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Democratising higher education in Ghana and Tanzania: Opportunity structures and social inequalities

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on an ESRC/DFID funded research project on Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing an Equity Scorecard (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/education/wideningparticipation). There are questions about whether widening participation in higher education is a force for democratisation or differentiation. While participation rates are increasing globally, there has been scant research or socio-cultural theorisation of how different structures of inequality intersect in the developing world. Questions also need to be posed about how higher education relates to policy discourses of poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals. The article explores participation in higher education, utilising statistical data and life history interviews with students in two public and two private universities. It focuses on how gender and socio-economic status intersect and constrain or facilitate participation in higher education. Findings to date suggest that opportunity structures reflect social inequalities.

1. Democratising higher education: wealth creation and poverty reduction

When asked what had been the most important event of the 20th century, Amartya Sen replied: the emergence of democracy (1999, p. 3). Democratisation debates have included discussion on the structural conditions of democracy (Przeworski, 1985), the compatibility of democracy and capitalism (Wood, 1996) and consideration of the redistributive potential of democracy (Young, 2000). The global expansion of liberal democracy has raised questions about participation and representation (de Sousa Santos, 2005). These issues have been particularly relevant as the diversity of societies is increasingly recognised, and among those groups whose rights are not recognised (Benhabib, 1996; Young, 2000). Links have been made between representation and cultural and social diversity. Gradually, a new social grammar that includes consideration of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds has emerged in conjunction with new forms of relation between the state and society. Questions have arisen about the representation of various social interests in key public institutions. Elite social institutions have increasingly been required to consider the democratic challenge. In the policy field of higher education, the concepts of access and widening participation have become condensates for discussion of diversity, equity and disadvantage, and a form of critique of public universities. Democracy has an intrinsic value and sometimes also instrumental utility (Miller and Rose, 1995). In the alleged globalised knowledge economy, more people have been required to acquire high skills and competencies. This is resulting in increasing numbers of people desiring a product that is in short supply. Higher education has always been rationed. Now new criteria are being applied to the rationing process that include attention to diversity and social inclusion. Tensions have started to appear between the providers and would-be consumers of the higher education product. These include fears about quality and standards, funding and capacity challenges.

Higher education is repeatedly positioned by the international community as a central site for facilitating the skills, knowledge and expertise that are essential to economic and social development (Schuller et al., 2004). Innovation and economic growth have become inextricably linked in policy terms (Kenway et al., 2004). Yet access is still problematic. Against the backdrop of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), overt links are also being made by the global polity between participation rates in higher education, wealth creation and poverty reduction (UNESCO, 1998; World Bank, 2002). Higher education is conceptualised as both a public and a private good (Singh, 2001). Public because it contributes to wealth creation, the development of civil society, democratisation, social security and peace, private because it has the potential to enhance the wealth and life choices of graduates (Morley, 2007). The convergence of personal desires and

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aspirations with macro-level wealth creation is a cornerstone of participation policies.

Widening participation in higher education has become a global policy objective, underpinned by both economic and social imperatives. However, there are questions about whether widening participation in higher education is a force for democratisation or differentiation. Initiatives are perceived both as a form of meritocratic equalisation and as a reinforcement of social stratification processes (David, 2007). It is debateable whether educational expansion 'reduces inequality by providing more opportunities for persons from disadvantaged strata, or magnifies inequality by expanding opportunities disproportionately for those who are already privileged' (Shavit et al., 2007, p. 1). Whereas there have been studies of how macro and micro level factors converge or collide in high-income countries (e.g. Burke, 2002; Reay et al., 2005; Thomas, 2001), there has been scant research attention paid to the motivations, subjectivities, educational trajectories and experiences of people from socially disadvantaged groups trying to enter and achieve in higher education systems in low-income countries. In a globalised knowledge economy, the question of who is participating, how and where, with what planned and unplanned consequences, demands closer scrutiny. The research project on which this article is based seeks to address this question in the context of two African countries, Ghana and Tanzania.

The article will consider the policy context and theoretical underpinnings of widening participation initiatives globally, and in African higher education in particular. Focusing on the intersections of gender and socio-economic background, it will also report findings to date from the statistical review, Equity Scorecards[1] and life history interviews with students in one public and one private university in Ghana and Tanzania.

2. Widening participation in higher education: meritocratic equalisation or elite formation?

Internationally, there is a burgeoning debate on the ideologies that underpin widening participation policies (David, 2007). A range of national and cross-national studies that discuss policy, professional and sociological contexts have accompanied this. Studies in South Africa focus on redress and transformation (Boughy, 2003; Naidoo, 1998). In the USA, the emphasis was on affirmative action, but after some high profile legal challenges, the focus has shifted to the consideration of diversity (Hurtado, 2007). In low-income countries, the emphasis has been on the identification of socio-economic barriers and enablers, e.g. in Bangladesh (Quddus, 1999), and in Uganda (Kwesiga, 2002). Emerging economies are aware of the need to up-skill the workforce, for example, in China (Hong, 2004). The UK frames the access debate in both economic and social justice terms (Thomas et al., 2001). Social justice concerns include the extent to which structural barriers such as poverty (Callender and Jackson, 2004), social exclusion (Levitas, 1999) and lack of educational opportunities combine to reinforce patterns of disadvantage (Reay et al., 2005). Cross-country studies (e.g. Morley et al., 2006; Osborne, 2003) have considered comparative policy drivers and strategic interventions.

Internationally, widening participation policies link individual choices, institutional responsiveness and national and universal salvation. There has been a conflation of knowledge production with national and global skill requirements, and an increasing commodification of knowledge and colonisation of education policy by economic policy imperatives (Ball, 1998). With the discourse of widening participation, the balance between the individual and the collective good is complex. Neoliberalism conceptualises the individual as following her/his interests as an autonomous entrepreneur. This implies that individuals pursuing their educational self-interests will augment economic benefits for the wider society. Underpinning policy priorities is the assumption that macro and micro level aspirations will overlap and that governments and citizens will choose the most appropriate providers and programmes which tie in to developmental strategies (Naidoo, 2006). Kenway et al. (2004) suggest that knowledge has become a tradable asset and that the production of the entrepreneurial subject is equated with future prosperity. Walkerdine (2003) questions whether widening access is part of the neo-liberal project of self-improvement and social mobility in which subjectivities, aspirations and desires are constantly aligned with changes in the labour market.

It is pertinent to ask why widening participation has become a policy objective in low-income countries at this particular historical moment. Most significant has been the reversal in World Bank policy on higher education. In 2000, a report prepared by a World Bank Task Force on Higher Education and Society in collaboration with UNESCO (World Bank, 2000) concluded that higher education can no longer afford to be considered a luxury good for developing countries in an era of globalised knowledge and commerce. The World Bank's former position argued that the rates of return to education favoured investment in primary education and that more resources should be allocated to it than to higher education (Manuh et al., 2007). Sall et al. (2003) note that a major reason for increased attention to higher education is the belief that knowledge serves as the 'glue' and 'fuel' of the new global economy and that Africans risk exclusion and further poverty if they do not pay more attention to the production of knowledge. In 2002, the Bank recognised 'the need to embrace a more balanced, holistic approach to ... the entire lifelong education system, irrespective of a country's income level' (World Bank, 2002, p. x).

The link between higher education and poverty reduction is most clearly articulated in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, where higher education is presented as playing an indispensable role in programmes of sustainable development. This is clearly seen in the UK Commission for Africa report (2005), which highlights the role of universities as enablers of development, rather than as targets of development aid themselves. The juxtaposition of technological progress and economic growth are central to discussions. Higher education is viewed as pivotal to development as it can provide scientifically, professionally and technically skilled staff and generate research and analysis to improve the effectiveness of the private economy and government policy and services.

The relationship between higher education and wealth creation/poverty reduction is also theorised at the micro level in terms of benefit streams to individuals and groups. The graduate premium or returns to education – in the sense of the increment in income that accrues to each year of education – are much higher for those with higher levels of education, e.g. via access to certain types of employment (Morley, 2007). Poverty is increasingly perceived as capability deprivation, i.e. people's access and opportunity to do things that they have reason to value, as well as material deprivation (Sen, 1997). Higher education is increasingly associated with poverty reduction, in the wider sense, by enabling individuals to develop potential and capabilities.

[1] Equity Scorecards examine how diversity is translated into equity in educational outcomes (Bensimon and Polkinghorne, 2003). In this project, Equity Scorecards that measure access, retention and completion for different groups of students are being developed at four universities in Ghana and Tanzania. Central to the development of the Equity Scorecards are datasets on key education indicators disaggregated by age, gender and school attended.

However, the challenges are immense, in particular for Sub-Saharan Africa. Here, the MDG target to halve world poverty by 2015 seems remote, given that the region is home to a third of the world's poorest people and has the highest levels of absolute poverty of any region in the world. Forty-one percent of people in Sub-Saharan Africa live on less than $1 a day (UN, 2007, p. 6), and the region has the lowest life expectancy, the lowest combined enrolment rates for primary, secondary and tertiary education and the lowest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of any region in the world (UNDP, 2007, p. 232). The fact that the 54 countries and over 700 million people who live in Africa are served by only around 300 universities (Teferra and Altbach, 2004, p. 22) makes the scale of the capacity challenge clear.

3. A mass global system?

Efforts to widen participation in higher education across the world have had considerable success. Student enrolment worldwide increased from 13 million in 1960 to 82 million in 1995 and to 137 million in 2005 (UNESCO, 1998, 2007). The growing number of private higher education institutions is a noticeable feature of this expansion in several regions, including Sub-Saharan Africa. However, globally, this still only means a gross enrolment rate of 24% (UNESCO, 2007, p. 132). Although Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced one of the fastest rates of growth, with an average increase in participation rates of 7% per year between 1991 and 2004 (UNESCO, 2006), enrolment across the continent has only reached 5% (UNESCO, 2007). In the two countries covered by this study, it is at or below the regional average. In Ghana, it stands at 5% and in Tanzania, just 1% (UNESCO, 2007). In Sub-Saharan Africa, therefore, it clearly remains an elite system and it is pertinent to ask how social reproduction and elite formation are effected in African higher education.

Research evidence confirms that disparities in participation rates continue to exist between different social and cultural groups, especially between higher and lower socio-economic classes. The above cited World Bank report (2002) concludes that, despite rapid noteworthy progress in many countries in access to tertiary and higher education[2] for traditionally less-privileged groups, including students from rural areas and women, higher education, especially in the university sector, generally remains elitist, with most students coming from wealthier segments of society.

When examining the participation of women in higher education, the statistics report a success story and confirm that participation rates for women have indeed increased. Between 1999 and 2004, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for gross enrolment in higher education increased in more than 77% of the 57 countries with available data (UNESCO, 2006, p. 27). Globally, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for higher education is 1.05, suggesting that rates of participation are slightly higher for women than for men (UNESCO, 2007). However, this increase has been unevenly distributed across national and disciplinary boundaries. In 2005 participation in higher education was greater for women than for men in four regions of the world: Northern America and Western Europe; Central and Eastern Europe; Latin America and the Caribbean, and Central Asia. In contrast, in East Asia and the Pacific, South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, participation rates for men continue to outstrip those for women and the GPI in each region remains well below one (UNESCO, 2007). In terms of field of study, women globally are concentrated in disciplinary areas associated with low-wage sectors of the economy. In many countries, two-thirds to three-quarters of graduates in the fields of Health, Welfare and Education are women. In regions where enrolment rates of women are lower than for men, men also dominate these disciplinary areas (UNESCO, 2006, p. 19). Globally, men predominate in subjects related to Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, and Maths and Computer Science (OECD, 2007). Women appear to be entering disciplines that are marginalised in innovation systems and disassociated from economic growth. The question of where women are gaining access, and to what, suggests that gender still influences and restricts choice. It seems therefore that the increased participation of women is largely related to quantitative, rather than qualitative, change, even where it is claimed that the sector has become feminised (Quinn, 2003). There are still major challenges in relation to gendered disciplinary choices, gendered curricula, discriminatory practices, gender violence and sexual harassment (Morley et al., 2006).

4. Higher education in sub-Saharan Africa

The challenges facing African higher education are fairly well rehearsed. The report prepared in advance of the first World Conference on Higher Education hosted by UNESCO in Paris in 1998 (UNESCO, 1998) documented difficulties including the shortage of resources, the deterioration of staff conditions and the decline in quality of teaching and research as a consequence of brain drain. It also reported on reforms to revitalise higher education, e.g. strengthening research capacity, increasing access to ICT and improving access for women. While increases in enrolment have been the highest in the world, the report observed that the higher education system in Sub-Saharan Africa remains the least developed in the world, with a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 5% (Table 1).

Scholarship on African higher education has highlighted a range of qualitative and quantitative concerns (Makhubu, 1998; Mlama, 1998), such as: the global capacity challenge presented by the growing demand for access, the pressures of globalisation (Fischman and Stromquist, 1999; Van der Wende, 2003), the role that higher education plays in development, modernisation and the knowledge economy (Okolie, 2003), funding (Ajayi et al., 1996), the rise of private higher education (Altbach, 1999; Banya, 2001a,b; Middlehurst and Woodfield, 2004), management and governance,

Table 1
Enrolment in higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2005

Country	2005		
	Total enrolment	GER	%F
South Africa	735 073	15	55
Nigeria	1 289 656	10	35
Ghana	110 184	5	34
Kenya	108 407	3	37
Tanzania	51 080	1	32
Sub-Saharan Africa	3 506 063	5	38

Source: UNESCO (2007, pp. 130–133).

[2] The terms 'higher education' and 'tertiary education' are used in varying ways in different contexts. For example, for the World Bank 'tertiary education' refers to all 'post-secondary education' including but not limited to universities, and including colleges and technical training institutions. UNESCO defines 'tertiary education' in terms of programmes at ISCED levels 5 and 6, i.e. that education that is more advanced than senior secondary education (ISCED level 3), and more advanced than post-compulsory non-tertiary programmes at ISCED 4. Although under review, the Ghanaian government currently defines its tertiary sector as including institutions that offer training leading to a degree or diploma (MEYS, 2004). In Tanzania, national policy refers to 'higher education' which is defined as 'an education provided at the level of degrees or advanced diplomas' (MHEST, 2004, p. 726). This paper works with UNESCO definitions and statistics for tertiary education, and Tanzanian and Ghanaian policies and statistics, bringing meanings of 'tertiary' and 'higher' closer to each other.

language issues, brain drain, the role of research (Teferra and Altbach, 2004), and whether African universities include indigenous knowledges (Brock-Utne, 1999). The next section will take a closer look at higher education provision in the two research countries.

5. Higher education in Ghana and Tanzania

There is a major capacity challenge in both countries, with demand outstripping supply. Ghana has six public and 32 private universities (of which 16 are degree-awarding), while Tanzania has eight public universities, and 22 private universities and university colleges. As noted above (Table 1), participation rates in higher education are lower in both countries than elsewhere in the region. In Ghana in 2005, the GER was 5% and the student population totalled 110 184 (UNESCO, 2007, p. 132). However, enrolments have grown as a result of reforms in the higher education sector at the beginning of the 1990s and the government's renewed commitment to expansion (GoG, 1991). Enrolment in higher education increased by 80% between 1993 and 1998 (Girdwood, 1999). Between 2004 and 2005 Ghana's tertiary Gross Enrolment Ratio rose from 3% to 5% (UNESCO, 2006, 2007). Recent figures from Ghana's National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) suggest university enrolment alone is over 97 942 (NCTE, 2006b, 2007).

In Tanzania, participation rates are lower than in Ghana. As Table 1 shows, in 2005 the GER was 1% and the student population totalled 51 080 (UNESCO, 2007, p. 132). However, enrolment has gradually increased over the past decade. In 1990, only 3146 students were enrolled at the country's two universities—one-tenth the size of the student population in Kenya at the same time (Cooksey et al., 2003). By 2006, enrolment in institutions of higher learning had reached 55 134, of which 40 719 were studying at a public or private university (MHEST, 2006) (Table 2).

In spite of policy initiatives for widening participation in higher education, quota systems and affirmative action programmes in both countries (GoG, 1991; URT, 1999; Lihamba et al., 2006; Morley et al., 2007), the social group most likely to enter higher education continues to be men from the top socio-economic groups. In Ghana, women comprise 35% of the overall university population (NCTE, 2006a,b) although they make up 41% of the students in private higher education (NCTE, 2006b). In Tanzania, 33% of the overall undergraduate population is female, with women comprising 38% of students in private higher education (MHEST, 2006) (Table 3).

In neither country are national data on enrolment in higher education disaggregated by the socio-economic background of students. However, information from a range of sources indicates that participation has, in the main, been predominantly available to men from wealthier backgrounds. In Ghana, while participation is increasing for women, students continue to be predominantly from wealthier socioeconomic backgrounds, as Fig. 1 demonstrates, and from elite schools. In a study of admissions to two public universities in Ghana, Addae-Mensah (2000) revealed that

Table 2
Enrolment in higher education institutions in Tanzania, 2005/6

Type of institution	Total enrolment	Enrolment in HE programmes
Public universities	35 606	31 043
Private universities	5113	4960
Technical institutes	2710	668
Other institutes	11 705	8921
Total	55 134	45 529

Source: MHEST (2006, p. 5).

Table 3
Summary of indicators of participation in higher education in Ghana and Tanzania, 2005–2007

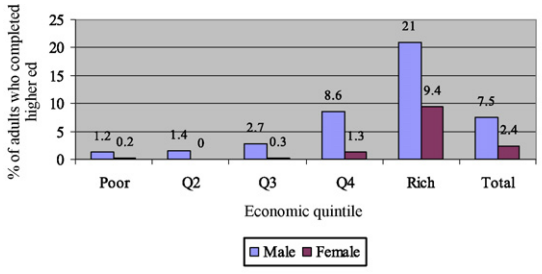
Indicator	Ghana	Tanzania
Gross enrolment ratio[a]	5%	1%
%Female in tertiary sector[a]	34%	32%
Gender parity index[a]	0.53	0.48
%Female in private universities[b,c]	41%	38%
Enrolment in universities[b,d]	97 942	40 719
%Enrolment in universities (private)[b,e]	10%	12.5%
Number of public universities[b,d]	6	8
Number of private universities (degree awarding)[f]	16	22

[a] UNESCO (2007).
[b] MHEST (2006).
[c] NCTE (2006b).
[d] NCTE (2007).
[e] NCTE (2006a,b).
[f] Lihamba (2008), NCTE (2008).

the majority of students come from the top 50 schools in the country, i.e. they are drawn from fewer than 10% of the country's schools (Addae-Mensah, 2000). While universities are recruiting from a larger number of schools, the elite sector still dominates in terms of the numbers and proportions of students admitted. In other words, their relative advantage is *increasing*. The top schools take the same percentage of places as in the past, even though they constitute a smaller percentage of institutions from which students access higher education (Addae-Mensah, 2000).

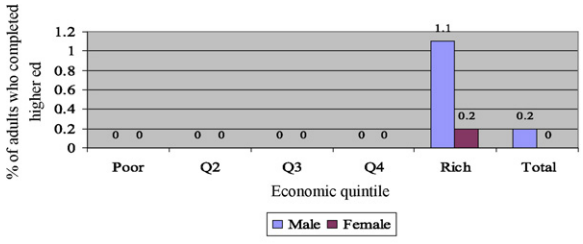
In Tanzania, Demographic and Health Survey data indicate the same trend of men from wealthier backgrounds dominating the sector (Fig. 2). Research suggests that participation is also shaped by other dimensions of inequality such as religion, region, and ethnicity (Cooksey et al., 2003).

In the following sections, we will draw on interview data from the project to illuminate the statistical data and to illustrate the complex ways in which gender and socio-economic background act as barriers to individuals' access to higher education in the two



Source: **World Bank Development Indicators. Ghana DHS Survey, 2003. (World Bank, 2008).**

Fig. 1. Percentage of adults (age 25+) in Ghana that completed higher education, by socio-economic quintile and gender, 2003.



Source: **World Bank Development Indicators. Tanzania DHS Survey, 1999. (World Bank, 2008).**

Fig. 2. Percentage of adults (age 25+) in Tanzania that completed higher education, by socio-economic quintile and gender, 1999.

research countries. The methodological approach of blending statistical and interview data helps to reveal both the scale and the lived complexities that structure participation of disadvantaged groups in higher education. While there are evident structures of inequality, women students' agency is visible in the ways in which they have navigated and strategised their way into and through higher education.

6. Gendered processes

Women's participation continues to be low in Sub-Saharan Africa, in sharp contrast to the 'feminisation' of higher education in high-income countries. In seeking explanations for this, it is recognised that threats of social stigmatisation can powerfully reinforce norms and keep people within a complex matrix of social rules and conventions. Women are at risk if they do or do not conform, i.e. conforming to traditional female roles in many African countries is a risk to educational opportunities, while non-conforming might allow women to access education, but places them at risk socially. Gender discourses ensure compliance for women and men to psychic and social norms (Hey, 2006). Our life history interview data, to date, are revealing how gendered divisions of labour and women's socially prescribed domestic responsibilities influence women's possibility of participating in education at all stages. A Ghanaian female student comments on her primary school years:

> *During that time ... financial things were not so good but my brothers were there. Because they were guys when I come from school I was made to go sell, come back home, cook that kind of thing so things were not very smooth for me so if I were a boy I wouldn't been involved in all those things.*

A mature Tanzanian female student explains how this pattern continues into higher education:

> *Like for me, I am a married woman so I find it very tiresome because I have to do some domestic work and do the reading so I can not meet the standards ... there have been a lot of problems; maybe you plan to do this there are interferences like you have visitors at home ... and other domestic problems that are hindering my studies.*

These observations are evocative of Edwards (1993) study in which she found that mature women students were caught between two 'greedy' institutions – home and university – and that survival involved complex splitting and disconnection between the two highly gendered worlds.

Compulsory heterosexuality and the inevitability of marriage and motherhood are apparent in our data. Women are represented as a culturally conditioned social category. The category of woman automatically implies constraint, restrictions and oppression. Gender is naturalised and heterosexualised. There is a morphology of women's bodies and biological development assumes pre-determined social dimensions (Butler, 2006). Women's engagement with formal systems of education is mediated by their bodily stages. The emergent female body signifies a problem for formal educational systems. Higher education is often seen as being incompatible with women's bodies and lifestyles. It is felt that there is insufficient structural and social flexibility to cope with early marriage, childbirth and care, pregnancy and menstruation. Chilisa (2002) documents how expulsion of pregnant girls is a legacy of missionary activity in Sub-Saharan Africa. She also argues that women's bodily functions are frequently used to control their life chances. A Tanzanian mature female student normatively constitutes young women as wives and mothers, while seeking to counsel that they keep access open to education by *delaying* the (seemingly inevitable) roles:

> *Yes, an advice always to young girls, through my experience I advise them at this time when they finish their A-levels they shouldn't get married first, finish your education, complete your education then get married.*

For a Ghanaian female, her university education helps her reconfigure her own identity in her married relationship. It licenses her to speak and identifies her more as a knowing subject that a subjugated wife:

> *Before I had not gone to College, I had been teaching. There is no time I would sit with my husband and discuss at the same level, but right because I am at the University I have had a chance both because I am at the University and have had exposure in different subjects we can sit and talk in equal terms.*

Higher education can be an agent of both social regulation and social emancipation. Academic disciplines are linked to gender identification. Entry into non-traditional disciplines, while offering increased earning and employability potential, can create practical and social difficulties for women. Certain embodied identities are seen to be irreconcilable with the subject matter. There is a perception that if a subject is 'hard', i.e. a 'hard science', it is not suitable for women, as a Tanzanian Female Engineering student relates:

Q: How many girls are you in your class?
A: We were eight, but now we are only three girls.
Q: Where are they?
A: They thought the course was so difficult they ... dropped it.
Q: They went to another profession?
A: Yah, they went to teaching.

Skill and knowledge acquisition lead to identity formation within a set of norms that confer or withhold recognition. Some academic identities have greater value in the social and market domains. Another Tanzanian woman relates how her social status has increased as a result of entry into a 'non-traditional' discipline:

> *When you go out there and tell people that, I am an Engineer, they take it as if a woman cannot do Engineering work. They just see as if you are very genius, so that makes me feel good.*

Whether women are constructed as geniuses or deviants, entry into non-traditional disciplines is still coded as cultural transgression.

7. Gendered agents of support: mothers, fathers and multiple capitals

Students' biographies include a range of (gendered) parental influences and orientations. The more privileged students described a type of aspirational *habitus* whereby their families carefully managed their entry into higher education. Parents' social, symbolic and emotional capitals and insider knowledge of educational systems provide an additional and crucial resource (Reay et al., 2005). Parental capital was cultural and material and those who were financially affluent could buy more privilege for their children. The educationally successful young person was often the product of an entire family's investments.

Student narratives also reveal a range of gender issues in parental support. Some women report detraditionalising influences emanating from their fathers. Fathers with social capital

seem able to decode and demystify educational structures, while mothers are often perceived as offering traditional nurturing and emotional support, especially in the early years. Parental message systems could also reinforce gender appropriate subject choices, as a Tanzanian female student describes:

Q: Did anyone give you any particular encouragement?
A: It was my father.
Q: So how did he encourage you?
A: I remember when I was a kid, I normally liked taking science subjects and even when I was in form four I did both Science and Arts. Then he told me, you are too much concentrated in science, but the way I see you it is better you do Arts ... He told me he would like to have a lawyer in the family and he said you can make it.

Paternal capital and investment often helped make a difference to their daughters' life chances. A Ghanaian female also attributes the construction of aspiration in secondary schools to a father:

My dad always asked whether I was interested in the course I was doing and how I was coping with the exercises and laboratory work. He asked questions and even gave me scenarios about females who had passed through the secondary school and are prominent people. So he always said that if you learn very hard ... you can even be a minister so we should learn hard.

Early years' experiences were often crucial in the formation of academic identity. Several students report the association of their mothers with domestic and affective domains, and their fathers with the public and professional domains. This follows a long tradition of socially constructing men as rational and worldly and women as emotional and parochial. A Ghanaian female contrasts her mother's (hysterical) authoritarianism with her father's modern, rational and sophisticated parenting:

Q: Who was the most influential in your life when you were in primary school?
A: My father – because my mother was too rude, too strict and always she shouts or beats me. But my father was talking to me like a grown person. . . . because he was talking to me like as a friend. Not as a father, and he was taking me everywhere.

Parental biographies influence educational decision-making. Wealthier parents wanted to reproduce and recreate class privilege, i.e. to repeat their personal histories, while socially disadvantaged parents often try to avoid history repeating itself, as a Tanzanian male describes:

My father was an orphan, he had no father, no mother, so he was telling us I didn't go to school because I had no parents. But you, because I am here, you have to study, I will help you in whatever way, to make sure you are going to school, University. There is no reason to avoid getting to higher education unless you fail because of your stupidness.

A Ghanaian male reports similar parental messages:

No, my parents did not go to the university especially my dad. So my dad – like if he was not able to go the university, it means he will also make sure like, he will also encourage – if I he couldn't make it, that doesn't mean his children shouldn't make it. His children should also go far beyond what was able to achieve.

As these quotations suggest, material poverty does not necessarily mean aspirational poverty. Poor parents were able to contribute other resources, or forms of capital, in terms of dispositions, emotional stability and supportive relationship. A Tanzanian female acknowledged the encouragement and strength that she received from her socially disadvantaged mother:

I had a mum who was really a mum she never lost her identity of being a mother. She was strong, very strong, and she was my heroine. She didn't go to school. . . . She was supporting us, strongly, she is the one who made us to be where we are I can say ... She didn't have any money you see! But she was always there for us.

Some mothers who lacked professional capital still offered their educational support as a Tanzanian female suggests:

My mother . . . really influenced me by helping me in my studies she was a housewife but she really helped us in any way she could.

Food was a currency used by some mothers to comfort, support and reward early years' educational experiences, as a Tanzanian female describes:

Q: Who was the first one to tell you that the results are out and that you have passed?
A: It was my mum she went there she saw the results then she came home with a surprise for me. She brought me a very big cake and I like cakes. So I was so happy.

A Ghanaian female relates how her mother educationally motivated and comforted her with food:

My mother in particular, she saw my problem of the writing so she used to teach me in the house. Sometimes I will be weeping and she wouldn't also leave me, she would entice me with some biscuits and other things for me to write.

Another Ghanaian female reports how her mother's food was a major social and emotional resource for her:

I remember my mother used to have time for us – like say, make for . . . let's say the breakfast we are taking to school. Yes, she will take time to prepare it, do cake, so many things so when you hold your bag, there are so many things in your bag because you have so many things you know that definitely you would get so many friends!

The different student narratives reveal a complex combination of differently distributed emotional, social, cultural and material capitals.

8. Intersecting gender and socio-economic background: developing Equity Scorecards

The multiple markers of identity do not act independently of each other. Although they clearly inter-relate, policy discourses tend to prioritise one structure of inequality at a time. While gender has received some policy and research attention, it is rarely intersected with other structures of inequality in low-income countries. Intersectionality theory suggests that oppression and discrimination occur in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity, and that there are 'vectors of oppression and privilege' (Ritzer, 2007, p. 204). Intersectionality tries to capture the relationships between socio-economic and socio-cultural categories and identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 1991). Poor women fall into two socially disadvantaged groups and as such, can become the invisible 'other' in audits of gender or social disadvantage. Apparent gender gains, in the form of affirmative action and access programmes, when scrutinised, often mask socio-economic privilege (Morley et al., 2006).

Central to our inquiry are Equity Scorecards (Bensimon, 2004). Based on a culture of evidence, they are being developed by this

Equity Scorecard 1
Rates of participation on four programmes by gender and socio-economic background, public university, Ghana, 2006/7

Programme	% Of all students who are women	% Of all students who attended a deprived school	% Of all students who are women who attended a deprived school
BSc Physical Science	15.3	2.2	0.6
B Commerce	28.9	3.3	1.0
B Education (Primary Education)	41.4	4.6	1.2
B. Management Studies (BMS)	42.0	2.8	1.4

Data source: (UCC, 2007b,c) *Date of scorecard*: January 2008.

Equity Scorecard 2
Admission to four programmes by gender and socio-economic background, public university, Tanzania, 2007/8

Programme	% Of all students who are women	% Of all students who attended a school in one of the 20 poorest districts	% Of all students who are women who attended a school in one of the 20 poorest districts
Commerce and Management	34.2	2.5	0.5
Law	25.0	1.0	0.0
Engineering	22.0	4.2	0.0
Science Education	16.4	4.2	0.7

Data source: (UDSM, 2007). *Date of scorecard*: December 2007.

project to measure intersections between the sociological variables of gender, socio-economic status (based on deprived schools indicators) and age, and the educational processes of access, retention and completion. Data are drawn from four organisations (two public and two private universities) and four programmes of study in each university. While data on these variables are available at each case study institution, they have not been disaggregated in this way before at any of them. In each country, the type of school attended by a student has been chosen as an indicator of socio-economic status. The indicator has been differently defined by teams in Ghana and Tanzania. In Ghana, the concept of a 'deprived school' was developed by one higher education institution that initiated quotas for students from such schools as a strategy for widening participation. It defined a 'deprived school' as being a (public) senior secondary school that has poor infrastructural facilities, poor libraries, workshops and laboratories, non-qualified and insufficient teaching staff, and that admit students with an average score at Basic Secondary School Certificate that is over 8[3]; it has also been noted that these schools had usually been established post-independence (UCC, 2007a). In Tanzania, junior secondary government or community schools in the poorest 20 districts of the country, as measured by the national Poverty Reduction Strategy (URT, 2005a,b), were chosen.[4]

Above are two examples of how datasets have been transformed into Equity Scorecards: the first is based on data from the public university in Ghana, the second from the public university in Tanzania. In both, the data refer to the four selected programmes (Equity Scorecards 1and 2).

As these Scorecards indicate, women have lower participation rates than men in all subjects, in both countries, and have a particularly low participation rate in the sciences. Students from deprived backgrounds have very low rates of participation, and this rate decreases for women from deprived schools. One interpretation is that academic disciplines continue to be linked to gender and to socio-economic backgrounds. When gender gains are scrutinised, it becomes clear that poorer women are still not gaining access either to public universities or to high status disciplines.

9. Preliminary conclusions

The findings so far from our study suggest that opportunity structures in Ghana and Tanzania appear to reflect social inequalities, despite organisational, national and international policy interventions to widen participation. Enrolment in higher education is rising—but participation rates from a range of social groups are not necessarily increasing. Participation by women has increased, with the market playing a part in widening their participation, as participation rates are close to 40% in private higher education in both countries. However, it is still unclear if gender equality gains are including women from lower socio-economic groups. Our methodological commitment to illustrating the statistics through student narratives allows more robust evidence to be gathered which implies that some social inclusion interventions can contribute to further stratification. Some women may be disadvantaged in relation to gender, but socio-economically privileged in relation to the capital that enables them to access the higher education product.

Our findings are indicative of the institutional fragility of participation. Shavit et al. (2007) and David (2007) pose questions about the relationships between expansion and differentiation and between diversion and inclusion. For example, socio-economically disadvantaged groups could be being diverted into lower status programmes and institutions. The low entry rate of women into high-status science and technology subjects is an example of this. The concept of diversion is evocative of Reay et al.'s (2005) finding that there appear to be highly stratified and multiple higher educations, rather than one inclusive higher education system. Widening participation initiatives might be adding numbers to a previously elite system, but it is questionable whether it is undermining or redistributing the power of socio-economically privileged groups. The most striking finding so far in our research is that students' access to higher education is still strongly correlated with the school that they attended. This selectivity dividend accrues into and throughout higher education, influencing access and the type of programmes enrolled on. Social stratification is

[3] Grades achieved for each subject taken in the Basic Secondary School Examinations are awarded a numerical value (A is attributed a value of 1, through to E which is awarded 5). These are combined into an aggregate score. Thus the higher the grades achieved in the exam, the numerically lower the aggregate score. The criteria for a 'deprived school' assume a correlation between a student's aggregate score and the quality of schooling received.

[4] This has since been expanded to 53 districts (being those districts where the percentage of households living below the basic poverty line is greater than the national average) so as to provide greater comparability with the Ghanaian classification of 'deprived schools'.

strongly related to educational opportunities, processes and systems. In both countries, there appears to be a conversion and consolidation of economic wealth into educational advantage. Participation in higher education is not just about individuals, but is about positional advantage and the relations and spaces between social groups. The circular relationship between social identity, social capital and access to higher education is as evident in Ghana and Tanzania as elsewhere.

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