



Girls claiming education rights: Reflections on distribution, empowerment and gender justice in Northern Tanzania and Northern Nigeria



Elaine Unterhalter^{a,*}, Jo Heslop^a, Andrew Mamedu^b

^a Institute of Education, University of London, United Kingdom

^b ActionAid Nigeria, Nigeria

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Gender
Schooling
Rights
Indicators
Tanzania
Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The article considers the analytical connection between two approaches to discussing girls' schooling and gender justice. One trend considers injustice primarily as a question of inequalities in distribution and raises few questions about the nature of the gender norms associated with inequitable distribution. A second approach looks at issues of empowerment, the ways in which structural gendered inequalities in the political economy and socio-cultural formations constrain the capacity of girls inside and outside school to claim the rights promised by education, but tends to underplay issues of distribution. The article considers what the relationship between these two approaches to gender justice might be through a detailed discussion of baseline data collected in 2008 for the NGO led TEGINT (Transforming education for girls in Nigeria and Tanzania) project. Girls' identification of the obstacles to claiming education rights and possible solutions are used as proxies for empowerment, while different features of distribution are examined with regard to gender parity in access and progression, governance and management, and teacher qualifications. Quantitative data based on responses to a survey allows for correlation between aspects of distribution and empowerment to be considered across different contexts. The strongest association between empowerment and distribution is found with regard to the levels of teachers' qualifications, although there is not sufficient data to explain the reasons for this. The conclusion highlights the importance of contextual factors in understanding the relationships between distribution and empowerment evident from the data and the importance of designing future studies to look more closely at the dynamic two way relationship of distributional and empowerment aspects of gender justice in education.

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The default position in discussing gender in national and international education policy for many decades has been to consider injustice primarily as a question of inequalities in distribution. This approach implicitly raises few questions about the nature of the gender norms associated with inequitable distribution, and gives little attention to the issue of empowerment. Partly as a critique of this, a literature developed that stressed the significance of examining the ways in which structural gendered inequalities in the political economy and socio-cultural formations constrained the capacity of girls inside and outside school to claim the rights promised by education. This approach, in highlighting inequitable gender norms, often gave insufficient

attention to issues of distribution, particularly what girls gained from schooling, despite the persistence of gender inequalities. This article explores the importance of attempting to build an analytical connection between the two approaches, so we can better understand the ways in which education rights are claimed and realised, in contexts of uneven achievement of gender equality.

The first part surveys some discussion in the literature on gender, distribution, inequality and empowerment drawing out some of the tensions between approaches that stress the importance of access and distribution and those, often concerned with features of empowerment, that downplay this. The second part reports on research conducted for the baseline study for the Transforming education for girls in Nigeria and Tanzania (TEGINT) project and how this linked with practice. The project attempted to link discussion of distribution with considerations of gender relations and empowerment, but keeping the two in a dynamic relationship was not always an easy matter. The data indicate that simple correlations cannot be made, and point to the need for

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 207 612 6922.

E-mail address: elaine.unterhalter@ioe.ac.uk (E. Unterhalter).

further work that looks at the form of the relationship between distribution and empowerment.

2. An over narrow conception of distribution?

A feature of education policy discussion at international and national level over more than a decade has been the prominence given to gender in discussions of distribution (Unterhalter, 2007; DeJaeghere, 2012). Gender has been consistently remarked on, while other aspects of social division, such as income, race, ethnicity or location have only relatively recently been noted (Lockheed, 2008; UNESCO, 2010). However, although there is a long history of concern with gender inequalities in schooling, there are many different positions on what is the appropriate space in which to identify those inequalities and how they may be measured. For example, do we see the primary space of inequality as the school, and is the main question concerned with distribution of opportunities for enrolment, progression and attainment for girls, relative to boys in particular population groups? This was the position of one of the first syntheses of analysis in this area in the early 1990s conducted by the World Bank (King and Hill, 1993) or is the distributional problem not simply one of access, but of what girls and boys have access to, how they engage with schooling, and how they are treated in school and after they complete particular phases of education? This was the position put forward by a range of analysts associated with considering inequality as located 'beyond access' (e.g. Aikman and Unterhalter, 2005; Maslak, 2008; Fennell and Arnot, 2008). Thus inequalities are not merely associated with resources, but with attitudes, structures, socio-cultural processes, uneven forms of empowerment, capabilities, and outcomes.

These different positions have consequences for the approach to measuring gender inequality and distribution. Gender parity, that is, the measure of the numbers of girls and boys in school, has long been used as a proxy to understand gender equality (UNESCO, 2004). Its usefulness is partly pragmatic, in that these data are routinely collected, but its limits are acknowledged. In recent years, the attention has shifted from access to school to quality in school (World Bank, 2011; Perlman-Robinson, 2011). The distributional question has changed its shape from being one about largely publicly situated questions of education provision – that is how many children states can enrol or progress through different phases of schooling – to one about largely individually located issues of attainment – that is what level of competence in literacy or mathematics or what exam scores particular children achieve and who is to be held accountable for this. Generally the research base for the focus on gender parity and questions of distribution are the monitoring and evaluation systems of governments, based on the administrative records compiled by the education officers of government departments (UNESCO, 2011, p. 262; UNICEF, 2012, p. 107). It is noticeable that the focus on parity and distribution assumes either that the school is an equitable institution in which the gender norms of the household or the society can be undone, or that these norms are relatively trivial and can be confronted by, for example, delaying the age of marriage or ensuring girls, who complete school, have access to the labour market. The ways in which marriage relations and labour market access are themselves marked by gender inequalities tends to be largely underplayed.

Critiques of the parity approach come from a number of directions associated with GAD (gender and development), analysis of capabilities and empowerment, and postcolonial theorising about processes of representation and discourse (Unterhalter, 2005a). While there are different emphases in these approaches all agree that simple distribution of resources is not adequate as a framework for justice. With regard to rights and capabilities some have pointed out how the idea of gender equality

is a normative idea about opportunity, dignity, agency and justice and that realizing this in education is not simply about enrolling equal numbers of girls and boys in school (Unterhalter, 2005b, 2007; Subrahmanian, 2005). GAD analysts have built up a considerable literature using largely qualitative research methods to show how gendered relations in school have resonance with those in the labour market, with patterns of ownership of assets, the distribution of power in the political, cultural, and social sphere, constructions of masculinity, femininity and ideas about bodily integrity, relationships of care and what is depicted as the private space of the family (e.g. Aikman, 1999; Raynor, 2008; Chege and Arnot, 2012). Thus the actions of educated girls always need to be understood in terms of gendered norms that constrain the possibilities for change (National Research Council, 2005; Mascarenhas, 2007; Maslak, 2008; Ross et al., 2011). Some authors, in bringing together elements of GAD and capabilities analysis highlight how a simple stress on distribution and education provision fails to take account of what is learned and how this learning can be used (Stromquist, 2002; Unterhalter, 2003; Monkman, 2011; Murphy-Graham, 2012).

A notable critique is that in monitoring school systems and the provision of opportunities to learn primarily in units of resource, that is how many years of enrolment or what level of attainment, analysts miss aspects of situatedness, collectivity, emotion, and the sense of vulnerability which has been a key component of postcolonial feminist assessments of inequality and experience of education *whether or not there have been achievements*. Thus, a number of African feminist analysts (Salo and Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka, 2003; Mama, 2007) draw attention to the nuance of locale, and the ways in which particular kinds of relationships form and re-form in response to particular conditions. Thus reducing inequalities in access to schooling might happen in conditions of expanding women's rights to assets, labour market participation, or political participation. However, sometimes girls have rights to and within education, but few economic and social rights in public and private arenas. In some contexts, women have considerable economic power in certain spheres, like trade, but do not participate in schooling. The fine-grain of context is important at both national and local levels. One trend of commentary draws out how engaging with equality entails not only what is learned formally in school, but draws on larger lessons about generosity, tolerance and the effects of suffering, where much wisdom may reside with women and men, who do not necessarily have formal schooling, and where a key element of learning entails engaging with emotion and vulnerability (Nnaemeka, 2003; Abrahams, 2007). In some of this analysis, while much attention is given to the complexity of gendered power and the difficulties of confronting it, relatively little attention is given to the significance of the expansion of education provision, which is sometimes treated as an area of almost deceitful false promises to girls or boys (Youdell, 2006). However, some very nuanced accounts draw out how formal learning in school or higher education can only touch the surface of insight into these connections, which are key to appreciating features of gender justice (Abrahams, 2007; Andreotti, 2011). These accounts, however, do not discount the significance of being in a formal education setting. But, they are concerned at how difficult it is, under current conditions, which overlook many injustices, for schools to engage with addressing these larger values.

A problem for the first group of analysts, who suggest the main problem is the distribution of education opportunities, is that in looking primarily at what Unterhalter (2007, pp. xii–xiii) has called gender as a noun, that is numbers of girls and boys in school, *gender relations*, aspects of gender identity, and particular representations of this become the background conditions that result in particular patterns of enrolment or attainment. Gender relations and

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/356079>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/356079>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)