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Globalising initiatives for gender equality and poverty reduction: Exploring 'failure' with reference to education and work among urban youth in The Gambia and Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on what observers have perceived to be a failure of development leading to a 'crisis of youth' as increasing numbers of young people find it more difficult to gain education, access to health, a job and meet standard of living aspirations. For some, a possible escape is offered by migration to Europe, the United States or Australia, often illegally. For those remaining behind, however, international development agencies offer a 'globalisation of solutions' to employment, gender inequality and poverty through the millennium development goals and the programmes to attain them. In this paper we do not take the failures of development at face value but look at local contexts to present a more complex picture of the relation between education, work and social life. Based on fieldwork conducted in urban areas of The Gambia and Ghana, we argue that rather than education as a catch-all solution we need to give more attention to the costs incurred by and for young people in pursuing education and training, to the operation of and actual opportunities in labour markets, and to patterns of gender socialisation which give women limited scope to exercise agency. This paper explores key gender dimensions of work and education among low-income urban youth noting that despite on-going efforts to increase young women's enrolment in schools and access to employment, gender inequalities have been far from eradicated. Our field interviews reveal how social expectations that women should perform the bulk of reproductive labour in their youth as well as in adulthood and constraints placed on young women's personal freedom in respect of their social relationships reduce time dedicated to education and establish fewer contacts relevant to securing paid employment. The result is for men to end up with more educational qualifications, more skills, and higher-paying jobs, even if unemployment among young people in general remains a major problem.

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1. Introduction

'...We the youths have a problem in our own country. We cannot have jobs to take care of ourselves let alone our elderly ones. Many of us see abroad as the solution to our problems... The solution presented to us as an alternative to Babylon (Europe) is to create skills centres for us to learn to acquire skills. Don't they not know that many of us already have skills but cannot access job opportunities in our own land?' (extract from letter to the editor 'The Sad Fate of Gambian Youth', *Foroyaa*, 27–28 August 2007, p. 8).

By most assessments the ambitious aims of the millennium development goals (MDGs) agreed by 189 countries in 2000 will not be met. Cataloguing a series of shortcomings at a speech to the United Nations (UN) in July 2007, UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown suggested that at the half way mark to the 2015 delivery date "we are

a million miles away from success".¹ By January 2008 19 countries and 21 private companies at the World Economic Forum at Davos added their support to the Urgent Call to Action in order to 'get back on track'. Yet at the UN General Assembly debate on the MDGs in April 2008, and despite the diplomatic references to 'progress' and 'unity of purpose', the atmosphere continued to be one of pessimism.²

A prospective casualty of the 'failure' to meet the promises of development are young people (*Ad Hoc Working Group for Youth 2005*). According to the United Nations there are approximately 1.2 billion 'youth' worldwide, 85% of whom reside in developing countries (*UNYP 2005*).³ Given a combination of numerical significance

¹ Speech of 31 July 2007, full transcript available at <http://www.pm.gov.uk/output/Page12755.asp>.

² Closing statement 'Recognising the Achievements, Addressing the Challenges and Getting Back on Track to Achieve the MDGs by 2015' by Srgian Kerim, President of the 62nd Session of the UN General Assembly, 4 April 2008.

³ The UN defines youth as 15–24, but many countries adopt different lower and upper limits. See Footnote 6.

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and a growing concern with the ability of 'development' to meet young peoples' needs, an interest in youth has risen steadily up the international agenda during the last decade. The 2007 *World Development Report* focused on 'Development and the Next Generation' pointing toward both the deficits in service delivery and achievements vis a vis young people, and to the benefits of 'investing' in young peoples' education, health and employment (World Bank 2006).⁴ In setting out to deliver the MDGs development agencies, national governments and many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have placed a great deal of faith in a package of measures, including extension of education, skills training, promotion of employment and gender equality. The constancy of these measures in the poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) and other efforts to attain the MDGs despite supposed local participation in policy formulation leads us to think of a 'globalisation of solutions'. What is far from clear, however, is whether the confidence placed in education and employment is justified. There is some evidence to show that education, for example, can serve as a way out of poverty or can prevent some people getting poorer (Harper et al., 2003). But, schooling is not a taken-for-granted desire of young people or *felt* by participants to be a confident predictor of later well-being (Jeffrey et al., 2005, 2008), nor that the costs and benefits of schooling against the supposed elimination of child labour are clear-cut (Delamonica et al., 2004a; Matz, 2002; Yates, 1997). Further, participation in education is shown to be influenced by a wide range of factors including *inter alia* household size and structure, level and stability of income, education and the work profile of parents, plus the quality of schooling (Ansell, 2002; Grootaert and Patrinos, 1999).

International agencies are aware of the risks of 'failure' and, if rather dramatically, some express concern for a 'crisis of youth'. Globally, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates the rate of youth unemployment to have doubled between 1993 and 2003 to almost 14.4%, equivalent to four times the rate for adults in the developing world (ILO, 2005).⁵ Figures suggest that approximately 700 million young people depend upon less than one dollar a day, an increase of approximately 12 million per annum since 1987, that at least 670 million young people suffer from two deprivations of basic human needs, and that gender gaps in education and health remain significant (Gordon et al., 2003; UNICEF, 2000).⁶ Marking slipping confidence in reaching the millennium development goals, the 2005 UN Report on the MDGs drew specific attention to unemployment among youth creating a 'scenario' for crime, violence and social unrest (also UNDP, 2006; Urdal, 2004; World Bank, 2006). Some research has shown how young people appear to be alienated from the state, and excluded from education and vocational programmes, from labour markets, and from social relations within families or familial networks, consequently failing to acquire the social and economic attributes necessary to be recognised as adults (Calvés and Schoumaker, 2004; Hansen, 2005). Yet, as our opening quote suggests, providing education and enhancing skills are only so useful, underemphasising existing human capital and offering unattractive options compared to employment oppor-

tunities in Europe, the United States or Australia. Emerging policy and research agendas, as well as more directly in conversation with development agency staff, speak to fears of a 'perfect storm' whereby disenchanted youth especially in so-called 'failed states' become sensitised to radical Islam or join gangs, migrate, possibly through networks used for trafficking drugs or contraband, and enter 'the West' undetected resulting in new security threats (DfID, 2005a, 2006; UNDP, 2006).⁷ The well-being of youth is increasingly being linked to global and regional security (UNOWA, 2006).

This paper presents the results of research conducted in The Gambia and Ghana in which the main objectives were to examine how young low-income women and men in urban areas negotiate livelihoods, with particular reference to education, training and employment.⁸ We were especially interested in how pursuing education and training imposed costs on young people, how their integration into labour markets opened them to economic and social opportunities beyond immediate remuneration, and to patterns of gender socialisation which give women limited scope to exercise agency. The paper is divided into four sections. Section 2 sets out how development can in some sense be regarded as having 'failed' youth in The Gambia and Ghana. Section 3 outlines the methodology of our research in Accra and Greater Banjul. Section 4 looks in more detail at how young people construct livelihoods through work, education and social contacts in the face of great difficulties, focusing in particular on the gendered dimensions of young people's paid and unpaid work. It also considers the effects of youth work on employment in later life, the disparities between the perceived and actual role of education in occupational mobility, and the scope and efficacy of current policy interventions regarding youth and gender in both countries. Section 5 summarises the principal results of the research, their conceptual and policy significance, and the ways in which the problems of gender inequality among youth vis-à-vis education and employment might be better addressed.

2. Youth, gender and the globalisation of solutions

Two main factors underpin our interests in examining young peoples' livelihoods and gender inequalities in West Africa. The first is the changing positions of youth and gender in international fora on poverty in developing societies. While the issue of youth has held a low profile in the development literature, in the last decade or so young people have become a more frequent subject of academic enquiry (for example, Harper et al., 2003; McIlwaine and Datta, 2004; White, 2003). This interest, in turn, is both a contributory cause, and effect, of the increasing attention given to youth (and youth rights) in major policy debates which gained momentum following the International Year of the Child in 1979 and the formulation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, as well as a range of regional agreements such as The African Youth Charter of the African Union (2006) and the Ibero-American Convention on the Rights of Youth (2005) (Edwards, 1996; Jones, 2005). The past decade has seen considerable institutional reforms, the broadening of youth-led policy agendas to embrace previously ignored groups such as the girl-child, and imaginative initiatives

⁴ Critics argued that the Report took a typically economic line to young peoples' development practices and achievements, and many regarded the emphasis on young people as the 'next generation' as confirmation of an adultist attitude among development institutions.

⁵ The ILO methodology defines unemployment as being without of work but actively available and searching for employment. Given the absence of welfare or social safety nets in most developing countries, recorded unemployment by this definition is lower than might be expected.

⁶ The concept of deprivation aims to broaden understandings of poverty beyond income to consider impacts on health and wellbeing which can be thought of as basic human needs. Based on Townsend (1987), fulfilling these needs depend on food, safe drinking water, sanitation, health, shelter, education, and information. Severe deprivation predicts serious adverse consequences in the short and longer term, including problems of child development.

⁷ Discussion documents leading to the draft Conflict Policy Paper were far more explicit in linking migration to geopolitical instability (DfID 2005a). The 2008–2013 DfID Research Strategy also gives conflict and 'failed states' key attention, and draws links between social exclusion and migration. One question is "Why do high levels of social exclusion and inequality only lead to conflict and unrest in certain contexts; what role does male identity and unemployment play; and what are the roles of religious identities and cultural values?" (2008, p. 20).

⁸ We work with a definition of youth of 13–30 years, the definition shared by most state agencies and NGOs and which frequently corresponded with grassroots perceptions of 'young people' in both countries, although the National Youth Policy in Ghana uses 15–35.

to grant political voice of young people and to improve their social conditions (Botchway, 2001; Fyvie and Ager, 1999; UNYP, 2005).

Yet, the privation of children and youth, and girl children in particular, seems to be especially marked in sub-Saharan Africa. Data for both The Gambia and Ghana record significant poverty limitations in social development, indicated by the 2008 Human Development Index rankings of 155 (down from 151 in 2001) and 135 (down from 129) respectively (UNDP, 2008). Measures of human development for both The Gambia and Ghana reveal worse and to some extent worsening situations compared to data for income per capita and economic measures of poverty. Given the youthful nature of both countries' populations, with over 40% of the population aged 15 or under, these deficiencies are likely to affect young people to a greater extent than the adult population and, as we shall note in more detail later, contain marked gender disparities also.

A second and related interest stems from the fact that while it is widely accepted that socio-economic and gender inequality start young, academic research on the links between youth, gender and poverty is limited and insufficient to sustain an association of childhood-lifecourse poverty that legitimates many policy measures (Harper et al., 2003). In part this lacuna owes to the disjointed nature of research. Most studies of gender and poverty focus on adults. Given the high proportion of women among the poorest cohorts, increasing percentages of women as household heads and growing role as breadwinners, this attention has focused largely on women (Chant, 1997; Chant with Craske, 2003; McIlwaine and Datta, 2004), but with an emerging literature that focuses on men (Chant and Gutmann, 2000; Correia and Bannon [eds], 2006).⁹ Moreover, research on livelihoods among young people has tended to neglect gender dimensions insofar as it often concentrates on paid labour and thereby underplays the household-based work performed by girls (Adepoju and Mbugua, 1997; Subrahmanian, 2002). How the working practices of young people become gendered remains underresearched with strong views held as to the effects of socialisation by working women in a household, cultural practices or parental perceptions of the quality of education on the one hand, and economic models which stress rational decision-making and links between poverty and child labour on the other (Bhalotra, 2003; Delap, 2001; Harper et al., 2003; OECD, 2003; Ray, 2000).

Data for both The Gambia and Ghana reveal high levels of child labour, significant drop-out rates from education and gender inequality in literacy and educational attainment. In Ghana, an estimated 28% of 7–14 year olds are involved in remunerated work (DFID, 1998, p. 2), with some regional estimates raising this figure to 44% for boys and 39% for girls (see Edudzie, 2002; Ray, 2000). In The Gambia, official data point to 16.4% of 10–14 year olds being in work, with higher levels of economic activity among girls than boys in both the 10–14 and 15–19 year cohorts (the respective female economic activity rates being 7.8% and 13.1%, and males' 4.5% and 7.9%) (GOTG, 2000, p. 66). That this particularly affects poor households is borne out by our research on 30 young people in the Greater Banjul Area (GBA), where around half had engaged in a remunerative activity by the time they were 11 or 12 years old, and in unpaid household tasks by the age of 7 or 8 (Chant and Jones, 2005). However, paradoxical to the widely perceived 'problem' of youth labour is the 'problem' of youth unemployment (UNECA, 2005). In Ghana best estimates put youth unemployment at 15.9% among 15–24 year olds, twice the rate among 25–44 year olds, and three times that of 45–64 years olds (Edudzie, 2002). Equivalent figures are not available for The Gambia, but official sources claim

that unemployment is particularly severe among 16–25 year olds (GOTG, 2000, p. 147).

In order to address these 'failings' a suite of proposals, targets and measures have been advocated over the past decade or so. The UN agencies, bilateral and non-governmental organisations have paid greater attention to inequalities especially in relation to education and health. Gender, female education and economic empowerment have been regarded as fundamental to strategies both to alleviate poverty and to achieve gender equality, with three of the twelve critical areas of the Beijing Global Platform for Action for example being 'women and poverty', 'education and training for women', and the 'girl-child' (Adjamagbo-Johnson, 2004; DFID, 2000; Chant, 2003; UNDAW, 2000). There have also been regional initiatives, most obviously the neo-liberal inspired new partnership for Africa's development, the multi-lateral efforts of the commission for Africa and various NGO alliances calling for a 'Southern Consensus' (see Bond, 2004; Gore, 2000).

Our argument here is that the approaches to and measures of developmental change have come together, to some extent, around a relative consensus of targets and how to attain them through the MDGs (see Fig. 1). The MDGs have mainstreamed the initiatives of a range of agencies and to some extent co-opted NGOs and those voices calling for a Southern or expressly African consensus. The MDGs attempt to focus development on a narrow set of achievements but with time-specific measurement points for 48 key indicators and commitments from donors to increase expenditures and improve their terms (see Taylor, 2005 for a critical discussion). For our purposes we note that MDG 2 is dedicated to the achievement of universal primary education and MDG 3 aimed at promoting gender quality and empowering women (comprising literacy, education, employment and political representation). MDG 3, in turn, is regarded as indispensable for the attainment of all goals set out in the Millennium Declaration (see Satterthwaite, 2003; World Bank GDG, 2003). While this attention is welcome, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), the principal tools for attaining consensus within countries and with the sweetener of IMF and World Bank approvals to debt reductions, have adopted an economy-first approach to poverty reduction. While in most developing countries, including The Gambia and Ghana, PRSPs regard education as one of the principal means of poverty alleviation for young people the differential impacts of policy and outcome are rarely analysed. A survey of 23 PRSPs conducted by Marcus et al. (2002) observed that none dealt with youth poverty, while a survey conducted by UNECA (2005) noted that of 21 African countries' PRSPs 17 targeted youth for employment creation but only 11 provided an analysis of youth unemployment.

At the most general level then the MDGs and PRSPs oblige countries such as The Gambia and Ghana to continue with the initiatives and programmes that have been pursued for the past decade and more. Both have longstanding commitments to educating their population and are among the 18 countries selected for the 'Education for All' (EFA)-Fast Track Initiative (FTI) 2004–15 that followed the World Forum on Education in Dakar in 2002 (see Uchida and Ogawa, 2002). Nevertheless, our data indicate while education has increased as a percentage of GDP in Ghana, it has declined in The Gambia, where it has also declined as a percentage of government spending (Table 1). Although school enrolment in both countries has improved, adult literacy and youth literacy rates are low for The Gambia and appear to have fallen for Ghana. The data also suggest significant but possibly declining gender gaps in literacy and schooling over time. In The Gambia, only just over one-third of people aged 15 years or over are literate with women representing around two-thirds of the illiterate population (GOTG, 2000, p. 4). The female literacy rate (as a proportion of the male rate) in the same year was 76% among young women and 69% among their older counterparts (Table 2). This positive

⁹ Women represent around 20% of household heads in The Gambia and as many as 30% in Ghana (Chant and Jones, 2005).

‘We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected’.

UN Millennium Declaration, September 2000

GOALS

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

Source: Millennium Development Goals website (<http://www.developmentgoals.org/>).

Fig. 1. The United Nations millennium declaration and the millennium development goals.

Table 1

The Gambia and Ghana: features of literacy and education

		The Gambia	Ghana
Adult literacy rate	2001	37.8	72.7
(% Age 15 and above)	2005	–	57.9
Youth literacy rate	2001	58.6	91.6
(% Age 15–24 years)	2005	–	70.7
Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross	2001	47.0	46.0
Enrolment ratio (%)	2005	50.1	50.7
Net primary enrolment ratio (%)	2001	69.0	58.0
	2005	77.0	69.0
Net secondary enrolment ratio (%)	2001	35.0	31.0
	2005	37.0	45.0
Children reaching grade 5 (%)	2000	69.0	66.0
	2004	–	63.0
Public expenditure on education as % of GDP	1990	3.8	3.2
	1998–2000	2.7	4.1
	2002–2005	2.0	5.4
Public expenditure on education as % of total government expenditure	1990	14.6	24.3
	1998–2000	14.2	–
	2002–2005	8.9	–

Source: UNDP (2003, 2008).

Notes: – = no data.

trend in female literacy undoubtedly reflects the fact that during the 1990s, girls' enrolment in primary ('lower basic') education in The Gambia grew at an average of 6% p.a. compared with 2% among boys.¹⁰ By the academic year 2002–2003, at which point scholarships for girls had begun to be delivered (see later), the gross enrolment ratio (GER) for girls had reached 90% (DOSE,

¹⁰ The Department of State for Education Mission Statement of 1998 declared the intention not only of achieving 9 years basic education for every Gambian child (starting at the age of 6 or 7), but at least a 50% transition rate to (senior) secondary education (DOSE, 1998; see also GOTG, 2000, p. 107). In order to smooth the transition from lower to upper basic, 'Basic Cycle' schools in which the first 9 years of basic education is taught are presently being established.

Table 2

The Gambia and Ghana: gender inequalities in literacy and education

		The Gambia		Ghana	
		Female	Male	Female	Male
Adult literacy rate (% aged 15 and above)	2001	30.9	45.0	64.5	81.1
	2005	49.9	49.9	49.8	66.4
Adult female literacy rate as % of male rate	2001	69.0	–	80.0	–
	2005	–	–	75.0	–
Youth female literacy rate as % of male rate	2001	76.0	–	95.0	–
	2005	–	–	86.0	–
Net primary enrolment, ratio of females to males	2001	0.93	–	0.95	–
	2005	0.99	–	0.99	–
Net secondary enrolment, ratio of females to males	2001	0.70	–	0.86	–
Gross tertiary enrolment ratio of females to males	2005	0.23	–	0.56	–
Combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment ratio (%)	2001	43.0	51.0	42.0	49.0
	2005	49.0	51.0	48.0	53.0

Source: UNDP (2003, 2008).

Notes: – = no data.

2003).¹¹ This said, further up the education hierarchy, gender gaps continue to be notable, supporting the suspicions of many that donor pressures to increase spending on primary schooling has been achieved through reductions in funding for secondary education and compromises over quality (Martin, 2003, p. 14). Data pertaining to 1996 reveal that the GER for girls in senior secondary education was 14% compared with 22% among boys (RTG, 2002, pp. 50–51; see also Table 2), and, in extremely poor households, just under 14% of girls aged 16–18 years are in school, compared with 39% of boys (RTG, 2002, p. 51).

Data for Ghana reveal that for children aged 7–17, 68.1% of boys and 59% of girls are at school, showing little improvement during the 1990s (UNICEF, 2001). Table 1 indicates that improving net enrolment in primary education (from 58% to 69%, 2000–2005) and at

¹¹ The gross enrolment ratio expresses the number of people in school as a proportion of all people of school age.

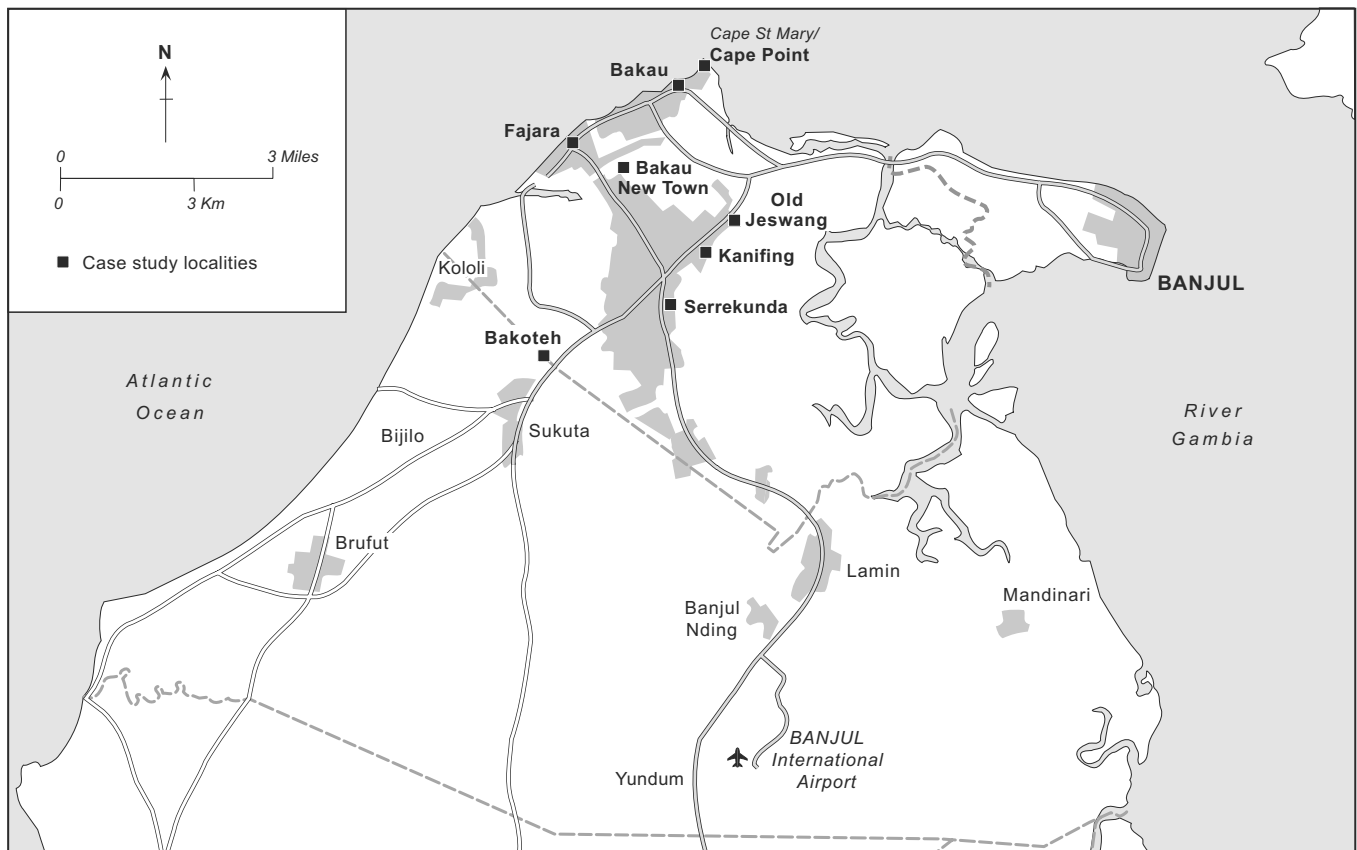


Fig. 2. The Gambia: case study localities in the Greater Banjul Area.

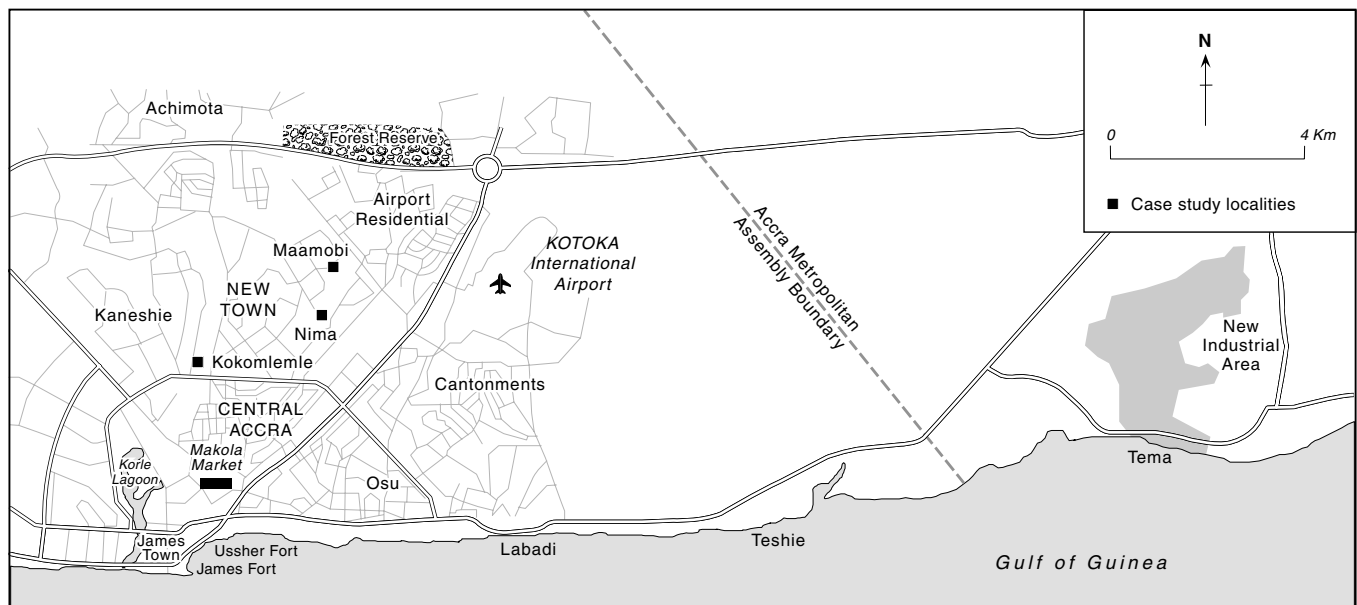


Fig. 3. Ghana: case study localities in the City of Accra.

secondary level (31–45%), but significant drop-off between the two school levels. Using different data [UNICEF \(2001\)](#) illustrates a gender gap at primary level of about 1% but as much as 16% at secondary level. Overall, there appear to be important gender disparities with male literacy for those over 15 of 81% and 64.5% for women in 2001, although both seem to decline absolutely by 2005 the gap for both periods is (suspiciously) the same at 16.5% ([Table 2](#)). Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that these figures are more generous

than those produced by [UNICEF \(2001\)](#) and may not include literacy in both English and a Ghanaian language which [Eduzie \(2002\)](#) has estimated accounts for only 32% of the population. This would seem a low return for the levels of government expenditure which [Addae-Mensah \(2000\)](#) estimates to have been US\$73 per pupil (versus US\$56 in The Gambia), although at secondary school level the corresponding amount is only US\$66 compared with US\$125 in The Gambia.

3. Methodology

Since such data trends pose questions about education as a route to poverty alleviation, in particular through employment, and on an inter-generational basis, we decided to explore these issues in the context of primary fieldwork in Accra and Greater Banjul (see Figs 2 and 3).

Although small-scale and qualitative rather than statistically representative, and designed to be indicative as opposed to definitive, our research sought to explore paid and unpaid work among young women and men in poverty, and the interrelationships with their acquisition of human, financial and social capital. Fieldwork took place over two months in 2003 during which time individual interviews and focus discussions took place with 60 young low-income women and men (in roughly equal proportions) living in low-income areas. Approximately two-thirds of participants were 10–19 years old, the majority was still studying and the majority were contacted through their involvement with schools, youth projects or NGOs, even if many had part-time employment. The remaining third of the sample were aged between 20 and 29 years, most had left 'full-time' education and were engaged in waged work or self-employment. Our principal reason for including a 'younger' and 'older' group of youth was to gain an idea of the prospective and actual role of education in shaping occupational trajectories. Thus, among 10–19 year olds, our concern was to find out about employment aspirations, and the anticipated role of education in their realisation. By contrast, the 20–29 year olds, most of whom were involved in street-vending, taxi-driving, tertiary services such as shop and restaurant work, to low-level white collar employment, were asked about their occupational strategies and experiences yielded insights into how educational attainment, along with other forms of human, financial and social capital, had facilitated entry into different jobs. All interviews and focus group discussions with young people were taped and transcribed, and included a combination of directed activities and more open-ended topical discussions.¹² Most of the focus groups lasted a number of hours and included lunch and social time, with some of the participants inviting us to see their workplaces, schools or clubs. Beyond the directed fieldwork considerable time was spent in lower income areas in both sites, which involved more casual conversations with other young people, traders and community leaders.

4. Constructing livelihoods

4.1. Young people, work and education

Young low-income people in The Gambia and Ghana become involved in a variety of work activities from a relatively early age, and almost invariably while they are still studying at primary school or have just entered secondary education. Virtually all children start participating in unpaid work such as domestic labour, helping out on peri-urban horticultural plots farmed by parents or 'guardians' when they are around 7–8 years old.¹³ Around half our

sample reported having taken on part-time remunerated work as well by the age of 11–12 years.

The income-generating activities undertaken by young people are commonly unskilled and poorly remunerated. In the main, these activities comprise assistance to relatives on market stalls and in small family businesses, or engagement in own-account informal commerce and services such as running errands or street-vending. Hours and times of remunerated work vary, but frequently involve 1–2 h of activity at either or both ends of the school day, as well as at weekends. As discussed in greater detail below, girls not only play a greater role in unpaid household labour, but, in The Gambia, at least, are also more likely to engage in paid work too. They are also more likely to hand over their earnings to parents than boys (see Chant, 2007: Chapter 4).

While participation in work conceivably takes time away from study, one major motive for young people to take on remunerated activities is to pay for, as well as to establish a legitimate claim to, schooling. Many young people from poor households recognise that being in school prevents them from contributing as much as they might to household expenses, and also that the costs of education can be a significant drain on already exiguous resources. Although in The Gambia, for instance, fees for state primary education have now been waived, and for girls, fees for 'upper basic' (junior secondary) as well (since 2001), the costs for uniforms, exercise books, pens, pencils, schoolbags, lunches and so on hit poor families especially hard. Indeed, school-related costs are estimated by official sources to consume 2.4% of the average per capita income of the poorest quintile of Gambian households (GOTG, 2000, p. 110; see also Ansell, 2002 on Lesotho and Zimbabwe). In light of the fact that poverty stands out as a major factor in school non-attendance and drop-out, funding one's own education is deemed critical by many young people. In turn, with work often being a *sine qua non* for accessing education this is conceivably one reason why part-time employment is not regarded as exerting negative effects on academic progress.

This said, in Ghana the focus groups identified the costs of contributing to school fees as having sometimes made it necessary to suspend education in order to engage in remunerative work. There is some evidence that a work-suspension relationship affects school performance (Heady, 2003), but it also seems to contribute to pressure for young people to extend their education and training well into adulthood. A large number of our participants, of both age groups, including those who still attended school, described prolonged periods of post-education contact. The perceived need for additional education was a function of the qualitative inadequacy and structural rigidity in the educational system, especially in Ghana, with many young people turning to private sector tuition at evenings and weekends not only in Information Technology and English, but for basic numeracy and literacy as well. Although additional qualifications are often acknowledged as being less important in practice for accessing jobs than other factors such as social contacts (see later), in the context of highly competitive labour markets and abiding aspirations to overseas migration, young adults frequently pay considerable sums for vocational courses. The roads near our study sites in Accra possess numerous colleges and institutes, as well as NGO and community training centres, offering courses in languages, IT, accounting, electronics, TV maintenance, tailoring, hair dressing, with activity well into the night and at weekends. Occasional work, therefore, is not only devoted to cover the costs of state schooling but to compensate for its educational and training deficits through funding supplementary classes in the private sector. Given the claims on time, and resource constraints among young women, they are less likely to be in a position to extend their education than young men.

While household poverty is undoubtedly one of the primary factors motivating young people's self-funding of education, it should

¹² Interviews were held with representatives from 20 government departments, multi-lateral organisations and NGOs involved in programmes for youth and/or gender in the two countries.

¹³ Children in The Gambia and Ghana are often fostered out to relatives or 'aunties' (fictive kin), especially where their natal families reside in rural areas. Indeed, a multiple indicator cluster survey conducted by UNICEF at the end of the 1990s showed that 10.2% of Gambian children were not living with either of their natural parents (Delamonica et al., 2004b, p. 9). Sometimes this occurs because of the death of a natal parent or because the foster parent has no children of their own, but more often it is because parents believe that their children will have a better chance to obtain education and work in urban settings (see also GOTG, 1998, p. 26; Human Rights Watch, 2007; van Vuuren, 2003).

also be noted that even better-off individuals may do so given a strong socialised expectation in both Gambian and Ghanaian family systems of respect and duty towards elders, and the idea that children should start 'giving back' to their parents as soon as they are able (usually by their early teens). In the Gambia, for example, participants who identified as Muslims articulated the belief that the more one does for one's parents, the more 'blessings' one will have in life.¹⁴ Children here are raised with such an important sense of 'family' and obligation to natal kin that parents seldom have to tell them to go out to work and few object when their children do so, even when they recognise that this may not be in the best personal interests of the child (Bjinsdorp and Montgomery, 2003, p. 32; Chant and Jones, 2005, p. 192). Similar patterns are found in Ghana, with some respondents mentioning additionally that they felt a need to work in order not to present an image of idleness that they, and their parents, equated with deviance from social norms. As Kabeer (2000) observes in relation to societies in which respect, power and status tend to increase with age:

'...children are likely to take the terms of the contract as given, rather than seeking to contest them or renege on them. Thus inter-generational contracts within the family are likely to be strongest in contexts where families are the dominant welfare institutions, and where the possibilities for adult children to secure their livelihoods, and ageing parents their survival and security, independent of family support and community networks, are largely absent' (Kabeer, 2000 p. 465).

In short, one cannot draw clear distinctions between education and work, including child labour, in the way that many international agencies appear to do, promoting one and seeking to eradicate the other. Seen through our interviews and focus groups, it is by no means surprising that the economic contribution made by children to their households or to their own education, is significant in both countries, with the pattern of working out of duty and obligation most marked among girls, among elder siblings, and among migrants raised in rural areas.

4.2. Gender dimensions of young people's work

While the vast majority of young people participate in unpaid household labour, the workload of girls within the home tends to be greater insofar as they perform a wider range of chores and dedicate more time overall to their multiple tasks. Whereas boys may only be expected (or asked) to run errands and/or to accompany younger siblings (especially sisters) to school, girls regularly perform a wide range of activities including cooking, cleaning, washing, sewing, minding younger siblings and so on. In addition, girls are often not only expected to serve parents, but elder brothers too, it not being uncommon in The Gambia for young women to make their brothers' beds, and to be at their beck and call for other services such as fetching food and drink, and delivering messages (see Chant, 2007, p. Chapter 4). This gender disparity stems not only from the fact domestic labour is deemed fundamentally to be 'women's work' in accordance with the normative ideal that in adulthood women should be the principal 'homemakers' in the household (see VP/SSWA, 1999, p. 8), but because women enhance their 'femininity' and appeal to the opposite sex showing how they 'care for' men who are close to them. As a general rule, these self-sacrificial norms are seen as non-negotiable by women,

even though they frequently end-up being the economic as well as unpaid care mainstay of households (see Chant, 2007, Chapter 4), as also noted in Ghana where contributing to household income is regarded as a vital part of maternal identity (see Clark, 2000).

Leading on from this, the fact not only that unpaid household labour is assigned primarily to women, but that most low-income mothers or female guardians have some form of income-generating activity as well, seems to have two major impacts upon their younger counterparts. First, it means that mothers have less capacity to assume full responsibility for reproductive labour and so pass on the 'excess' burden to daughters (or foster daughters). Second, it establishes the notion that young women should also contribute economically.

In the Gambian fieldwork, for example, it was found that paid work is slightly more common among girls than boys, which, in line with the adult generation, suggests that their disproportionate involvement in domestic labour does not preclude remunerative work. The net result is that many young girls spend up to four hours a day in a combination of paid and unpaid labour, which, objectively at least, takes significant time away from homework, after-school private study, rest and play. This is corroborated by official data from The Gambia which shows that in extremely poor households, where levels of child labour tend to be highest in general, girls are particularly likely to be economically active (GOTG, 2000, p. 3). In Ghana, participants of a focus group in Maamobi noted that almost everyone at their Junior Secondary School works simultaneously with education. One participant said her day began before school going to the market to buy cloth, from where she goes to school until 2.30 p.m., returns home where she prepares food for sale and does textile design which she works on in the evening once chores are complete. The 'duty of work' among daughters was claimed to have become more intense with the shift from extended to nuclear households since domestic chores could not be shared among other adult women in the compound and vulnerability to income shocks from the loss of a mother's earnings, without compensation from another family member (including a co-wife in a polygamous arrangement), was that much more immediate.

Over and above existing gender divisions of labour, one factor explored with participants in relation to the uneven workloads between boys and girls is that parents place more emphasis on educating sons and the education of female children is sacrificed. In both Ghana and The Gambia, cultural practices of gender discrimination (including by teachers, resource allocations and curricula) and the high cost to families of formal basic education limit school enrolment and retention, especially of girls (DfID, 2005b; UNICEF, 1999 The Gambia). One example from fieldwork in The Gambia is the case of Yassime, a 27 year old waitress. Born to a father, who was a cook, and a mother who was a chambermaid, Yassime and her three sisters were only allowed to complete their primary education before being told that they had to find jobs. Once they had done so, both parents retired, and expected their daughters not only to support them, but their younger brother too. The brother, now aged 14, is presently at an upper basic school and has been funded throughout by the earnings of his sisters, who expect that they will go on to finance his secondary education as well. Despite this self-sacrifice on the part of the Yassime and her sisters, they stand to go unrewarded by their parents inheritance-wise, with the family compound already signed over to the brother (see Chant, 2007, p. Chapter 4).

Important contributory factors to the differential value placed on educating boys rather than girls are fourfold. First, there is a pervasive normative ideal that men should be the chief breadwinners for their households. Second, 'open' unemployment is higher among women than men: 19% versus 14% for The Gambia (VP/SSWA, 1999, p. 7). Third, while a total of 59.1% of Gambian women aged 15

¹⁴ Islam is the professed faith of over 90% of the Gambian population, with around 5% being Christian and the remainder Animist (Bjinsdorp and Montgomery, 2003, p. 5). In Ghana, about 60% of the population claim to be Christian, 16% Muslim and 21% Animist. In Accra much of the fieldwork took place in Nima and Maamobi, two settlements where the majority population is Muslim.

or more are economically active, which is only marginally less than the rate for men (63%) (GOTG, 2000, p. 56), and their presence in formal urban employment is growing, women are still only 26.3% of clerical workers, 21% of civil servants, 12.8% of managers, and a mere 1.9% of technical and professional employees (GOTG, 2000, p. 138). Most of the remainder of the female workforce is informally employed in small-scale, unskilled, and under-capitalised ventures in agriculture, commerce and services. This is partly because many women are subject to having their choice of work constrained by husbands (see Fig. 4), partly because of women's lower levels of education and other human capital, and partly because of discrimination. Related to this, women are much less likely to ascend to the upper tiers of the employment hierarchy, with only 4.9% of the skilled workforce in The Gambia being female (GOTG, 2000, p. 138). As reported by the Vice President and Secretary of State for Women's Affairs, Isatou Njie-Saidy: '...women's access to employment is limited in terms of getting employed in the first place, staying in employment and making it to the top' (VP/SSWA, 1999, p. 33).

Fourth, the average earnings of men are consistently higher than those of women, regardless of poverty status and type of occupation (Table 3). According to one source, in the formal sector of The Gambia, mean female incomes are only 59% of men's, when taking into account incomes generated by informal occupations too, total average annual incomes for women as a proportion of men's falls to only 34% despite working considerably longer hours on average (TANGO, 2001, p. 8–9). As informal workers, domestic workers are

excluded from the Labour Act of 1990, which reinforces 'society's perception of domestic activity as a female domain and not worthy of legalisation or monetisation' (VP/SSWA, 1999, p. 3). Additional factors pointed out in the first national report on the MDGs is that early marriage depresses girls' access to education, along with the '...belief that schoolgirls tend to become sexually active whilst in school and remain unmarried thereafter' (RTG, 2003, p. 14). As summarised by TANGO (2001, p. 8), although more than half of Gambian children live in poverty, in terms of nutritional status, access to resources and services and use of child labour, the girl-child undoubtedly fares worse.

4.3. Youth work and employment in later life

Recognising that youth work and education are not necessarily 'polarised choices for poor households' (Subrahmanian, 2002, p. 403), the extent to which paid (and unpaid) work affects the employment prospects of young people in later life is difficult to determine. At first sight the intrinsic value of work undertaken by young people, beyond helping to instil what participants identified as a sense of 'discipline' and 'responsibility', does not seem significant since most of their work does not provide specific skills which would necessarily be employed in an adult career, or at least one of choice. This is especially pertinent given the pronounced aspirations of most youth, whether male or female, to eschew manual, informal sector and/or home-based work (which is common among their parents) in favour of white collar jobs or setting up a

The following is an excerpt from Section 2 'Gender and Social Exclusion Considerations' in a *Micro-enterprise Development Training Manual* prepared by the Fight against Social Exclusion Programme in The Gambia.

'Gender Bias ruins the successful business of Ramatoulie'

'Ramatoulie, a London-trained seamstress decides to start tailoring service in her small town, using funds saved and borrowed from the Bank. She gives the businesses full attention and because of her skills and efficiency, attracts many customers including schools and organisations in the town. Ramatoulie specialised in sewing dresses such as "Asobi" for social functions and school uniforms. The business grew and the profit increased. Ramatoulie has little time for family and domestic chores but helps her husband, Mustapha, to run the house, to pay children's school fees and other domestic bills. She loves Mustapha, her marriage and family but she also loves her business, which she likes to expand. Unlike her in-laws and many people in the town she does not believe that a woman's place is in the home.

She avoids expensive social functions and ceremonies organised by the local community and is called: "A Gambian in appearance but a Tubab at heart". Ramatoulie's answer is "I have no money to waste. Local custom will not ruin my business. He who walks slowly to catch a thief should not cough".

As the business expands and customers increase, Ramatoulie's time for the family and society decreased. She travelled to buy materials, to give supplies, to organise fashion shows in hotels at night. These activities (including visits to hotels, late at night) made the family and community elders extremely angry and Mustapha's respect in society decreased. The elders and family members condemn the practice of visiting hotels at night, and frequenting the company of men and tourists.

Family members and community elders put pressure on Mustapha to act as a man and to protect his wife from evil. As the pressure increased, Mustapha called Ramatoulie and gave her an ultimatum: "Enough is enough, you have to choose one husband (sic), either your business or your family!". Ramatoulie choosed (sic) the husband and the family, reduced her business activities, lost her customers and faced many problems in the business. She applied for credit but needed the help of Mustapha to offer collateral. In the end, she failed to respect the business cycle and the business collapsed'.

Source: FASE (2001, pp.43-5).

Fig. 4. The Gambia: constraints on female labour force participation. Source: FASE(2001, pp. 43–45).

Table 3

The Gambia and Ghana: gender-related development index and inequalities in political and economic activity

		The Gambia		Ghana	
Gender-related development index(GDI) value ^a		0.496		0.549	
Gender-related development index(GDI) rank ^b		133		117	
Female economic activity rate (age 15 and above) (1990 = 100)		94	–	92	–
Female economic activity rate as % of male rate		69.0	–	94.0	–
Estimated earned income (PPP US\$)		Female	Male	Female	Male
2001		1530	2581	1924	2579
2005		1327	2525	2056	2893
Seats in parliament held by women (as % of total)		9.4		10.9	

Source: UNDP (2008).

^a The GDI comprises four gender-differentiated indicators: life expectancy at birth; adult literacy; combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio, and estimated earned income.

^b Rank out of 144 countries.

formal sector enterprise (equated variously with being registered, having employees and/or occupying extra-domestic premises). Indeed, most of our 10–19 year old participants expressed views about career preferences that when compared to the nature and level of their education and skills, and the experience of 20–29 year olds, appear idealised and/or improbable.

Yet education is deemed by the vast majority of poor 10–19 year olds as the single most important factor in progressing to a 'good career'. In respect of the way in which education interplays with other resources ('human', 'social', 'financial' capital) which young people use to advance their work prospects, there is little doubt that advantages accrue from improved literacy and, more specifically, an ability to read and write English, the official language of both The Gambia and Ghana. With a strong association between literacy and English on the part of youth and employers alike, many emphasise the relevance of this skill given the increasing amount of 'paperwork' involved in the emerging employment areas of financial, retail and tourism services, and prized jobs in the government. In contrast, while several young people are able to speak four or five indigenous languages in addition to English, multi-lingualism tends to be disregarded as a 'skill' per se, even if it helps in forging social ties, which, as we shall see later, can be extremely important in increasing access to jobs. Similarly, other skills which young people acquire in the course of their upbringing, including horticultural knowledge, domestic skills such as sewing and cooking, and practical expertise in areas such as carpentry, mechanical and electrical repair linked to what might be considered to be a 'salvage' ethic in which little can afford to be thrown away, are rarely interpreted as vocationally relevant.

Yet the emphasis placed upon education by young people, as well as by the state and NGOs, as a means to prepare young people for work appears somewhat at odds with reality. This is amply demonstrated by our interviews with 20–29 year olds in a variety of low- to middling-status occupations which suggest that academic qualifications beyond basic literacy in English had actually done little to advance employment or earning opportunities. In The Gambia, for example, respondents discussed how occupations such as taxi-driving, which are commonly entered into through apprenticeships, and where the basic eligibility criteria are the ability to converse (as opposed to write) in English, to handle a car, and to simply 'know how to get around', often lead to greater remuneration than posts in which secondary education, full literacy and/or specialist training are, on the surface at least, more critical. From interviews in Ghana, it was clear that the extensive network of public and private vocational technical institutes with

their myriad of qualifications do not necessarily meet labour market needs given that many 'skilled graduates', as one person put it, 'downgrade' once they start looking for work.¹⁵ The shortcomings of the public education system had prompted many of our participants in Ghana to embark upon private vocational courses, at significant cost, for which the employment prospects were uncertain.¹⁶ Indeed, it was rare to encounter a young person working in the area of their vocational training. An exception was Sandra, 18, who left school unable to get a job before enrolling at the Girls' Vocational College where she learned batik design. She now works as an agent for the lottery and on her off-days she produces batik/tie-and-dye cloth, the money from which is used for her own and her siblings' upkeep.

If education has a role in enhancing the employment prospects of young people it could be argued that this is often of a more tangential than a direct nature, with the two most crucial factors identified by focus group participants in gaining access to a regular job or business opportunity being personal contacts and start-up capital. Indirectly, the potential financial capital possessed by young people interrelates with education insofar as only better-off families among the poor can afford to put their children through the complete pre-tertiary education cycle (i.e. through to senior secondary). In respect of social contacts, however, the links with education are less obvious notwithstanding that some young people observed the scaling down of their social circles on leaving the school environment. This is especially so with young women who, despite their more extensive labour loads, are more closely guarded by parents and senior kin. None the less, exemplifying the importance of social contacts, 27 year old Yassime, referred to earlier, explained how she obtained her present (and much coveted) job as a waitress in a luxury hotel through a friend of the family. Had she not had this contact, who happened to be working as the manageress of the establishment, she would not have stood a chance through formal channels because she had not finished her secondary education and had had no previous experience of a 'formal sector' job. Vouching for her 'character' – as honest and hard-working – had been all important in this case, as it also was with Rachel, a 22 year old Ghanaian, who is currently working in a photographic studio. Although unlike Yassime, Rachel had graduated from senior secondary school, with particular interests in science (and had also gained a little sales experience with minerals and cosmetics), the fact that an extended family member had shown her how to take pictures, and was able to recommend her to the studio boss, was much more relevant than her education in securing a job. Indeed, even where people have highly specialised skills and qualifications, getting employment without a contact is virtually impossible. A 24 year old Gambian male internet café attendant recounted that despite having a complete secondary education (West African Secondary Certificate [WASC]), plus 15 months of specialist short-course IT training, he was only able to get his job after 5 months of unemployment because he knew someone who worked in the business, and in which, importantly, someone without any IT experience had been recruited previously simply on the basis of trust and close acquaintance with an existing employee.

As echoed in discussions in focus groups in Ghana, gaining employment is frequently a matter of 'know who' not 'know how',

¹⁵ Studies have noted that vocational training in Ghana rarely reaches the very poor and fails to prepare young people for post-education employment with many 'graduating' to work within the education sector itself (Edudzie, 2002).

¹⁶ According to Addae-Mensah (2000) social mobility through education in Ghana is largely a myth. Private schools charging upwards of US\$5000 per annum have increased across all levels of the education system, including at primary level with enrolment in 1986 of 69,090 rising to 4,45,899 in 2000. Parents consider private schooling value for money as it gains access to one of the 18 secondary schools (out of a total of 504) which provide over 50% of university students.

with the 'knowing who' involving a complex array of familial, ethnic and religious contacts. In respect of the latter, and in light of the fact that many employers seem to equate 'Godliness' with probity, some participants mentioned how they went to more than one church or rotated family members among church denominations to seek out the best opportunities. Indeed, in some churches job opportunities were announced during services and one lay preacher had 'fixed' so many young people into jobs that she had set-up her own employment agency. Such employment networks are greatly enhanced by the rapid growth in numbers and size in recent years of Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, evangelical and Charismatic churches in Accra. These focus group discussions offered insights of how vocational training also served as an important means of building social networks. Vocational training, for example, often requires work placements which are seen as significant to repaying sponsors and opening-up networks outside of family links.

In turn, work itself is frequently regarded as vital to the generation of social capital and creation of life chances. Networks gained through work allow young people to develop opportunities lacking in educational establishments. One 20 year old Ghanaian male, Hafiz, explained how he worked part-time in a store owned by his aunt despite previous and on-going vocational training as an electrician. The vocational training had resulted in numerous apprenticeships but no job offers. Companies, Hafiz claimed, preferred to apprentice young people for which they would not need to pay benefits or higher wages, and would then claim that employees needed further vocational qualifications before being eligible for a permanent job. By contrast, working in the shop, where he began aged ten, had allowed Hafiz to acquire mobile phone covers. Selling the covers, in turn, gave him access to the phones themselves, and selling just one phone could earn him more than he received from his employment in the shop. With the income from phone sales Hafiz buys more phones, "eats in style" and gives money to his aunt to save for him. As phone owners tend to be relatively well off and to have useful contacts he hoped that he would eventually interest someone in his electrical skills. With his "area boys", with whom Hafiz sits out talking and drinking soft drinks during free time, plans are hatched to get to Europe or make contact with an uncle in the US, and with the money earned abroad to "make it" on return with his own electronics firm. Crucially, 'getting on' means 'getting out' for Hafiz.

5. Current policy regarding youth and gender

Despite the critical importance of social capital and informal economic alternatives in affecting labour market entry, the complexities of local economic and social arrangements in both The Gambia and Ghana, do not thus far seem to have been taken on board in interventions aimed to address issues of youth and gender. Instead, policy in both countries remains heavily influenced by the standardised prescriptive rhetoric of the MDGs and the EFA-FTA initiative, as well as funding and capacity-building support from major international and bi-lateral donor agencies. Here, as Porter (2003) has noted, local understandings of poverty and how best to address its dynamics are largely ignored. The occasional emphasis on consensus in setting out policy, an important dimension of the PRSPs, belies the absence of many local NGOs at meetings.¹⁷

The considerable policy advances on paper, therefore, has tended to a mixture of normative agenda-setting or piecemeal programmes to address education, skills or employment deficits and gender inequalities but rarely efforts to tie these together. With

these caveats, 'advances' are arguably more discernible in The Gambia. A major overriding goal of The Gambia's National Youth Policy 1998–2008, for example, is to enhance training and employment opportunities for young people, while the National Policy for the Advancement of Women (1999–2009) aims to reduce gender inequality and to promote greater well-being and participation among Gambian women (GOTG, 2000; NWB, 2002). With the specific purpose of correcting long-standing gender biases in educational attainment, the schooling of the girl-child has been given particular attention. Prior to 1982, when a 'girl-friendly' schools initiative was launched in The Gambia, toilets had not been gender-segregated, which had dissuaded many parents from educating daughters. Subsequently, the 1993–2003 National Education Policy attempted to improve female enrolment and completion ratios in other ways, such as by training more female teachers (Njie-Saidy, 2000), and by setting-up a dedicated Girls' Education Unit within the Gambian Department of State for Education (DOSE). Aside from the waiving of 'upper basic' (junior secondary) school fees for girls, there have been other interventions such as scholarship schemes and workshops to encourage girls to go into less conventionally 'female' subjects such as science, mathematics and technology (APRC, 2001).

In order to better harmonise educational provision with the job market various vocational training schemes have also been introduced by government and NGOs in The Gambia, along with attempts to re-orientate youth to value these and other skills. Initiatives to date have included increasing vocational instruction as part of the academic curriculum (through placing more emphasis on agricultural science, home economics, woodwork and IT), the introduction of 'career' days and occupational advisory bodies within the school environment, and the launch of vocational training alternatives for 'early school leavers', as in the case of the Gambian government's National Youth Service Scheme (NYSS), and NGO-funded 'skills centres' (see GYNSS, 2001). Other important initiatives include the establishment in 2001 of the child protection alliance (CPA), an interagency collaborative institution comprising over 40 organisations for the protection and rights of children in The Gambia, and the creation of a National Policy on Children (2003–2008) which could possibly establish the basis for a National Commission on Children. In turn, the CPA has lent support to the establishment of 'Voice' a young people's group which is dedicated to issues of child protection and child rights in The Gambia.¹⁸

In Ghana, by contrast, the direction of change is much less certain. Having been the first country to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to establish a National Commission on Children (GNCC) some of the momentum appears to have been lost. But, the GNCC was located in the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs which symbolically equated children as a 'woman's issue'.¹⁹

Whereas Ghana's medium term development plan 1997–2000 aimed to deliver functional literacy as a minimum through free compulsory universal basic education (GOG, 1995), the Children's Act of 1998 only went part way to removing the prohibitory stance to child work of earlier legislation. A large number of short-life programmes such as 'Red Card to Child Labour' sponsored by the government, international donors, trade unions and churches have

¹⁷ During fieldwork a PRSP exercise was held in Accra at which most local leading NGOs were absent and one informant who did attend noted that her role was to listen to "international experts tell them how it would be".

¹⁸ Among its many activities, the CPA helped to organise the third National Science/ICT Clinic for Girls with sponsorship from UNICEF and with the participation of the Forum for African Women Educationalists in The Gambia (FAWEGAM) in collaboration with DOSE and the Peace Corps – 96 girls attended, with four college women acting as mentors to encourage girls to study Maths, Science and Technology (Interview by Sylvia Chant with Jalamang Camara, CPA, The Gambia, April 2003).

¹⁹ Typically, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs is allocated the smallest share of the national budget.

set out to combat child work in the tourism sector, street selling and trafficking ('kayaye').²⁰

To much credit, the government has increased the budget of the education service, and prompted by the MDGs has pushed more resources to primary education and away from tertiary, and has undertaken some moderate curriculum reform. But, student retention remains a problem, especially of girls, and the linkage to employment conditions is limited and piecemeal, giving the impression to one NGO that the initiatives are a palliative to donors.²¹

But consistency and tying together policy and delivery remains suspect. Youth issues in the first Kufour presidency fell under the Ministry of Sport and Youth – the order being indicative to many of government priorities – and in the second administration to the Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment. In 2004 we were informed that the government was formulating a National Employment Policy and, separately, a National Youth Employment Programme. At the time of writing neither have materialised; the Employment Policy now scheduled for announcement in March 2008 (nine months before the presidency ends) and only the barest details emerging of the Youth programme. Emphasis of the new programme seems to stress training young people to work in community health, in teaching, and agri-business. NGOs have expressed concern at the lack of participation from civil society in arriving at these decisions.

A focus group of youth-led organisations in Ghana revealed that none had been consulted about the nature, or language, of education reform, changes to vocational training or means to extend the youth rights discourse into agenda-setting. They expressed annoyance that the Ghana Education Service continues to maintain enrolment and attendance rates as the indicator of delivery, a view illustrated by official reports which make no mention of the quality of delivery or impact on livelihoods, and do not take on board grassroots suggestions for curriculum reform. As a focus group with leaders of the youth movement noted, paraphrasing a Ghanaian saying: 'nobody takes medicine for a sick person', yet education policy is devised only by adults without participation of young people. As the same group observed, policy makers tend to ignore the needs of Muslim groups, especially girls, and another group indicated its frustration at learning about hygiene and time management, while having limited time on computers, and one participant asked us what learning philosophy and classics had done to help the youth of developed countries. The sense is of a continued practice of placing stress on literacy and qualifications without examining their relevance in the context of access to usable skills and other resources (see Yates, 1997).

6. Conclusion

In May 2000 *The Economist* titled its lead story 'Hopeless Africa'. The editorial, under the subtitle 'The Heart of the Matter' (a play on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*), provides a catalogue of failures, domestic and international, from the abduction of UN troops by forces loyal to Foday Sankoh in Sierra Leone, to famine in Ethiopia, thuggery in Zimbabwe, and widespread despotism and corruption that 'for reasons buried in their cultures, seem especially susceptible to (Africa)'. The editorial compares Freetown at the start of

the nineteenth century as 'remote and malarial, but also a place of hope' and the start of the twenty-first when it 'symbolises failure and despair'. The cover photo indicates one possible outcome of this situation, a muscular black youth carrying a rocket-launcher on his shoulder stares out of the continent, the rocket perhaps symbolically pointed to Europe. The Economist advises the UN that it must 'fight the wars it can win', and clearly taking on an armed youth is not such a war. Rather, the UN must turn around the declines in real incomes that have left sub-Saharan Africa \$200 per capita worse off in 2000 than in 1974, and strengthen international commitments to fight malaria and HIV-AIDS. Translated into the MDGs, these form some of the mainstays of the global development agenda.

To some extent, our research supports greater emphasis on development interpreted as education, work and enhanced social capital. Young women and men in The Gambia and Ghana face numerous problems in attaining education, and access to the labour market. This situation owes, *inter alia*, to weak macro-economic performance in both countries, as well as to lack of vocationally-relevant education and training opportunities. However, what is perceived to have been a failing of development in The Gambia and Ghana, as measured by international development indicators, is more complex and highly subject to political and social conditioning 'on the ground'. Although educational qualifications carry *kudos*, formal labour markets, while nominally credentialist and meritocratic, continue to be characterised by personalism, such that the role of social contacts outweighs the value of education and training when it comes to labour recruitment. As for the informal sector, where most of the population generate their livelihoods, start-up capital is a key determinant of whether a business will get off the ground in the first place. Women tend to be disadvantaged to men in all these spheres, such that the few employment or business opportunities available tend to be biased in favour of men. Gender-sensitive policies of micro-credit provision are going some way to help women 'catch-up' with men, especially in the informal sector, but the disadvantages faced by women in respect of disproportionate demands on their time through domestic labour, the claims on them to contribute to family well-being from an early age (whether in terms of remunerated or unremunerated activities), their more limited circles of social contacts, and the pervasive belief that women should first-and-foremost be 'homemakers' adds up to a situation in which the current generation of young women is unlikely to parallel men's achievements in the workplace.

In order to redress this situation, education and employment policies should not only aim to reduce gender discrimination in schools and in the labour market, but also attempt to address gender inequalities within the home. One of the main barriers to young women's enrolment in schools and access to employment owes to social expectations that women should perform the bulk of reproductive labour in their youth as well as in adulthood. Another is the constraints placed on young women's personal freedom in respect of their social relationships. These factors have a variety of implications, including less time among young women to dedicate to their education, and fewer contacts relevant to securing paid employment. Coupled with discrimination against girls and women within and beyond the family, the tendency is for men to end up with more educational qualifications, more skills, and higher-paying jobs, even if unemployment among young people in general remains a major problem. Initiatives here could take the form of encouraging parents to value their girl children on a par with boys, and of attempting to equalise domestic reproductive labour burdens at all stages of the life course. These are unlikely to be easy tasks, however, especially where households are struggling to maintain basic subsistence. As articulated by Kabeer (2000, p. 479):

²⁰ Interview by Gareth A Jones with Sylvia Hinson-Ekong, ILO-IPEC, Ghana, May 2003.

²¹ Ghana established a Girls Education Unit within the Ministry of Education in 1997 and drafted a National Plan for Girls' Education, tasked with reducing school drop-out rates, at the time running at over 30% in primary and 20% in secondary schooling, about one-third higher than for boys. Our impression is of minimal progress and a summary of the present education strategy makes no mention of gender equality. Curriculum reform has increased vocational skills training and entrepreneurship through awareness of microfinance.

'Investing in the education of the current generation of children, particularly girls, may be the most effective way to ensure the survival, well-being and education of the next generation of children, but it begs the question as to how to break the negative syndrome of livelihoods-health-education which shape current parental strategies. If the logically prior rights to food, to housing and to health have not been guaranteed, on what basis can we seek to implement the right to education for its children? On the other hand, if deliberate efforts are not made to break this syndrome by ensuring that this generation of children acquire at least the basic education which is becoming necessary to operate in increasingly cash-based and literate economies, what is to prevent the inter-generational transmission of values, poverty and disadvantage to continue uninterrupted?'

Although gender inequality is not exacerbated by poverty in all contexts, in The Gambia and Ghana there is strong evidence to suggest that without more efforts to reduce poverty or to redistribute resources to poorer households, then the prospects of equalising the life chances of young women and men will be doomed to failure. As such, pro-poor policies in general should be a fundamental aspect of future strategies to put rhetoric about the mainstreaming of gender into practice.

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