

## CIES Gender Justice SIG submission

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### Abstract - Gender justice, work and education in Sub Saharan Africa

This panel addresses the findings of a recent research collaboration funded by the British Academy (2020-23) that sought to deepen understandings of how young women navigate the demands of education and work in different rural contexts of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). A further research objective was to support rural female youths in developing their agendas for change about their education and work. The research took place in rural communities of SSA's two largest economies, Nigeria and South Africa, both of which are fractured by enduring inequalities.

The project is informed by an overarching concern for gender justice, in particular with respect to the continuing misrecognition of women's reproductive work and the ways this reproductive work impacts on education. Women's reproductive work has been recognized as central to flourishing economies (Butler 1997; Oyewumi 2005; Pateman 1988), but much of this work has remained 'invisible'. Women in contemporary neoliberal societies may participate more in the 'formal' economy, but are still over-represented in insecure, low-paid, part-time positions (McDowell 2014; ILO 2017). International initiatives attempt to address these inequalities by advocating for the right to 'decent work', a concept that is central to Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Importantly however, such initiatives tend to assume that the socio-legal frameworks surrounding 'wage labour' structure most jobs. In contexts where this is not the case, the realization of 'decent work' is considerably more problematic.

In much of SSA, the employment situation bears little resemblance to that of post-industrial societies of the Global North. Across SSA, almost 70% of those with jobs are in 'vulnerable' employment (i.e. working within the family or for their 'own account'), and that such employment is especially prevalent for females and for youth (ILO 2017). Of further concern is the high level of working poverty in SSA, which affects around two thirds of those with jobs. Recent research into rural youth employment in SSA has also demonstrated the heavy burden of domestic and reproductive labour that falls on young women in particular (Crossouard et al 2019; 2021). Overall, the precarity of female youth livelihoods in such contexts intensified a gendered - and indeed sexual - economy in which women constantly struggle against systematic subordination.

This research project brings into focus the intersections of education provision, gender equality, and the right to decent work, as reflected in Goals 4, 5 and 8 of the UN's Sustainable Development agenda. It does this in rural SSA contexts in which there are high youth populations, high gender inequality, high incidences of forced or early marriage, early pregnancies, HIV/AIDS, low and gendered educational outcomes, and deep poverty. In partnership with researchers from Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, in Northern Nigeria, it has explored the livelihoods of young women in a context that has been affected by violent insurgency. In South Africa, in collaboration with the University of KwaZulu Natal, it has explored young women's livelihoods in a society which has suffered from deeply racialized employment structures.

More generally, the project addresses the chronic lack of research into rural youth and gender (Farrugia 2018), and into education in rural contexts, including within Africa (Pini et al 2018). It takes up how schools in SSA are gendered institutions, which often contribute to, rather than disrupting the reproduction of gendered outcomes (Dunne et al 2005; Dunne et al 2014; Crossouard and Dunne

2020). It also challenges overly-linear and under-theorised understandings of how education and work figure in youth livelihoods. Although initially conceptualized before the C-19 pandemic, the consequences of this have added to the relevance of the research, given the pandemic's differential impacts on poorer communities and on women as primary carers. Finally, given that globally approximately one third of all women work in the rural economy (Mlambo-Ngcuka 2019), the project provides critical evidence in support of SDG ambitions to eradicate poverty by 2030 of relevance to policy-makers, NGOs, activists and academics.

The research has addressed the following research questions:

- How do female youth in rural contexts of Sub Saharan Africa understand 'work' and what significance does this have within their lives and imagined futures?
- How have these female youth navigated the demands of work and education?
- What are female youths' agendas for social change with respect to work and how their work is valued?

The research drew on participatory visual methodologies (PVM) and life history approaches. After C-19 restrictions had been eased, we engaged rural young women in two communities in each national context in a series of VPM workshops, each lasting one or two days, spread over a period of approximately nine months. The workshops involved participants in community mapping, drawing, walk-about activities, photo-voice and cellphilms (participatory videos made on cellphones or tablets) (Dockney and Tomaselli 2009; Mitchell, De Lange and Moletsane 2017). These creative PVM methods culminated in participants' production of policy posters and action briefs focused on their experiences and understandings of work. These were then presented in each context in a community exhibition and dialogue that aims to support participants in developing an agenda for social change. Alongside these participatory methods, 12 young women in each research site participated in life history interviews exploring how work and education has figured in their lives.

The papers that follow firstly address our theoretical framing before turning to two papers that take up our recent empirical research into the intersections of education and work for young rural women in Nigeria and South Africa.

#### Selected references

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- Crossouard, B., & Dunne, M. (2020). Gender and Education in Postcolonial Contexts. In C. Mayo & T. Mbiti (Eds.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dunne, M., Leach, F., Chilisa, B., Maundeni, T., Tabulawa, R., Kutor, N., et al. (2005). *Schools as Gendered Institutions: the Impact on Retention and Achievement*. London: DfiD.
- Dunne, M. (Ed.). (2008). *Gender, Sexuality and Development: Education and Society in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

#### [Paper 1: Reworking gender, education and work in Sub Saharan Africa](#)

Professor Barbara Crossouard and Professor Máiréad Dunne, University of Sussex

Our first presentation focuses on the ways international policies frame the education and work lives of young women in Sub-Saharan Africa. It precedes two further presentations which discuss our

recent empirical research using participatory visual methodologies into the ways young women in different rural contexts of SSA navigate the demands of education and work.

In this paper we draw on our previous writing firstly to critique the normative age-related expectations of a linear transition from education to work within dominant policy lenses, in particular focusing on human capital theory (Crossouard et al 2021; 2022; Dunne et al 2021). We highlight how this fails to recognize the informal economies of Africa, how African youth typically combine education with multiple forms of income-generating work, and importantly, how this takes no account of the reproductive labour of young women and its impact on their education. It also fails to recognize how schooling itself involves gendered work, and indeed how schooling is a gendered institution (Dunne et al 2005).

Secondly, we call instead for theoretical attention to the concept of gender regimes in order to explore the imaginaries of education and work prevailing in different contexts and how these imaginaries - which often remain congealed around a gender binary of male v female - reproduce and naturalize gender inequalities (Dunne 2008; Crossouard and Dunne 2020). This takes up poststructural and postcolonial feminist perspectives to illuminate the part that different institutions such as family, schooling and religion all play in the construction of gendered imaginaries in specific socio-historical contexts (Dunne et al 2017).

Lastly, we address the methodological implications of these theoretical lenses for opening policy horizons. A key issue here is that nuanced attention to the intersections of different axes of inequality and the power relations within different institutionalized contexts (such as schooling or work) benefits from in-depth qualitative studies that can explore how gender and other axes of identity are performed within specific contexts. We further argue that these theoretical and methodological approaches are important in order to make visible and better recognize the significance of women's unpaid reproductive labour and to disrupt what for many young women are the limitations of the sexual economy.

Overall, our discussion theorises the intersections of education provision, gender equality, and the right to decent work, as reflected in Goals 4, 5 and 8 of the UN's Sustainable Development agenda. This is of particular relevance to rural SSA contexts in which there are high youth populations, high gender inequality, high incidences of forced or early marriage, early pregnancies, HIV/AIDS, low and gendered educational outcomes, and deep poverty. These issues are critical to SDG ambitions to eradicate poverty by 2030 and are of relevance to policy-makers, NGOs, activists and academics.

## [Paper 2: We will have our say: education and work for young women in Northern Nigeria](#)

Professor Dauda Moses and Safiya Aliyu Chin, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Nigeria

Questions of gender justice are important across Nigeria, but are particularly extreme in its northern states, including Adamawa State in the north-east, where our research was conducted. Nigeria is the largest African state, with an estimated population of 225 million. Its population is young, with a median age of 18 years. However, although its economy is now larger than that of South Africa, four out of ten Nigerians live below the national poverty line (World Bank 2022). The enduring inequalities that fracture Nigerian communities are in large part a legacy of colonialism, which sedimented intersecting economic, ethnic and religious differences, particularly between the north and south (Dunne et al 2017; UNDP 2018). These deep inequalities are compounded when gender is brought into play. Nigeria is ranked 123rd out of 146 countries for gender parity (World Economic Forum 2022). In terms of education, the youth literacy rate is only 56% in the north-east of Nigeria,

as opposed to 96% in the south-east (UNESCO 2022). The education of girls in Northern Nigeria has also become of acute concern since 2009, this being the start of a violent insurgency, which has included targeting girls participating in 'western' forms of schooling.

The site selection in Nigeria was informed by our awareness of the significant part that religion plays in the lives and identities of the population (Dunne et al 2017). Just over 50 percent of Nigerians are Muslim, predominantly living in the northern states, a further 45 percent are Christian, residing mostly in the south, with another 6 percent practising traditional religion (CIA 2022). Nevertheless, there are Northerners who are Christian and Southerners who are Muslim. Adamawa State in the north-east, the location of this study, has a Muslim majority but is estimated to have a 40-45 percent Christian population (Dunne et al 2014).

Our research was conducted with a group of 14 Muslim young women in Girei, and a second group of 14 Christian women in Numan, two rural contexts close to Yola in Adamawa State. All were aged over 18. The workshops used a mix of English and local languages, mainly involving Hausa and Fulani, and were led by researchers from Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola. The research team included two female youth researchers. With the participants' permissions, the workshop discussions were recorded, translated and transcribed in English. The action brief developed by the participants to outline their agenda for social change was produced in English and Hausa, the latter being a shared language across both sites, although not typically used for written communications.

Our research shows that young women in both rural contexts see education to be important. Their discussions indicated strong, shared concerns about the burden of reproductive work (domestic and sexual) that was routinely assumed of them, and how this interfered with their schooling. They also highlighted how they were subject to different forms of gender violence, in school, at work and in the home, and how they had little recourse in the community to address these. 498

### [Paper 3: Striking for change in the community: education and work for young women in South Africa](#)

Professor Relebohile Moletsane, Dr Lisa Wiebesiek, Nkondo Mkhize (University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa)

While racial equality was a primary concern at the dawn of the new constitution in post-apartheid South Africa, gender justice was also rapidly recognised as a key issue that needed to be addressed, with strong feminist concerns about gender equality being raised even as the new constitution was forged (Seidman 1999). Nevertheless, the legacy of apartheid has proved difficult to overcome. With a population of 60 million, South Africa has the second largest economy of Africa, with the mineral extraction, agriculture, finance and tourism industries playing a central role in the country's economy. In spite of the wealth generated by these industries, South Africa remains a highly unequal society, with a Gini Coefficient of 0.67 in 2015. KwaZulu-Natal, the province in which the research was carried out, also has the highest level of inequality of all South African provinces. In addition to being racialized, recent statistics confirm that the labour market is gender-biased; female workers earn 30% less than male workers (Statistics South Africa 2022). The endemic poverty in rural contexts intersects in complex ways with gender inequality. As Moletsane and Ntombela (2010:4) note, although they fulfil important socio-economic roles, rural women in South Africa are 'poorer, invisible and voiceless'. Education outcomes for youth in rural contexts are also much lower than in

urban contexts. Only 34 percent of rural youth complete upper secondary education, as opposed to 55 percent of urban youth (UNESCO 2022).

Researchers from the University of KwaZulu-Natal with extensive experience of participatory visual methodology (PVM) worked with two groups of young women co-researcher participants (CRPs) – one in each of two rural research sites in the Drakensburg region of KwaZulu-Natal. The precarity of people's livelihoods in contexts of poverty, high unemployment rates, low wages, food insecurity, poor service delivery, and migrancy in the search for employment in South Africa is both racialized and gendered. Men in this context are far more likely than women to complete their education, find employment in the formal economy (often by migrating to cities such as Durban), and earn a decent wage (Hunter 2010). None of the young women CRPs were employed or studying full-time during the project, and only a small number were involved in some post-school training activities.

Using visual artefacts and integrative discussions with participants in a series of workshops, this paper will present an overview of the findings from the South African arm of the project. Similar to the findings from Nigeria, the research highlighted the unequal gender norms in communities and households that often lead to a lack of access to post-schooling opportunities, unequal access to job opportunities, lack of dignity in women's work, the burden of work on women and girls, and the persistence of high rates of gender violence. The findings also point to the problematic nature of the highly gendered school curriculum which portrays women's lives primarily in terms of marriage and the domestic sphere.