

RESEARCH NOTE

by * K. Blakemore

The African response to formal education has often been characterised as one of ever-increasing demand. In Ghana from 1965-1970, and Nigeria during the Civil War, however, enrolment in primary schools in most regions declined as much as 4% per annum. To study attitudes towards primary and middle school education, and to try to assess the effect of school-leaver "unemployment" upon demand for schools, it was decided to conduct small-scale social surveys in two communities in northern Ghana.

The Northern and Upper Regions of Ghana seem to have suffered from deprivation in many spheres, not least in education, but within "the north" there are significant differences in the local response to education. The choice of one community in the north-west (Ko-Nandom) and one 20 miles north of Tamale was made in order to crudely approximate this differential response.

Ko-Nandom is a semi-Christian community, subject to a great deal of short-term labour "migration" in the dry season and is fairly remote from well-established market centres; consequently the production of cash crops is minimal. Pong-Tamale, on the other hand, could be described as an "urban satellite" of Tamale; is situated on the main northern road from Tamale to Bolgatanga, it has its own source of employment (a large veterinary Station) and its townships may be divided into traditional, small-farmer Dagomba houses, larger Dagomba compounds whose householders mix other economic activities with farming, and a Zongo which provides most of the workers in the Veterinary Station. This district north of Tamale was chosen so that important large-scale rice farmers could be included in the sample of householders.

* Ph.D. Candidate, Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham

The design of the social survey was not made on the basis of sampling within the defined population of the "community" but rather upon the backgrounds of the school-leavers who had attended the middle schools in each village. School registers were used to find the names of all the boys who had left school in 1970 and 1971. From this list, half of the boys' names were selected and, if possible, their fathers were interviewed. Then an equal number of fathers, who happened to be living in the same village section, but with no sons attending school or no school-leaver sons, were also interviewed. In the Pong-Tamale and Savelugu district (2 middle schools) a greater proportion of householders who sent no children to school were included. It is also worth noting that the Ko-Nandom middle schools drew their students from nearby hamlets, but the Savelugu boarding school, and to a lesser extent the Pong-Tamale day school, took students whose original homes had been up to 20 miles away.

Interview schedules were also designed for middle school-leavers. Less than half of them 1970 and 1971 students were still living in the villages, and an even smaller proportion of students from previous years remained; however, as this research project has been designed for the study of education in a "rural" situation, no attempt to follow up school leavers in towns has been made. Every school-leaver contacted in the selected villages was interviewed, and only for a very few cases was the interviewing delegated to an assistant. In Ko-Nandom, 54 middle school-leavers and 49 householders were formally interviewed, and in Pong-Tamale, Savelugu, Diare, 56 school-leavers were traced and interviewed, in addition to 63 householders.

From this experience, and at this stage of the work when interviewing is still not complete, it would be wrong to generalise about the place of formal education in these selected communities, much less about the Dagarti or Dagomba response to schools. However, the interviews and general observation have thrown up a number of interesting clues which suggest reasons for the reluctance to send children to school or, in the case of Ko, to be resigned to sending them to school. The schedules for fathers and for school-leavers have been divided into sections dealing with attitudes to farming, the place of literate people in the village, employment aspirations, the reconciliation of demands from family and the school, and (for fathers) the problems of socialization. For the sake of brevity, tentative conclusions which have arisen out of these sections will be indicated below under more general headings:

The commitment to education, unemployment and aspirations

In Ko-Nandom, both the household surveys and the number of children enrolled in Primary Class One (PI) indicate a much stronger commitment to education than in the Pong-Tamale/Savelugu district. In Ko, about 50% of the primary school-age children were actually attending school, but in the Pong-Tamale/Savelugu district the proportion was 24%. From the latter example, a distinction must be made between the majority of Dagomba farmers and the

householders from the Pong-Tamale 'new town' (mostly Dagomba) and Zongo, who sent about 40% of school-age children to school. This exception should not blur the general impression of enrolment in the rural districts surrounding Tamale, where many villages have schools with empty classrooms or have closed their primary schools altogether. In this case, supply clearly outstrips demand and indicates that the "educational problem of the north" is not simply one of neglect as far as facilities are concerned.

The household survey revealed that, in places where people were extremely reluctant to send children to school, families sometimes had a senior son who had been forced to attend school during the expansionist period of Dr. Nkrumah; their disenchantment with education stemmed usually from the fact that some sons had dropped out of school as soon as the element of compulsion had been removed and had become "good for nothing" or, if they had completed school, were finding it difficult to obtain employment. Commitment to education was not perceived as something affecting the household unit all the time: it was often described as a kind of tribute, a "once only" contribution of one son who, when trained to read English, could act as the educated representative of the whole household. In Koonandom, this attitude also appeared, but to a much lesser extent. The migration of most young men to the south means that more children have to be educated to ensure that at least one literate person is living in or near the home at any one time. An attitude of "resigned acceptance" of education also arose from the awareness that young men, if they have to travel, might as well be well-prepared for their search for employment.

The middle school-leavers in Pong-Tamale and Savelugu were surrounded by a much wider range of job opportunities than their counterparts in the north-west. It was surprising, therefore, to find that parental knowledge of the employment opportunities for school-leavers in the Tamale area was extremely unsophisticated, unless the father himself was a wage earner.

The influence of the signals of the job market (that is, rising aspirations for one's sons in an expanding market, or depressed aspirations in times of unemployment) would seem to be weaker than more traditional attitudes towards education. Thus farmers who lived next door to wage-earners did not seem to modify their aspirations for their sons, and seemed to know as little about educational levels, the requirements or qualifications for work as did the Dagarti fathers who often travelled to the south to take on labouring work.

The middle school-leavers themselves usually showed fairly perceptive appraisals of their position; in Koonandom, school-leavers simply farm for their relatives until they are judged to be strong enough to go to look for work in the south. The boys interviewed were reluctant to go without permission from their fathers, or without making sure that a relative or friend in the south would be ready to receive them. They were aware that finding work of any kind was difficult, were usually ready to wait for a year (at least) before

returning home to the only alternative, farming food crops for the family. As with the Dagomba school-leavers, they were prepared to take on any kind of work except very menial tasks such as latrine boy or petty trader. In the Pong-Tamale/Savelugu area, the school-leavers' responses indicated a greater degree of independence from their home village; many had lived in two or three places during the previous year and had left their immediate family to attend middle school in the first place. About half of the Dagomba sample had visited either the south or the Upper Region, whereas not more than 25% of the Dagarti boys had ever travelled further than Nandom, six miles away.

Although Dagomba school-leavers mentioned more often an interference in their educational career by father or father's brother, this response may reflect a greater degree of self-consciousness as "educated people" felt by these boys, compared with the Ko group amongst whom a middle school education is more common. While it is true that Dagomba farmers are sometimes responsible for withdrawing their sons from school, occasional respondents were appalled by the suggestion that a child should be told to leave the school against his own will; not only would this contradict a child's own rights, but also the authority of the father who allowed the child to go to school in the first place.

In conclusion, enrolment and the status of school-leavers are both bound up with "commitment" to education, but trying to define "commitment" or to observe declining enrolment in one village is very difficult. To give one example, enrolment in one small village Nyeshie, supposedly declined from 26 to 6 over a period of six months. But at no one time did the whole group of 26 go to school at once; perhaps every day children would appear, but the composition of the group would change from week to week, so that at no one point could it be suggested to a parent that he had "withdrawn" his child from primary school.

Traditional socialization and formal education

For the reasons mentioned above — the need to migrate to earn money — attitude in Ko towards education seemed more tolerant than in the Pong-Tamale/Savelugu district. In both communities, however, there was a feeling that the eldest, the stronger and the ones with more "sense" should not go to school. Sociability, farming ability and quickness in performing household tasks were characteristics more often associated with the non-educated in both communities. In matters such as trustworthiness and moral behaviour, Dagarti respondents often said that this depended on the character of the boy and the way in which he had been brought up, not so much upon whether he had been to school. A number of Dagomba respondents thought along the same lines, but others associated drunkenness more often with the educated. This was the only negative influence resulting from modern education

mentioned by the Muslims. The more serious, or well-to-do Muslims often pointed out the value of learning English, especially as some modern missionary Qu'ranic commentaries are written in English. A combination of State school education in the day-time and learning the Qu'ran in the evening was suggested as something which the brightest children should do, but a Muslim parent would usually send some sons to Qu'ranic school, some to State school and keep others in the house. This pattern contrasted quite sharply with the non-praying Dagomba, who had sometimes been forced to send a son to school in the early 1960's but was usually very reluctant to send any more sons to school.

The Christian/non-Christian responses matched the Muslim/non-Muslim attitudinal differences, but in Ko-Nandom the distinction was not too clear because school children sometimes become Christians while fathers do not (and the conversion seemed to be more clearly-marked than from non-Muslim to Muslim). For Christians and non-Christians in Ko-Nandom, however, preoccupation with problems of socialization and the continuation of the old social order was much greater than in the Pong-Tamale/Savelugu district. Interviewing during January-March revealed some households with up to six adult women, with one "junior father" keeping house until the other adult males returned from the April-August farming season. Consequently the problems faced in enforcing paternal authority upon the young were often mentioned. One of the most common responses to the question "should all go to school, or some, or none?" was that, if all were to go to school, who would look after the home, "or would you like us to let it die out?" The ambivalent feelings about migration — fearing its social consequences yet at the same time realising its economic inevitability — therefore seemed to be extended to education.

As part of the preoccupation with the disappearance of traditional values, the failure of the young to follow "the old ways" was more often discussed in Ko-Nandom than in Pong-Tamale/Savelugu. Unwillingness to return home to attend an important funeral, to help brothers to clear a farm or to break a prearranged dowry and marriage agreement were often cited as examples. The most pervasive aspect of this feeling of changing standards was undoubtedly the frequency with which accusations of poisoning occurred.

As an explanation of sudden death, poison — and witchcraft-accusation have always existed, but it seems that its incidence used to be more strictly controlled. The present-day confusion of Christian and non-Christian beliefs seems to have weakened some of these controls, especially when close relatives do not share the same religion. In descriptions of poison-accusation cases, informants always stressed the uncontrolled nature of the attack, and the wilful, non-rational motives of the attacker, usually adding that "these days" it was possible to harm someone without the fear of traditional sanctions.

The relevance of this high incidence of poison-accusations and gossip feelings about education would seem to lie in the links, mentioned above,

between migration and education. Typical situations for poison accusations occur within the localized descent group, and very often when a brother becomes jealous of a father who manages to persuade a large number of sons to return from the south to farm for him. The danger of jealousy becomes especially great if any of these have informed me that they do not like to risk visiting their homes (near Ko) for longer than a week. A much larger proportion of middle school-students from Ko than from Pong-Tamale/Savelugu said that "trouble from relatives" or "death palaver" would make them settle in a different region, given that they had equal opportunity for work in Nandom or in the south.

In contrast, neither Dagomba school-leavers nor parents specifically mentioned the fear of poison. From these preliminary findings, it could perhaps be suggested that education of children in the Ko district is generally favoured, whereas the return of educated young men is not; the Dagomba response, on the other hand, seems to discourage widespread formal education but to respect the position of the small number of literates who complete their schooling.

Note

A third study in the district of Ho, Volta Region, will be included to compare findings with the two northern samples.