether that intake is two or three meals each day, that these meals should be of a sufficient quantity to enable each household member to carry out the activities they need to during any given day (work/school etc.).
* Food security is also about perception (as elaborated upon by Maxwell and Smith, 1992) and about each household member feeling satisfied that they have enough to eat. Parents must have an awareness of their own perceptions but also of their children’s perceptions of what is sufficient: parents need to be aware of their children’s perception of food security and whether or not their children feel they receive enough food to eat to enable them to partake in the activities they need to.

## 8.2. Food security in the household

Based on background information gathered prior to the field research questions were assembled that would produce data to present a complete picture of food security as experienced by the households surveyed. A variety of questions were therefore asked, covering different aspects of food (in)security. Although it was difficult to fully understand the food situations within each household without a proper analysis of the diets followed this was not feasible within the remit of this study and as a result the questions asked were designed to gain as thorough and comprehensive a picture as possible of the situation in which households found themselves in regards to food security. The areas identified as some of the most significant in this respect were formatted into questions as follows:

Do you think that all family members have enough to eat every day?

Table 8.1: Frequency table to show whether or not households have enough to eat

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Enough to eat | | |
|  | Yes | No | Missing data |
| Number of households | 61 | 37 | 2 |

Source: Survey 2010

Parents within the surveyed households were asked whether they thought all members of their households had sufficient amounts of food to eat each day, so as not to leave them hungry, for the majority of the year. Amongst the households surveyed 61 stated that they considered that their families had enough to eat, that they were food secure. The remaining 37 households who gave an answer to this question said that they did not have enough to eat. However, the two groups had many of the same dietary characteristics (as identified below) indicating that difference in food security may be, to some extent, a difference in opinions and attitudes – “We have no other choice than to be satisfied with what we have” was the answer given by one respondent (Allada).

Do all members of the household eat the same number of meals each day?

Table 8.2: Frequency table to show whether all household members consume the same number of meals each day

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | All members same number of meals | | |
|  | Yes | No | Missing data |
| Number of households | 42 | 56 | 2 |

Source: Survey 2010

An attempt was made to establish whether or not all household members were entitled to an equal share of the food on offer by asking whether each family member ate the same as each other every day or whether some members ate more meals than others. In 56 households members did not eat the same number of meals each day as “there is not enough to go around” (respondent Tchoulehoudji). Amongst those households, just over half stated that the children in the household ate more whilst the next largest group stated that the father ate more than other members. These figures show that the mother(s) always come(s) last in this respect; in the data gathered from this research it shows that the mother never eats more meals than other family members.

Do all members of the household eat the same quantity of food at each meal?

Table 8.3: Frequency table to show whether all household members consume the same amount of food

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | All members same amount of food | | |
|  | Yes | No | Missing data |
| Number of households | 2 | 96 | 2 |

Source: Survey 2010

In connection to the previous question, is the question of whether or not all household members eat the same amount of food at meal times, when they do eat the same meals. It seems that in only two households do members eat the same quantity of food at meal times when all members eat. In 96 households, different members eat different amounts of food; in 27 households it is the children who receive more to eat than other members, in 25 households the amount of food each member gets is dependent on age with the oldest members eating most, the parents eat more in 9 cases and the mother eats most in only two households. However, in the majority of cases (32 households) the father eats more than other members.

Who eats first when there is a food shortage in the household?

Table 8.4: Frequency table to show which household member eats first when there is a food shortage

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Eats first in shortage | | | |
|  | Children | Father | Mother | Missing data |
| Number of households | 82 | 15 | 1 | 2 |

Source: Survey 2010

During periods of food shortage, which all but three households stated that they had experienced at some point, in almost all households (82) the children eat first and in almost all other cases (15) the father eats first. In only one household was it stated that the mother would eat first if there was a food shortage.

Overall the information presented for the questions above indicates that in most households the first priority is to feed the children, although the father is also a key priority. It also demonstrates that although parents stated that every member had enough food in reality this may not always be the case. Not all meals are eaten by all household members and amounts of food are spread unevenly. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that household members are going hungry hence the importance of gathering results on this topic within schools (chapter 8.2).

What is the household’s main source of food?

Table 8.5: Frequency table to show main sources of food amongst households

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Main food source | | | | | |
|  | Animals | Fields | Market | Fields and market | Market and animals | Missing data |
| Number of households | 2 | 57 | 19 | 16 | 3 | 3 |

Source: Survey 2010

The majority of households (57) stated that their main source of food was solely from their fields. The next most common source of food, the market, was far less used with just 19 households relying solely on the market. 18 households rely on both their fields and the market in combination for their main sources of food. Only two households rely on their animals at all as a source of food; animals are mainly reared for sale and for their produce rather than for consumption purposes within the households. It is clear therefore that the fields are key to households’ food security in Dogbo with by far the majority of 73 relying on their fields wholly, or to some extent, to provide their food.

Food composition:

It is interesting to note that the composition of meals is quite uniform across all households (box 8.1). From the information given in the survey asking about the ‘typical’ meal/diet it appears that all households have a very similar diet as they generally eat only the foods that they grow, or make, or that are accessible, in terms of price and availability, at the market. In addition, observations indicated that often several different households may eat together for some meals: one person or household prepares a meal and many people in the village eat it together. As a result of this the likelihood of many households having similar diets is further increased.

Box 8.1:

**Typical household meal ingredients:**

* Maize,
* rice,
* cassava,
* small fish,
* vegetables,
* onion,
* chilli pepper,
* beans,
* gombo (a green sauce made from a tropical African plant),
* red oil,
* salt,
* stock cube flavouring.

(Information gathered from household questionnaires, 2009)

Although, as already mentioned, a detailed analysis of household diets was not carried out it is apparent that the typical household diet, although containing several nutritional ingredients, lacks the variety necessary to provide all required nutrients for a balanced diet (Dossa, 2009). This information raises the question not only of food insecurity but also of nutrition insecurity – if the children, in particular, are not getting a balanced diet they are not following a balanced eating regime and may therefore suffer the negative consequences of this such as stunted growth which can then impact upon other areas of their life (Behrman, 1996; Shetty, 2002).

## 8.2. Food insecurity at school

It has been suggested by several authors that high levels of household food security are likely to lead to higher levels of enrolment in school, and that the converse is also true, and additionally that decreased food security is likely to mean that children are less likely to attend school regularly (Ahmed and del Ninno, 2002; Alderman et al.,1997). It is this latter point that seems to be most significant for this research although the reasons that have become apparent in this research are not those identified in most literature (chapter 2.5.1).

The importance of food security as an overall concern for children and their schooling is an issue that has been demonstrated less at the household level but very distinctly in schools, by both children and teachers. Much emphasis was put on the issue by teachers interviewed and the majority of children worked with presented negative ideas around the concept of food at school (box 8.2) showing that whatever the end impacts are of food security in terms of a child’s education it clearly is an issue that, generally at least, particularly affects children from very poor households very significantly.

Despite the information presented above about the less than secure food situation in households, no households surveyed mentioned food, or nutrition, insecurity as a limiting factor upon their children’s schooling or even really as an issue affecting their children at all. The main reason for this would perhaps be that they themselves did not consider their households to be food insecure despite some of the information they gave. As identified, the majority of households stated that all members had enough to eat. However, this data is disputed somewhat by the information put forward by children during the focus groups with them at school; during the focus groups the children were asked to write all the thoughts they associate with lunch/lunchtime. In this setting some ideas about children’s experiences were made clear. Out of the 60 children worked with only 18 gave positive ideas around the theme of ‘lunch’ and said that they ate ‘a lot’ at home, most children rather identified negative feelings towards lunch time (box 8.2). The indication here then is either that food is more of a problem to children than their parents realise or that parents were perhaps unwilling to elaborate fully on their situations with an outside researcher.

Box 8.2. Results gathered from focus groups at the schools researched.

Examples of some of the negative ideas around lunchtime presented by children on the spider diagrams they produced during the focus groups:

- I eat little at home.

- Eating at school is difficult.

- I eat lunch for 10F.

- I don’t find anything to eat at home.

- My family does not find much to eat.

- I eat little.

- At lunch time I find nothing to eat at school or at home.

- I find nothing to eat at school.

- My parents don’t find money to give me for food.

- I do not always have money for food.

“At lunch time I normally eat little. Sometimes I go home to try and find food...sometimes it is better than other times. On some days my father gives me some money for school but with this money I can never buy much food [from the vendors] as it is expensive for me.”

Pupil, EPP Adandro-Akodé.

Considering the data collected it is apparent that, for most children, even when they are able to eat at lunchtime they are unlikely to eat very much. 63 households stated that they felt their family had enough to eat but as some of the children who claim to have problems with accessing sufficient amounts of food came from these families it is evident that parents and children may have very different opinions and perceptions on the same situation as the majority (39) of children stated that they ate “a little” or “not enough” at lunch time (box 8.2).

The problems that food security can provoke for the children’s schooling were made very plain by the teachers interviewed. It is clear, for example, from teachers, and also from observations, that at some schools visited fewer children are in school after lunch than before lunch (box 8.3). Some teachers explained this phenomenon that has already been pointed towards by children and is picked up on by Madamombe, 2007: children often have a long way to walk home at lunch time and, if is the case in many of the very poor households, children are unable to find enough food to eat and therefore remain hungry they may not always return to school due to lack of energy to walk the distance back and spend an afternoon in school or because they prefer to stay at home in order to try and find more to eat (box 8.3). Clearly therefore, in this way, food security has an impact on the attendance rates of children from the poorest, most food insecure, households.

Box 8.3. Experience from children and teacher about afternoon school absenteeism

“We often see that there are fewer children in the classrooms after the lunchtime break. There are different reasons for this...one other thing can be if they cannot find enough food to eat for lunch. If they are still hungry then the children do not always return to school for the afternoon, they maybe too tired to walk back for example, or they may spend some time searching for food. Often we notice some absences...”

Teacher, Gbenonjou II.

“Most times I go home at lunch time and look for food at my house. Some days it is not easy to find so I keep looking...This sometimes mean I am late for afternoon school...and sometimes, when I am very hungry and there is no food I do not come back.”

Pupil, Madjre-Centre.

However, the most notable issue appeared to be that if children do return to classes after the lunch break, often late, having found little or no food to eat for lunch, the consequences can be very difficult for teachers to deal with. Children’s concentration levels in class are affected – when they have not had enough to eat they are, understandably, more focused on this issue than their lessons and in response to this teachers are often forced to give out money to these children so that they are able to buy food in order that the whole class can continue with lessons (box 8.4); this is not the only occasion when teachers feel obliged to give money to the children to enable them to satisfy their hunger to some extent (box 8.4). This in itself demonstrates the level of problem that exists – seven teachers identified this as a major concern and as a recurring experience, teachers are often put in the situation where they feel they must support those who need it to buy food when they themselves can often not very well afford it (box 8.4).

Box 8.4. Teachers’ experience of children’s food insecurity

“We know how hard it is for children to work well and concentrate properly with an empty stomach – they think about being hungry, not about doing work. We know that, but so many of our children are hungry very often and it is difficult for us...we cannot always help...Certainly [being hungry] has impacts on how children are able to behave and focus in class, we see that, it is very obvious that the hungry children struggle more than their friends...But for me it is an expensive thing to do, I also do not have a lot of spare money, I have my own family to support.”

Teacher, EPP Botagbé.

“Many of the parents of the children here are really deprived and we also have orphans at the school, there are seven orphans. And sometimes at break times I have to distribute 50F to the children because whilst the other children have eaten and another child hasn’t eaten but has to work soon... or if a child cries that he has a sore stomach and when you ask if he’s eaten and he says no...you are obliged to satisfy that. So that’s the problem... and a canteen would therefore really help [with children’s hunger in class]. The government canteen is exhausted and does not operate anymore; the canteen [a straw hut] has now been turned into a classroom. “

Head teacher, Aisso.

“...parents do not know how to maximise their land and so their children often go hungry. Sometimes at break times I give out up to 500F all together to enable children to eat...You don’t always want to do that you can’t allow these young children to go hungry when we want them to learn and do well in our classes...”

Head teacher, Fifadji.

## 8.3. School canteens

### 8.3.1. Current situation identified

Amongst the schools visited, seven schools had had experience of government run canteens but in none of the primary schools visited were the canteens functioning at the intended levels and teachers emphasised the contribution this made to the already existing problems children face with food security. In five cases the teachers identified that there had been government run canteens in the past but that numerous problems were experienced (box 8.5).

Box 8.5. School experiences of government canteens.

“In theory we have a government canteen currently in place at our school but in fact it is not working now and it has only functioned during one week of the current school year. I do not know whether the canteen will start running again.

Head teacher, EPP Godohou.

“...We had a government canteen in the past but it does not work now at all, and never did work very well before...Now the canteen had been turned into a classroom as it does not seem likely that it will be used again as a canteen.”

Head teacher, EPP Tchouleoudji.

Despite the lack of ‘official’ school canteens, all schools have food vendors who come from the local area to sell small dishes of food and snacks (box 8.6) but the problems here are threefold: firstly, the vendors are unreliable, if the weather is bad, the vendors don’t come so the children have nowhere to buy food if they need to. Secondly the food is expensive and children often do not have enough money to buy sufficient food to satisfy their hunger. Thirdly the food that can be purchased is not always nutritious leaving the children still hungry and with low energy hence exacerbating the problems already identified (this data was collected from the interviews with school teachers).

Box 8.6. Data collected about food vendors at schools

“...they [the vendors] sell rice mainly, with some sauce, and some small snacks. The prices are quite high, for the children...the children can usually only afford very small portions. The food isn’t really expensive but for the children it is a lot and the small amounts they can buy mean they are often hungry later.”

Teacher, EPP Adandro-Akodé.

Having a school canteen available on the school premises brings a number of advantages to a school and to the children who go there. Kumanda (2006) emphasises how advantageous it can be to have a canteen on the school site and this is support by literature from Ahmed and del Ninno (2002) and Alderman et al. (1997) who emphasis how beneficial a regular and nutritious diet is to school children. This information is supported within this research by the opinions gathered from teachers (box 8.7).

Box 8.7: School canteens

“Having a canteen could be so positive...it could provide a reliable source of food, for little money, on site. And teachers and parents can also know that the food that is provided is nutritious so the children can get a good portion of food for a small price...”

Teacher, Fifadji.

“...It would be a good thing [a canteen], they would always be here not just sometimes [like vendors] and the food can be less expensive...The children would have a better chance of getting something to eat.”

Teacher, Gbenonjou II.

### 8.3.2. Problems caused by lack of school canteens

Pupils and teachers alike emphasise the problems caused by lack of school canteens. Head teachers in particular stressed the difference a school canteen in their school would make. The presence of a school canteen would allow children to purchase food at a cheap price, or depending on the nature of the project, to receive it free, in school; currently if the poorest children are given money to buy food at school it is often barely sufficient to buy anything let alone enough to sustain a child’s energy levels through an afternoon of lessons.

Canteen would help to stop children going home for lunch and not coming back as being able to obtain very cheap food on the school site would make it easier for them to stay in school.

The dramatic difference that having a school canteen can make to child attendance in school has been recognised (Ahmed and Del Ninno, 2002; Plan Benin, 2008; Madamombe, 2007) but it is making these canteens work that is the problem (Plan Benin, 2008).

## 8.4. Conclusion

From the results presented in this chapter it seems evident that food insecurity is an issue although the recognition of this at the household level seems to vary and this can be related to the idea of different perceptions. Although the majority of households seemed to identify similar characteristics and problems only some of those households considered themselves to suffer from food insecurity whilst others did not. It is interesting to note however that all (bar three) households did say that they had experienced some form of food shortage. The children themselves seemed to have quite negative perceptions about food and lunchtime and it is clear that food insecurity, at this point in the day in particular, is a problem for the majority of children spoken to. Although, on the whole, direct links between food security and education are not extremely clear it is apparent that food security can affect levels of attendance and also, more generally, a child’s school experience overall. Teachers too are impacted by the food insecurity suffered by the pupils and that can then cause knock on effects as teachers feel obliged to support their pupils. Teachers appear to believe that school canteens could certainly go some way to addressing some of the issues clearly experienced at the school level but based on evidence in this research it is not apparent that canteens are functioning to any successful extent in these schools in Dogbo.

This study has also underlined the role of nutrition security, which can be defined as adequate nutritional status in terms of protein, energy, vitamins, and minerals for all household members at all times (Weingärtner, 2000); in other words, a balanced diet, filling all an individual’s requirements. Children themselves recognise this point and during the focus groups comments were made such as ‘I do not have a rich diet’ and ‘The food I eat is not balanced’; this information is supported by the data gathered at household level concerning the typical diet components that different households identified. However, with the data gathered from this research it is not possible to link poor nutritional security to a child’s schooling directly but it is nevertheless a significant issue to highlight as it is something that has arisen from this research carried out in Dogbo.

# Chapter 9: CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS/REFLECTIONS

## 9.1 Conclusions

The rural area of Dogbo was an ideal location to study barriers to education as it was an area where the issues that are relevant in this situation are most at play and an impact study of food security and other barriers is what this study has focused on. The research objective was:

*To what extent does food insecurity, amongst other household characteristics, impact on the primary school enrolment, attendance, retake and dropout rates of the children from poor households in Dogbo, Couffo?*

The following questions were formulated to provide a sufficient answer to this objective:

1. What are the rates of enrolment, attendance and performance at the department (Couffo) and commune (Dogbo) levels?
2. What is the quality of primary education provided in the research area?
3. What are the characteristics of the poor households?
4. What are the material characteristics of the house?
5. What are the characteristics of the parents within the household?
6. What are the children’s roles within the households?
7. What is the food security situation within the households?
8. What are the levels of enrolment, attendance, retake and dropout amongst children from poor households in the study?
9. Which household characteristics have an impact on a child’s primary school enrolment, attendance, retake and dropout rates?
10. What is food security and to what extent is does it impact upon a child’s primary school enrolment, attendance retake and dropout rates?

The following conclusions summarise and reflect on the results obtained from the study of the above questions.

Schools and education:

Overall, the number of EPPs in Dogbo is staggering: for a commune of nearly 77,000 people there are 97 state run primary schools and, across the board, the schools have very high numbers of pupils with some schools needing to split into two complexes to try and keep class sizes manageable which exacerbates the problems schools have in accessing sufficient numbers of qualified teachers. Since the introduction of free primary school education the government of Benin have put much effort into trying to improve primary school education – new classrooms are being constructed at schools across the Dogbo and school materials such as text books are provided to schools by the state. However, this research suggests that these actions are not being implemented as effectively as could be hoped. The construction of new classroom units that are underway is, in many cases, extremely slow. Buildings remain half constructed leaving teachers with little or no information as to when they will be completed. Furthermore although it is government policy to provide sufficient numbers of text books to all primary schools it is clear that this is not happening for every school – although several schools studied stated that they had no problems with text book supplies others mentioned it to be a significant issue and said that several classes severely lacked necessary text books. These factors indicate that poor communication and organisation is hindering government efforts to improve the situation. Although some schools are benefiting from government actions these effects are not uniform and this must be changed in order to provide a higher quality level of education to all children.

Teacher shortages are another problem that threatens the quality of education provided to children in Dogbo. Class sizes are high and a lack of qualified teachers forces schools into recruiting community volunteers (‘communautaires’) to make up the deficit which can negatively effects the level of education children receive as communautaires receive only limited training – up until a few months ago they were only having only low-level training from existing teachers. Now, the government, in collaboration with various NGOs, has introduced a program to try and train community volunteers to a sufficient teaching standard, however this will clearly take some time to become effective. To further help solve the problem of qualified teacher shortages the government also needs to make teaching a more appealing profession for people to take up – in 2008 teachers across Couffo went on strike due to their unhappiness with conditions of employment; very few teachers are able to find positions as APEs (a position which brings the benefits of secure employment, regular pay and a source of money at retirement), as they cost the government a lot of money, and this means that many are deterred from teaching.

Across all schools studied pass rates at CEP were relatively high and although some were higher than others the level of school infrastructure seemed to have little bearing on this. Surprisingly perhaps, some of the most poorly equipped schools had the highest pass rates. However, these rates do help to mask other problems; for example the pass rates do not give any indication of how many times a child had to re-take to achieve that pass or how many children dropped out before getting to their CEP exams for example.

Households and education:

The majority of households surveyed remained very poor, as they had been identified in the INRAB survey (2007); households were, in material terms, very poor with the vast majority of households owning a very limited amount of land and their living standards in the home being very basic with little space for the whole family and few possessions (such as radios/books/TVs). Other characteristics were less evident than had been expected however – for example, although children often tended to support their parents with their employment the children themselves were rarely forced to take up employment at the expense of schooling. It is difficult to know whether this is an improvement on previous situations but certainly what was indicated by almost all parents was a positive attitude towards their children’s education. Given the problems discussed in the literature on the subject and information gleaned from teachers this attitude, amongst many parents, is new. It appears that the prominence of the campaign promoting the importance of primary school education is taking effect and, although significant issues still remain, it seems parents, in many cases, are taking the information to heart. As a result, amongst the households surveyed the majority of primary school age children are in fact enrolled in school, although the figure has by no means reached 100%. Nevertheless, these elevated enrolment levels result in the aforementioned high pupil numbers in schools which can be difficult for schools to manage in the current situation.

Addressing only the household level it would seem that attendance rates also are very high but the picture presented at the schools did not fully reflect this. The results of this research have demonstrated that attendance rates really remain a problem for many children. In addition, at many schools re-take and dropout rates although not dramatically high, remain a significant issue. The situation reflects the circumstances discussed by Bowden (2002) and Michaelowa (2001) that increased enrolment rates can help to mask a whole host of other issues which are particularly pertinent amongst the poorest households.

Due perhaps in part to the change in attitudes at the household level it appears that household characteristics generally act less as barriers to a child’s education than had been hypothesised initially. Nevertheless, the barriers in some cases do remain and gender divisions are particularly pertinent – although high numbers of girls are enrolled in school their ability to always attend school and to stay in school are often jeopardised. As girls often bear more responsibility in the home their schooling may suffer in a way a male child’s schooling does not. Despite the campaigns promoting girls’ schooling it appears that in reality it is, amongst many poor households, only enrolment that has actually increased and in other ways the situation is still problematic. Clearly getting the child enrolled is the first important step but if a child is unable to be fully focussed on their education due to commitments at home this will clearly cause problems for the child which may be expressed in numerous ways.

It seems that factors that cause children to be absent from school are not necessarily recognised at the household level. This is an important observation as it highlights how different perspectives can be and therefore shows how vital it is to glean information from as many various sources as possible. For example, although parents mentioned that purchasing school supplies for their children was sometimes an impossible expenditure it was only children and teachers who identified the embarrassment this could cause and the absenteeism it could consequently provoke in some cases. Discussing subjects with different sources can enable a full picture to be put together of a situation. Parents for example either may not recognise some problems or be unwilling to admit them and therefore understanding the same issues from different perspectives has been important in allowing this research to be more comprehensive.

Food security clearly demonstrates the above point. This study has shown that food security is a key area of concern for primary school children however the majority of households surveyed did not recognise this but rather felt that all members of the household had enough to eat. Both children and teachers highlighted the shortage of food that many children from the poorest households suffer and teachers directly stressed the consequences this hunger can have on children’s schooling. Amongst all issues discussed, food security was shown to be the most concerning as it was apparent that it was a concern, to some degree or another, for a large proportion of the children worked with; for around a third of children it was seriously worrying and often led to teachers taking pity on the children and aiding them in buying enough food to permit them to get through the school day. This itself then triggered other negative consequences for teachers. This negative cycle must be addressed if the situation is to improve.

The difference that well run school feeding programs and school canteens would make cannot be stressed enough. They are a recognised way of combating both food security problems and nutrition security problems as they are able to provide access to a regular source of food that fits into a suitable diet for children and gives them the nutrients they need (Ahmed and del Ninno, 2002). The presence of a school canteen enables children to come to school and be guaranteed the offer of a nutritious meal. However, in none of the schools visited were school feeding programs evident.

The Beninese government is clearly aware of the importance of the problem and the fact that they must take action to tackle it however currently these actions are not working; a fully operating government canteen was not observed in any of the 12 schools despite the fact that some schools stated that they did have a government canteen but that it rarely, if ever, functioned. Furthermore, in one school a government canteen had been in operation but had been closed down. State run canteens will operate only in schools above and below a certain size – if a school is too small then a state canteen will not be located there and the same thing is true if the school is very large. Although it is apparent that the government has many problems to tackle and changing the situation will take time, from the results of this research it appears that functioning canteens would have a large impact on children’s schooling and to their well-being overall.

Plan Benin have also recognised this problem in their introduction of their school feeding project – this scheme has only been piloted in a limited number of schools however and has not been successful everywhere[[29]](#footnote-29).

This project is evidently well intentioned but although the aim was that it would be set up in one of the schools in this study due to the school’s more rural location, the project was withdrawn after its initial set-up as it was agreed by all parties that the school was too large for the project to be effective.

The development of both of these schemes, by Plan and by the government, indicate a recognition of the importance of food security in education; not only in encouraging children to come to school but more importantly trying to ensure that children stay in school once there and do not have to drop out half way through the school day when they do not find enough to eat. The most significant recommendation therefore would be to manage the structure and reach of these programmes and their organisation.

## 9.2. Limitations/Reflections

During the course of this study several obstacles were encountered that are relatively common in fieldwork practices. One key problem was that questionnaires were not always filled out fully meaning that for some questions asked answers were not received from all respondents. In addition, working with a translator, although rewarding, always has the potential to cause difficulties (Bujra, 2006 in Sumner and Tribe, 2008) such as limiting what is actually translated and the translator, often unintentionally, putting their own slant on what is being said. Also, accessing accurate data was sometimes difficult at school level as schools did not always have access to records or did not have a good system to file them making them difficult to find[[30]](#footnote-30).

However, as is evident, these problems were relatively minor and were overcome, to a large extent, by considering the same questions at different levels so that if information was not gathered accurately at the household level the teacher’s reactions on the same subjects could still be gauged for example.

With hindsight it is clear to see that there were definite weaknesses to the research and changes could have made the investigation more relevant in the study area.

The most prominent limitation was that the research was too narrow and this stemmed from the fact that positive changes have taken place in the study area to improve primary school education which has meant that enrolment levels are relatively high. As a result of this the study of barriers to enrolment rates was less relevant that had been anticipated. Although barriers do still exist to some extent, although more relevantly perhaps on factors beyond enrolment such as attendance and dropout, the study might have been more insightful had it also had a focus on secondary school education so that it could have been established whether the same problems were encountered at both primary and secondary school levels. A consideration of tertiary education could also have added another interesting dimension.

The inclusion of rich households would also have enhanced the research so that a comparison study could have been made – the decision to consider only very poor households was taken in collaboration with Plan Benin but had time allowed it, a more expansive study would have been enlightening. Instead, the way this research was organised meant that it was only at the teacher level that distinctions could be made between the very poor households and the better off households.

Before commencing the fieldwork section of this research it was assumed that poor households would continue to face strong resistance to sending their children to school and would rather prefer them to be at home in order to support the family in various ways; this assumption came from the numerous barriers discussed in the literature studied to gather the background for this research. In reality however, the situation was more positive than had been anticipated. It is clear there are numerous problems and issues to try and tackle and solve but overall parents’ attitudes towards primary education are positive and barriers, at various levels, appeared less significant than had been perceived beforehand.

Nevertheless, for those children that do enrol in primary school there are numerous issues to be faced. Not only are improvements needed in basic infrastructure such as classrooms, latrines and running water and in teacher quality but furthermore, if Benin is to catch up with the developed world further, and offer the best education to the country’s children, dramatic changes, which currently seem a long way off, are necessary. EPPs across Dogbo operate without any form of electricity; understandably when access to running water, for example, is in short supply this concern is bound to come first but nevertheless, children will need to be educated in relevant modern technologies in order to give them any chance of operating within the developed world. The primary school education system currently is doing as well as it can under the circumstances but for the situation to really change children attending these schools need to be better trained than ever before to allow them any chance of being competitive in their country specifically but in the wider world more generally.

It is of course clear that basic primary education is vital for expanding a child’s capabilities and giving them greater possibilities for later life (Wigley and Akkoyunlu-Wigley, 2006; Mertaugh et al., 2008). However, this alone is not enough. Naturally, trying to encourage all children to complete a primary education is very important in order to give them the necessary tools and basic building blocks to make the most of opportunities they face in the future but if the later opportunities are not in fact available then the children will have little chance of using their capabilities gained at primary school. For education to be useful and supportive in the field of development therefore it must go further than the basic primary school level and herein lies a problem: many teachers interviewed fear that if children manage to get through primary school significant drop out may be seen at secondary school level as parents are unable to afford the necessary fees required. Furthermore, some parents’ positive attitudes towards education do not seem to go further than primary education and although children themselves are ambitious in many cases parents have low expectations for their children (box 9.1) and do not see beyond their primary education. Parent’s ideas of primary school education are affected by the later opportunities they see to be available (Lavy, 1996).

Box 9.1: A mother’s argument for sending her daughter to primary school

I want my daughter to go to school so that she can learn maths which will help her to work at the market now and when she has finished primary school when she is a bit older...

Household interviewee, Tchouleoudji.

Parents attitudes towards the possibilities of later education also need to be changed but in order for this to happen the opportunities available to children beyond primary school must be widened and made more accessible – fees at secondary school are bound to make secondary school unattainable for some children and beyond this, even with the necessary finances, opportunities at tertiary level are scarce as are job opportunities more generally, even if specific training has been received (box 9.2; Sawahel, 2009). In order for parents to be encouraged to make investments in their children’s education they must see that it is worth it and that there will be benefits, in real employment terms, which are within reach of their children.

Box 9.2: A demonstration of the problem of scarce job opportunities in Dogbo

I carried out my training in Dogbo with a German NGO and I am now able to work with metal professionally but this is irrelevant as I can’t find a job. I now work as a zemi-jahn (motorbike taxi) driver.

Valentin, Dogbo.

In order to ensure the significance of raising enrolment and attendance levels and reducing retake and drop out rates, and to make having a primary education more relevant, certain changes are vital:

* household factors, particularly food and nutrition insecurity must be tackled effectively,
* the way in which schooling is provided must be improved in various aspects such as school infrastructure in general, the number and quality of the teachers themselves, and an ability to cope with increasing numbers of pupils,
* most importantly perhaps are the opportunities available to children after they have completed their primary education. Unless opportunities expand at later stages the children educated at primary school will be unable to maximise and benefit from the capabilities they gained and will therefore not have the opportunity to explore their potential.

Giving the children a quality primary education is the first step. The opportunities available to children once they have left primary school will determine whether or not primary school education allows these children to play a greater role in society as a whole, aid the overall development of their country, as many argue education allows (Mertaugh et al., 2008; Lanzi, 2007; Saito, 2003) and, most importantly improve their own well-being and livelihood by lifting themselves out of poverty.

# Appendix 1: Resumé of the Plan Benin commissioned report ‘Research into the typology of households in Couffo’ (INRAB, 2007).

Depuis l’année 2004, l’ONG Plan Bénin a mis sur pied un programme pilote d’amélioration de la sécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle des ménages dans le département du Couffo. Ce programme vise des améliorations pérennes au niveau des revenus familiaux et dans le statut nutritionnel des enfants et des femmes du département. Le programme consiste en un paquet d’interventions complémentaires répondant aux trois piliers de la sécurité alimentaire, à savoir la disponibilité, l’accessibilité et l’utilisation de l’aliment.

Sur la base des résultats issus de la recherche sur la sécurité nutritionnelle conduite en janvier 2006, et suite à la revue intégrée des programmes dans la zone d’intervention, il ressort qu’il existe toujours des poches de pauvreté dans les communes d’intervention et que les ménages les plus pauvres (principales cibles du programme) n’ont pas été suffisamment touchés par tous les axes d’intervention. Il est également apparu à travers la même étude que la majorité des bénéficiaires du programme ayant la terre, ne sont pas des pauvres. Il s’est avéré alors nécessaire de réorienter prioritairement les actions futures du programme vers ces cibles spécifiques. Dans ce cadre, l’ONG Plan Bénin a requis l’appui de l’Institut National des Recherches Agricoles du Bénin (INRAB) pour l’identification des ménages pauvres du Couffo et des besoins spécifiques d’intervention de ces ménages.

Ainsi, à travers un diagnostic participatif l’INRAB devra identifier les ménages pauvres et extrêmement pauvres dans les communautés d’intervention de l’ONG Plan Bénin. De façon spécifique, les résultats attendus sont **:**

* la réalisation d’une typologie des ménages de communautés d’intervention de Plan Bénin;
* le recensement de tous les ménages pauvres dans tous les villages d’intervention de Plan Bénin;
* l’identification des ménages pauvres nécessitant un appui dans les villages d’intervention du programme de Sécurité Alimentaire et Nutritionnelle ;
* l’identification des critères de classification des ménages selon leur niveau de prospérité;
* la proposition d’actions en vue de lutter contre la pauvreté.

Cette mission s’est déroulée en plusieurs étapes dont les principales sont :

* la revue de la littérature pour la proposition de la méthodologie et des outils de collecte et d’analyse des données,
* la formation des enquêteurs,
* la collecte des données sur le terrain,
* l‘élaboration de fiches de recensement,
* le recensement et la classification des ménages selon les caractéristiques les plus discriminantes identifiées.

Pour une fiabilité des résultats, l’approche hybride de l’utilisation de l’analyse quantitative et de l’analyse qualitative a été utilisée de manière complémentaire pour cette étude. La démarche méthodologique utilisée repose sur la Méthode Accélérée de Recherche Participative (MARP), en l’occurrence la stratification sociale. Quatre jours de formation ont permis de former 18 enquêteurs constitués en groupes de trois personnes. Les enquêtes préliminaires ont été effectuées dans dix huit villages du département du Couffo. A cet effet, les outils de collecte de données ont été remis à chaque membre des groupes constitués. Chaque groupe a eu pour mission de faire le recensement exhaustif des ménages de trois villages et de sélectionner 20 ménages par village pour la collecte des données quantitatives. Au total 360 ménages ont été sélectionnés et enquêtés. L’organisation des focus group dans les six communes du Couffo à l’aide de l’outil (Succès Echecs, Potentialité et Obstacles) SEPO a permis de mieux appréhender les problèmes que vivent les populations concernées afin de proposer des mesures correctives.

Pour les données quantitatives, l’approche statistique a été basée sur des analyses multi variées. L’analyse canonique discriminante pas à pas (Steppique canonical analysais) et les résultats de l’analyse qualitative ont permis de retenir les caractéristiques les plus discriminantes des différents types de ménages. L’Analyse en Composantes Principales (ACP) a permis de déterminer les caractéristiques les plus déterminantes pour les classes identifiées sur la base des variables mesurées. Ces résultats ont servi à élaborer une fiche de recensement simplifiée que les enfants de niveau minimum de la classe de cinquième du cours secondaire ont utilisé pour collecter les informations sur le niveau de vie des ménages.

Cette démarche méthodologique a permis de recenser plus de 29063 ménages des communautés d’intervention de l’ONG Plan Bénin dans 38 arrondissements des six communes du Couffo. La typologie a été effectuée avec 24806 ménages qui ont répondu aux dix questions retenues pour la classification desdits ménages. L’analyse des résultats indique que 15 % seulement des ménages concernés ont un niveau de prospérité relativement intéressant. Ils sont considérés comme étant les riches. Les populations qui ont un niveau de prospérité juste au dessus du seuil de pauvreté représentent 35 % ; ces populations appartiennent à la classe moyenne. Par contre, 25 % ont un niveau de prospérité en dessous du seuil de pauvreté, ce sont les pauvres. Ces derniers sont cependant mieux lotis que d’autres qui vivent dans le dénuement total, ce sont les extrêmes pauvres, ils représentent aussi 25 % de la population cible. Cette répartition des classes de prospérité varie d’une commune à l’autre. A Aplahoué par exemple 20,8 % des ménages sont des riches contre seulement 6,6 % pour Dogbo. C’est donc dire que les besoins et intensités d’interventions pour l’amélioration du niveau de vie ne sont pas les mêmes d’une commune à l’autre.

Une base de données est réalisée et permet de reconnaître les ménages selon leur niveau de prospérité. Cette base de données se trouve sous la forme fichiers (bases Excel) et de documents reliés à part et intitulés :

* Annexe 3 : « Base de recensement des ménages du Couffo selon leur niveau de prospérité (commune d’Aplahoué) » ;
* Annexe 4 : « Base de recensement des ménages du Couffo selon leur niveau de prospérité (commune de Klouékanmè) » ;
* Annexe 5 : « Base de recensement des ménages du Couffo selon leur niveau de prospérité (commune de Djakotomey) » ;
* Annexe 6 : « Base de recensement des ménages du Couffo selon leur niveau de prospérité (commune de Lalo) » ;
* Annexe 7 : « Base de recensement des ménages du Couffo selon leur niveau de prospérité (commune de Toviklin) » et
* Annexe 8 : «Base de recensement des ménages du Couffo selon leur niveau de prospérité (commune de Dogbo) ».

Ces résultats offrent l’avantage de fournir des informations précises sur les caractéristiques des ménages au moment de l’enquête (septembre 2006). Des propositions ont été faites en considérant les besoins des populations et le potentiel local de développement pour lutter contre la pauvreté dans les communautés concernées.

*Mots clés : pauvreté, Couffo, Plan Bénin, INRAB, recensement, ménages, typologie*

# Appendix 2: Explanations of sampling techniques used for the study.

The number of households to be surveyed overall was established using a specific formula (n=zu2x(pq/I2)x2) to give the number of households to be surveyed that would provide an accurate, representative sample of the full number of very poor households. 919 was the total number of very poor households in Dogbo and putting this number into the equation it was established that a sample size of 209 households was needed to give a fully representative sample. Once this number (209) had been established a separate method was used to ascertain the number of households that should be surveyed in each village (box 1) giving the results demonstrated in table A1.

Box 1: Explanation of the way in which the household sample was chosen

In order to ascertain how many households should be surveyed in each village an equation was used to establish how many groups the sample size should be divided into to ensure that the sample gave a representative sample of all villages. For a sample of 209 it was ascertained that there should be 25 different sub-groups and so to determine how many households should be in each sub-group: 209/25 = 8.36 ≈ 8 (to the nearest whole number).

Using a cumulative population table for the poorest households in each village it was determined that the gap between each sub-group should be 36.76 (≈37). Using a random table of computer-generated numbers the starting point for the sample was then taken as 21.

Therefore a sub-group was to be taken where the 21st very poor household was located. After this, 37 was added to 21 to give 58 so that in the village where the 58th very poor household was situated another sub-group would be taken. 37 was then continuously added to the previous number, giving the location of another sub-group, until the total number of very poor households (919) was surpassed.

Table A1: table to show the number of sub-groups to be taken in each village.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Village** | **Very poor households** | | **Number of sub-groups** |
|  | **Number** | **Cumulative number** |  |
| Adandro-Akodé | 76 | 76 | XX |
| Allada | 20 | 96 | X |
| Ayesso | 82 | 178 | X |
| Botagbe | 194 | 372 | XXXXXX |
| Fifadji | 74 | 446 | XX |
| Gnigbe | 20 | 466 | X |
| Godohou | 18 | 484 |  |
| Houndromey | 36 | 520 | X |
| Hounsa | 37 | 557 | X |
| Kenavo | 25 | 582 | X |
| Lokogohoué-centre | 53 | 635 | X |
| Madjre-centre | 114 | 749 | XXX |
| Midangbé | 29 | 778 | X |
| Segba | 40 | 818 | X |
| Tchoulehoudji | 5 | 823 |  |
| Togannou | 6 | 829 |  |
| Totchangni-centre | 53 | 882 | X |
| Véhidji | 57 | 919 | X |
| Total | 919 |  | 25 groups |

Key: X = 1 sub-group of eight households.

The next step was to establish which households would be surveyed to make up the total number specified for each village – Plan Benin’s list of households for each village made this aim possible. The total number of very poor households was taken for each village and divided by the number of households (not number of sub-groups) to be surveyed in each village.

Eg. Segba: Total number of very poor households (40)

Total number of households to be surveyed in the village (8)

= intervals between households (4.75 ≈ 5)

Therefore on the list of household heads for all the very poor households, every 5th household must be chosen to be surveyed.

There were two concerns with this technique however:

1. This research was focussed solely on primary school education and therefore, for the household to provide interesting data for the survey, it should have at least one child of primary school age.
2. Household names may have changed in the two years since the Plan survey and therefore some households could be difficult to identify.

As a result of these two issues it was decided that if a family did not have a child of primary school age, or if the household was difficult to find due to name changes, then the name underneath would be tried (eg. Segba: the 6th name would be tried) and if this was not successful the list would be worked down until a suitable household was found and then the original sampling technique would once again be adopted.

For the rest of the research the samples taken were based upon the households identified within this sampling strategy.

# Appendix 3: Two examples of the ideas formulated by children during the focus groups.

Figure 1: Spider diagram by Dieu-Donnée (12years), EPP Midangbé

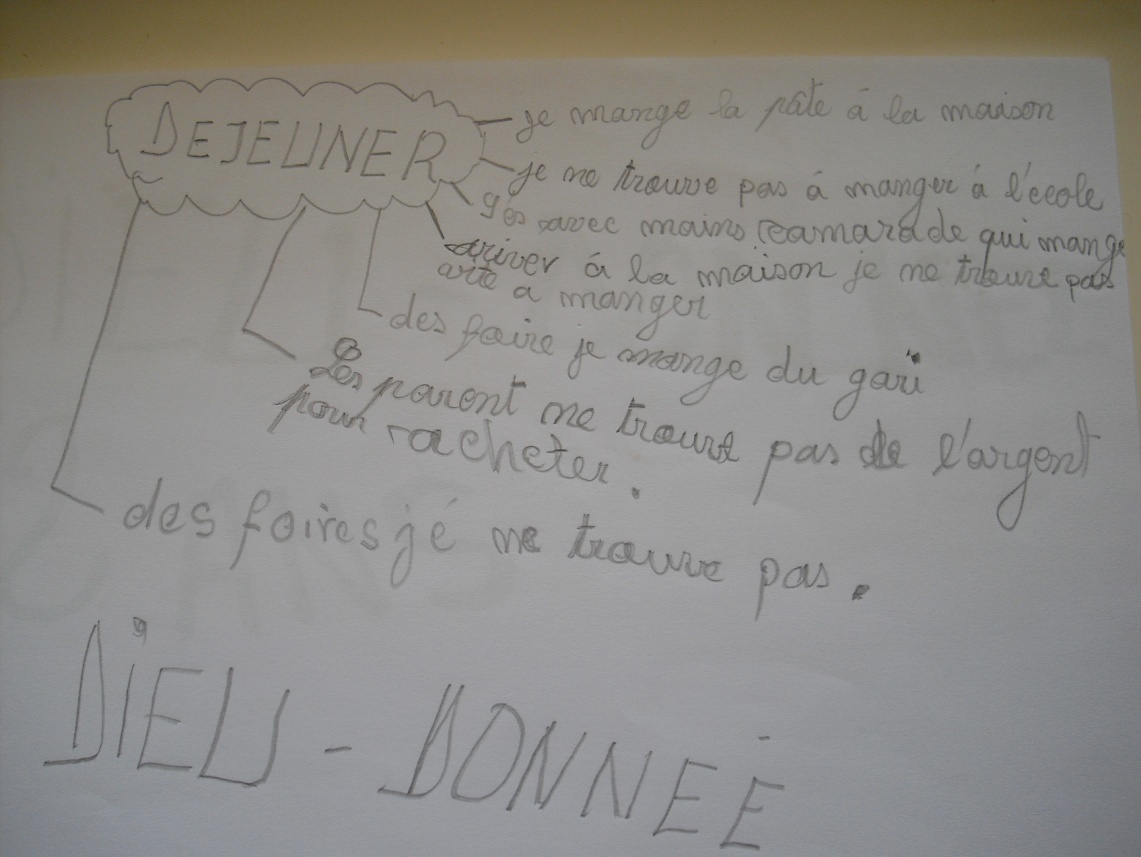
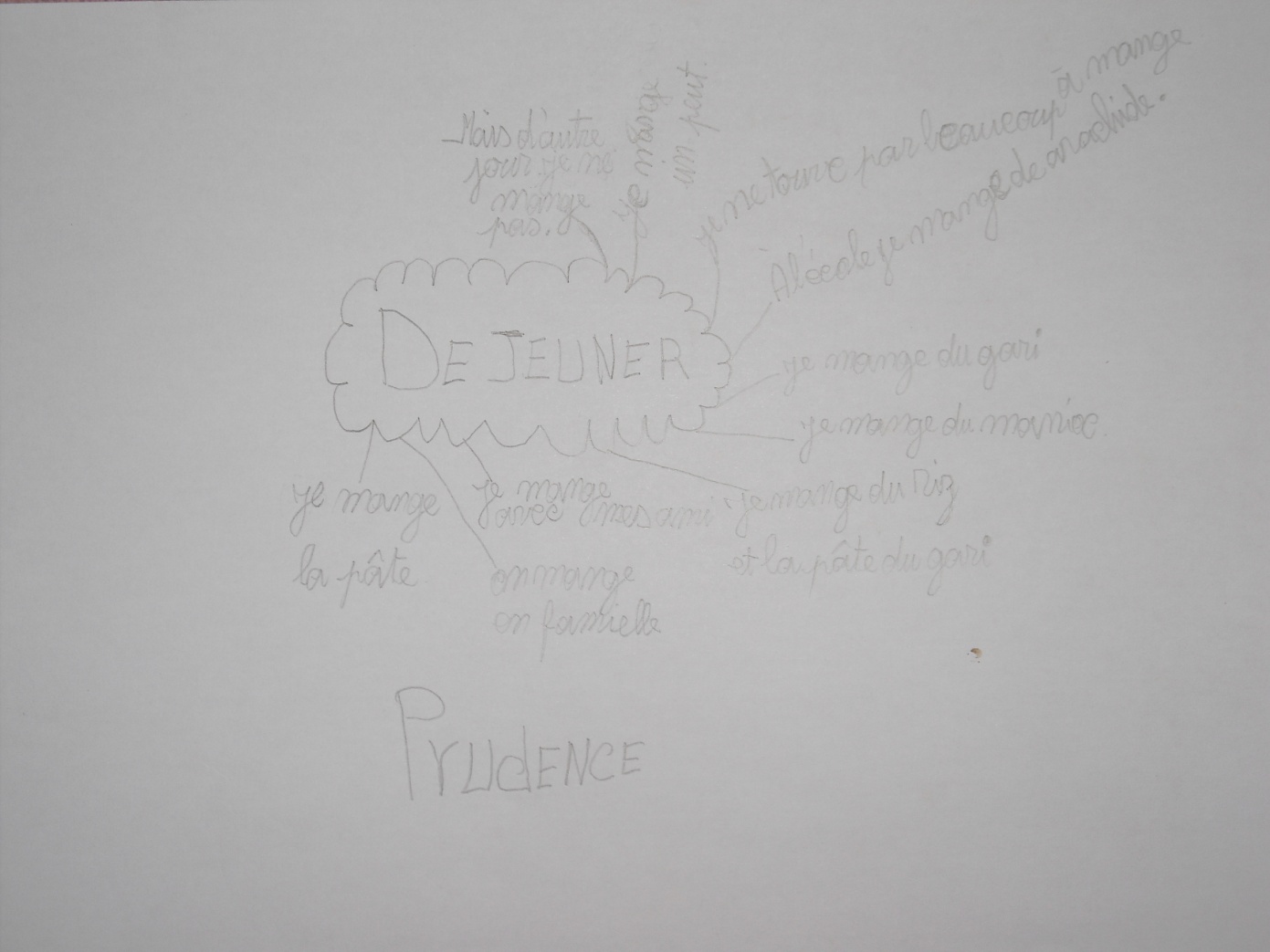
****

Figure 2: Spider diagram by Prudence (9years), EPP Botagbé



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1. Performance rates are measured by the number of children in the preceding year that successfully passed their CEP. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For this category figures were gathered by taking the total number of children in the household and dividing that by the number of children who went to school. Therefore, 1 expresses a situation where all children within a household are at school and 0 shows that none of the children in the household are enrolled in school and if 4 out of 6 children have been appropriately enrolled in primary school, for example, this is represented by 0.67, and so on. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. EPPs were the focus of this research; these are public government funded schools. Privately run schools were not included as the households involved in this research were classified as ‘very poor households’ and it was therefore hypothesised that they would be unlikely to have the level of income to support their children attending fee paying primary schools. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For more on the livelihood approach see chapter 2.3 and Kaag in Kalb et al. (2004); De Haan in van Lindert et al. (2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The number of girls completing school was significantly lower than the number of boys completing school. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For more detail see chapter 2.5 and Hoot et al, 2004; Huisman and Smits, 2009; Iyamu and Obiunu, 2006; Lloyd et al., 2008; Michaelowa, 2001; Michaelowa and Wittman, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Pinstrup-Anderson and Herforth (2008) and FAO (2008) for further information. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Millennium Goals, and other related global aims, are targeted for completion by 2015; for more information see http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Benin, with 11 other formerly French-ruled African countries and two other West African countries, is part of the Communauté Financière Africaine (CFA) and the economy operates with CFA frans. Exchange rate: 1€ = 656CFA [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Over 40% of ‘communautaires’ have passed only their CEP exams or have no official qualifications at all (Guingnido Gaye, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Many men in Benin follow the custom of taking at least two wives. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Women walk up to three or even four hours to reach the market carrying heavy goods to try and sell. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. During the pilot run although only ten children were invited to the focus group around 30 children from the village attended which made the session rather chaotic and difficult to control. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Couffo is a relatively recently created department and as a result some of its administrative offices remain joined with the neighbouring department of Mono, hence ‘Mono-Couffo’. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A small caveat must be added here: the numbers for the country overall and for Dogbo and Mono-Couffo are garnered from different sources which do not make clear how the figures were established. Therefore it is possible that the collection methods are different which could explain the extreme difference between figures. This consideration must be borne in mind. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Performance rates are measured by the number of children in the preceding year that successfully passed their CEP. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. EPP Segba currently only has four year classes up to CE2 so they have not yet presented children for the CEP. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This policy was instigated to try and help to achieve quality basic education for all. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For this category figures were gathered by taking the total number of children in the household and dividing that by the number of children who went to school. Therefore, 1 expresses a situation where all children within a household are at school and 0 shows that none of the children in the household are enrolled in school and if 4 out of 6 children have been appropriately enrolled in primary school, for example, this is represented by 0.67, and so on. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The rate of abandonment was recorded as the number of children who had dropped out of school in the previous school year (September 2007 – July 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Although the question specifically asked for the all inclusive number of household members it is possible that when a wife was answering the question she might not include the other wives in her count of household members – “Jealousy is of course an issue with polygamy – we often don’t like the other wives and do not like to consider them part of the household, there is always competition between us...over everything” (Raymonde, Tchouleoudji). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Household wealth has been calculated using an amalgamation of answers to four different questions – the number of fields owned by a household, the mode of transport owned, possession of TV/radio/books/phone and ownership of electricity/toilet. Each of the answers to these questions was given a certain number of points and then the points for each category were then totalled for each household to give a total number of points – the higher the points total the wealthier the household is deemed to be. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. In 98% of cases food was the household’s main expenditure. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Whether or not the parent could speak French was assessed as to whether they felt they were able to communicate comfortably with others in the language. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Sodabi is a locally brewed alcohol made from palm trees. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Second hand clothes generally sent to Africa from Western countries and sold on by local people in markets across the continent. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. When job opportunities are scarce in the local area people in Couffo often leave to neighbouring Togo in search of better job opportunities or to take up seasonal employment for a short period. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The truth of this must be considered as it is possible that parents may have, in some cases, given the answers they thought wanted to be heard by the researcher/research assistants. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. At EPP Segehoumey, a school studied in this research, this program was introduced but soon abandoned through mutual consent between Plan Benin, the school and the local community. It was agreed that the school, at 600 pupils, was too large for the community to be able to run an effective canteen (for more information on Plan Benin’s school feeding project see chapter 3.5). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Whilst in Couffo Plan Benin organised an event to train head teachers about good school management in terms of filing etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)