

# **Democratising Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Opportunity Structures and Capacity Challenges**

**Professor Louise Morley, Dr Fiona Leach and Dr Rosemary Lugg, University of Sussex, UK**

## **Abstract**

This paper discusses work-in-progress on the ESRC-DFID funded research project on Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing an Equity Scorecard ([www.sussex.ac.uk/education/wideningparticipation](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/education/wideningparticipation)). This project is examining patterns of inclusion and exclusion in higher education in two African countries with a view to interrogating the role that universities play in poverty reduction and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It is researching strategies and challenges for widening participation via policy analysis, two hundred life history interviews with 'non-traditional' students and two hundred interviews with key academic staff and policy-makers. Working with a public university and a private university in Ghana and Tanzania, the aim is to provide a comprehensive statistical overview of patterns of participation and achievement in higher education in the two countries. The project is developing Equity Scorecards to measure access, achievement and retention of socially and economically excluded groups in the four case study institutions. The statistical data will be illuminated by the multivocality of interviews with stakeholders whose interests are rarely included in international higher education policy arenas. Overarching aims are to build theory about socio-cultural aspects of higher education in low-income countries, to expand the research

capacity in the countries concerned, and to provide new knowledge and literature that could contribute to making African higher education more socially inclusive.

### **Democratising Higher Education: Wealth Creation and Poverty Reduction**

Widening participation in higher education has become a global policy objective, underpinned by both economic and social imperatives. 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 in low-income countries. Increasingly, more overt links are being made by the global polity between widening participation in higher education, wealth creation and poverty reduction (UNESCO, 1998; World Bank, 2002). In the UK, the Commission for Africa report (2005) highlights the role of universities as enablers of development, rather than as targets of development aid themselves. African higher education is presented as playing an indispensable role in any programme of sustainable development and poverty reduction. Higher education is viewed as central to development as it can provide scientific, professionally and technically skilled staff and generate research and analysis to improve effectiveness of the private economy and government policy and services.

Bernstein's earlier observation (1970) that education cannot compensate for society can usefully be recalled in relation to the myriad challenges involved in attempting to reduce poverty via widening participation in higher education in low-income countries. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set out to halve world poverty by 2015. This target seems remote in Sub-Saharan Africa, where a third of the

world's poorest people live and which has the highest levels of absolute poverty of any region in the world. Forty-four percent of people in Sub-Saharan Africa live on less than \$1 a day (UN, 2006). Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the world that has experienced an increase in absolute poverty since 1990 - both in terms of the actual number of people, and in terms of the proportion of the population, living in absolute poverty. At present, Sub-Saharan Africa 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, 2006).

Economic rationalism is increasingly linked to the imperative of modernisation, with widening participation initiatives often seen as a state interventionist approach to steering higher education systems. This elicits concerns about the increasing commodification of knowledge and colonisation of education policy by economic policy imperatives (Ball, 1998). There are questions about whether widening participation in higher education is a force for differentiation or democratisation. Internationally, there is a burgeoning debate on the ideology that underpins widening participation policies (David, 2007). Initiatives are perceived both as a form of meritocratic equalisation and as a reinforcement of social stratification processes. Greater participation by providing opportunities to students can exacerbate disparities. 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* 2007:1).

Arguments justifying widening participation are both sociological and economic and include attention to national interests and to equal opportunities. There are social justice concerns about how 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). Macro-level arguments also consider human capital and the role that skill acquisition and professional development play in a globalised knowledge economy and the wider social benefits of learning (Schuller *et al.*, 2004).

The relationship between higher education and wealth creation/poverty reduction is also theorised in terms of micro levels of benefit streams. 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. Poverty is increasingly perceived as capability, as well as material deprivation (Sen, 1997), and higher education is associated with poverty reduction by enabling individuals to develop potential. Underpinning the 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). Widening participation policies link individual choices, institutional responsiveness and national and universal salvation (Ball, 1998). 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. Whereas there have been many studies of how macro and micro level factors converge or collide in high-income countries (*e.g.* Burke, 2002; Thomas,

2001), there has been scant research attention paid to the motivations, subjectivities and experiences of people from socially disadvantaged groups trying to enter and achieve in higher education systems in low-income countries.

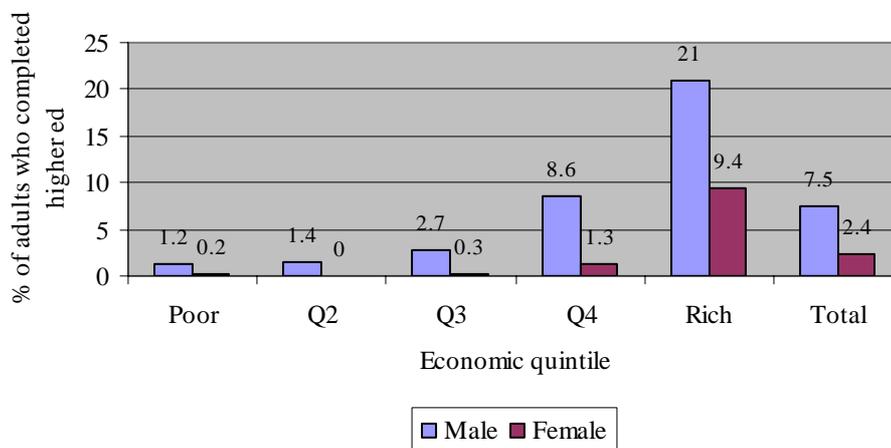
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### **Who is Participating in Higher Education?**

Globally, there are concerns about who gains access to higher education. Widening participation has received some attention in a range of low, mid and high-income countries. Initiatives are classified in terms of diversity, affirmative action and access: in South Africa (Boughy, 2003; Naidoo, 1998), in the USA (Hurtado, 2007) in Bangladesh (Quddus, 1999), in China (Hong, 2004), in Uganda (Kwesiga, 2002); in the UK (Thomas *et al.*, 2001), and in cross-country studies (Morley *et al.*, 2006; Osborne, 2003). There has been considerable quantitative success in widening

participation. Student enrolment worldwide increased from 13 million in 1960 to 82 million in 1995 and to 132 million in 2004 (UNESCO, 1998; UNESCO, 2006). However, globally, this still only means an enrolment rate of 24 per cent. In Sub-Saharan Africa, this figure drops to 5 percent, in Ghana 3 per cent and in Tanzania 1 per cent (UNESCO, 2006). 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 are men from the top socio-economic backgrounds.

**Figure 1: Who completes higher education in Ghana? Percentage of adults completing higher education (age 25+) by socio-economic quintile<sup>1</sup> and gender, 2003**

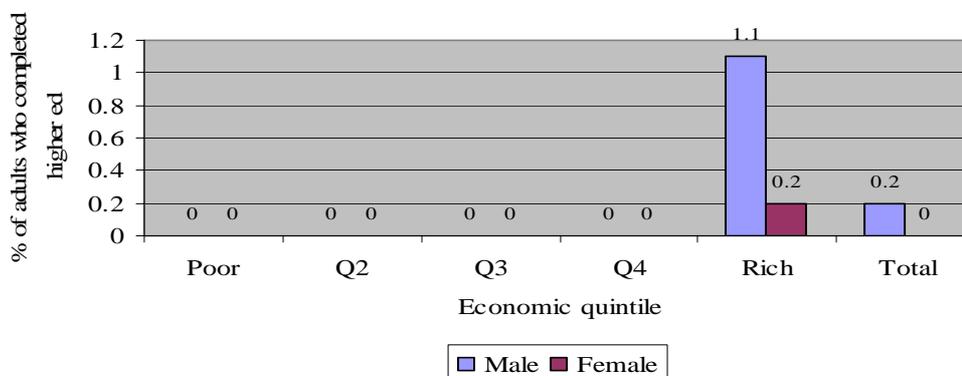


Source: World Bank Development Indicators. Ghana DHS Survey, 2003. DHS data indicator 26 (World Bank, 2007).

<sup>1</sup> In constructing wealth quintiles from DHS data, households are classified in terms of living standards based on information on household ownership of durable goods and housing characteristics. Households are then ranked, from the wealthiest to the poorest. The poorest 20 percent of households form the first wealth quintile, the next 20 percent the second quintile and so on, with the top 20 percent forming the fifth quintile (World Bank, 2006).

In Ghana, national data on enrolment in higher education are not 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 who have been students at elite schools. Whilst participation is increasing for women, students continue to be predominantly from wealthier socioeconomic backgrounds, as Figure 1 demonstrates. In a study of admissions to two universities in Ghana, Addae-Mensah (2000) revealed that the majority of students come from the top 50 schools in the country, *i.e.* they are drawn from fewer than ten percent of the country's schools (Addae-Mensah, 2000). While universities are recruiting from a larger number of schools, the elite schools still dominated 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).

**Figure 2: Who completes higher education in Tanzania? Percentage of adults completing higher education (age 25+) by socio-economic quintile and gender, 1999**



Source: World Bank Development Indicators, Tanzania DHS Survey, 1999. DHS data indicator 26 (World Bank, 2007).

In Tanzania, national data on enrolment in higher education are also not disaggregated by the socio-economic background of students. However, Demographic and Health Survey data indicate that those who have completed a higher education have predominantly been men from wealthier backgrounds. It is argued that participation in higher education in Tanzania is shaped by dimensions of inequality that include religion, region, and ethnicity (Cooksey *et al*, 2003), although without appropriate national data on these sociological variables it is difficult to quantify national patterns.

**Table 1: A Summary of indicators of participation in higher education in Ghana and Tanzania , 2004/2006**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Ghana</b>	<b>Tanzania</b>
Gross Enrolment Ratio <sup>1</sup>	3%	1%
% Female in HE sector <sup>2</sup>	32%	29%
Gender Parity Index <sup>3</sup>	0.48	0.41
% Female in private universities <sup>4</sup>	41%	36%
Enrolment in universities <sup>5</sup>	93,285	37,667
% enrolment in universities (private) <sup>6</sup>	10%	10%
Number of public universities <sup>7</sup>	6	5
Number of private universities <sup>8</sup>	13	17

Sources: <sup>1-3</sup>UNESCO (2006), <sup>4-7</sup>MHEST (2005), <sup>8</sup>MHEST(2006), <sup>5-7</sup>NCTE (2006a), <sup>4-8</sup>NCTE (2006b)

Trow (1973) argued that enrolment below fifteen percent constituted an elite higher education system (up to 40 percent is now seen as a mass system, and over 40 percent is seen as a universal system). Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced one of the fastest

rates of growth in participation rates, with an average increase of 7 percent per year between 1991 and 2004 (UNESCO, 2006). However, it still has an elite system and it is pertinent to ask how social reproduction and elite formation are effected in African higher education.

Most of the UK-based research evidence, despite its disciplinary or methodological approach, draws the same conclusion, that is, you are more likely to participate in higher education if you are from Social Group 1 (professional), than Social Group 5 (unskilled) (Connor *et al.*, 2001). This pattern has remained depressingly consistent over time. The Robbins Committee in 1963 surveyed a sample of people born in 1940–41, and concluded that members of the professional class were 33 times more likely to enter higher education than their counterparts from semi-skilled and unskilled backgrounds (Kettleby, 2007). Galindo-Rueda *et al.* (2004) found that more than three quarters of individuals from professional backgrounds study for a degree compared to just 15 per cent of those from unskilled backgrounds in the UK. They also discovered that neighbourhood or postcodes were significant. People who live in poorer neighbourhoods are less likely to participate in higher education. Machin and Vignoles (2004) in their UK study found that parental income is a major determinant of whether or not an individual participates in higher education. Parental occupation also influences participation.

Clearly, disparities in participation rates continue to exist between different social and cultural groups, especially amongst higher and lower socio-economic classes. The World Bank report (2002) notes that rapid enrolment growth has produced

noteworthy progress in many countries in access to tertiary and higher education<sup>2</sup> for traditionally less-privileged groups, including students from rural areas and women. However, they conclude that higher education, especially in the university sector, generally remains elitist, with most students coming from wealthier segments of society.

### **African Higher Education**

UNESCO hosted the first World Conference on Higher Education in Paris in 1998, at which representatives of 182 countries endorsed the *World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty First Century: Vision and Action* with its commitment to in-depth global reform of higher education. The pre-conference report (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 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.

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<sup>2</sup> 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. The Ghanaian government defines its tertiary sector as including institutions that offer training leading to a degree or diploma (GoG, 2004). In Tanzania, national policy refers to 'higher education' which is defined as 'an education provided at the level of degrees or advanced diplomas' (URT, 2004:726). 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.

The need to reform African higher education has been widely reported. One concern is that it was weakened by the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the early 1980s (Manuh, 2002). The World Bank position only moved away from focusing on basic education to the exclusion of higher education in the late 1990s. In 2000, the Bank commissioned a Task Force on Higher Education and Society, along with UNESCO, to draft a report on the role of universities in the developing world (World Bank, 2000). It concluded that higher education cannot afford to be considered a luxury good for developing countries in an era of globalised knowledge and commerce. By 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:x).

Scholarship on African higher education has highlighted a range of qualitative and quantitative concerns (Makhubu, 1998; Mlama, 1998). The growing demand for access represents a significant capacity challenge for higher education systems globally. This is exacerbated in Africa which is a continent with 54 countries and over 700 million people, but with approximately 300 universities. Other concerns relate to globalisation (Fischman and Stromquist, 1999; van der Wende, 2003), the role 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 and b; Middlehurst & Woodfield, 2004), management and governance, language issues, brain drain, the role of research (Teferra and Altbach, 2004), and whether African universities include indigenous knowledges (Brock-Utne, 1999).

Research and publishing activities are also fairly underdeveloped in Africa, with limited funding allocated to research in university budgets (Teferra and Altbach, 2004), and limited opportunities to develop research capacity (May, 2002; Sawyerr, 2004). Independent inquiry and academic freedom can also play a role in the democratisation process (Benneh, 2002). Underinvestment in research can also mean that universities in the western industrialised societies remain the major producers and distributors of knowledge. Studies on international higher education research have tended to overlook countries in the continent other than South Africa (Tight, 2003). The absence of African voices on debates about the economic and social future of the continent has been noted (Salo, 2003), and the urgent need to build capacity and research autonomy. The next section will take a closer look at higher education in the two research countries.

### **Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania**

There is a mixed economy of higher education in Ghana, with multiple delivery points. The tertiary education system includes six public universities (NCTE, 2006a), 13 private universities (NCTE, 2006b), ten polytechnics (one in each region) (GoG, 2007), 38 post-secondary teacher training colleges (GoG, 2007) and two professional institutes (NCTE, 1999). As already noted, participation rates are lower than in other countries in the region, and lower than the regional average (see Table 2 below). In 2004, the Gross Enrolment Ratio was 3 percent and the student population totalled 69,968 (UNESCO, 2006:126).

**Table 2: Enrolment in Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa**

	<b>2004</b>		
<b>Country</b>	<b>Total enrolment</b>	<b>GER</b>	<b>%F</b>
South Africa	717, 793	15	54
Nigeria	1,289,656	10	35
Ghana	69,968	3	32
Kenya	108, 407	3	37
Tanzania	49, 948	1	29
Sub-Saharan Africa	3,300,418	5	38

*Source: Gross Enrolment Ratio (UNESCO, 2006:126-129)*

Although participation rates are relatively low, enrolments are growing. As Table 3 shows, student numbers increased during the 1990s as a result of reforms of the higher education sector at the beginning of the decade and the government's renewed commitment to expansion (GoG, 1991). Girdwood notes that enrolment in higher education in Ghana increased by 80 percent between 1993 and 1998 (Girdwood, 1999).

**Table 3: Increasing enrolment in Higher Education in Ghana, between 1993 and 2001**

Type of HE institution	Number of students enrolled	
	1993/1994	2000/2001
Public Universities	15365	40637
Private Universities		1662
Polytechnics	1299	18474
Post-secondary Teacher Training Colleges	18955	21410
	35, 619	82, 183

Sources: Enrolment (Rows 1, 3, 4: GoG, 2007. Row 2: NCTE, 2006b).

Enrolments in higher education continue to rise. Recent figures from Ghana's National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) suggest university enrolment alone is over 93, 285 (NCTE, 2006a&b).

In Tanzania, there is also a mixed economy of higher education provided by five public universities, five university colleges (MHEST, 2005), 17 private universities (MHEST, 2006), four technical education institutions, one private technical institution, and 14 higher education colleges. Participation rates in higher education in Tanzania are low. As Table 2 shows, in 2004 the Gross Enrolment Ratio was 1 percent and the student population totalled 49, 948 (UNESCO, 2006:126). However, enrolment has gradually increased over the past decade. In 1990, Tanzania had only 3146 students enrolled at the country's two universities. This was one tenth the size of the student population in Kenya at the same time (Cooksey *et al*, 2003). The majority

of students in Tanzania are enrolled in undergraduate programmes, and the majority of these are enrolled in public universities (Lugg *et al*, 2007:25). Seventy-two percent of undergraduates enrolled in 2004/5 were studying at a public university.

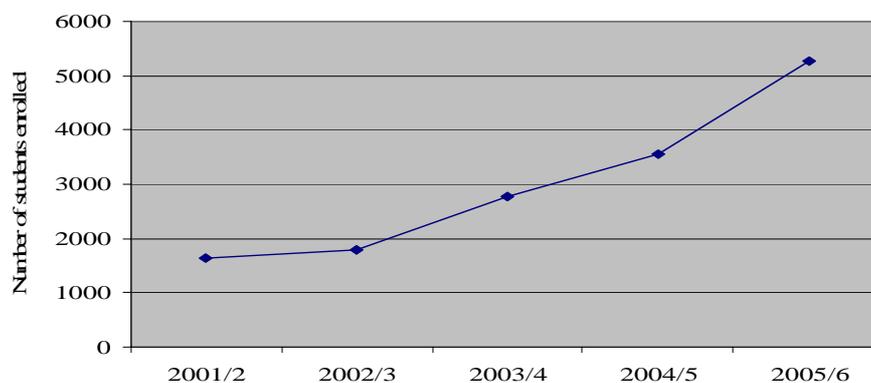
**Table 4: Enrolment in higher education institutions in Tanzania, 2004/5**

Type of institution	Total enrolment
Public universities	34113
Private universities	3504
Technical institutes	2242
Other institutes	8390
Total	48, 249

*Source:* Student enrolment in Higher Learning Institutions (MHEST, 2005: Summary 2)

More recent figures indicate that there are now 5275 students in private institutions in Tanzania (MHEST, 2006), approaching 10 percent of the total student population (Morley *et al*, 2007:40). As Figure 3 shows, enrolment in private universities has accelerated since 2002/3.

**Figure 3: Rising enrolment in private universities in Tanzania between 2001/2 and 2005/6**



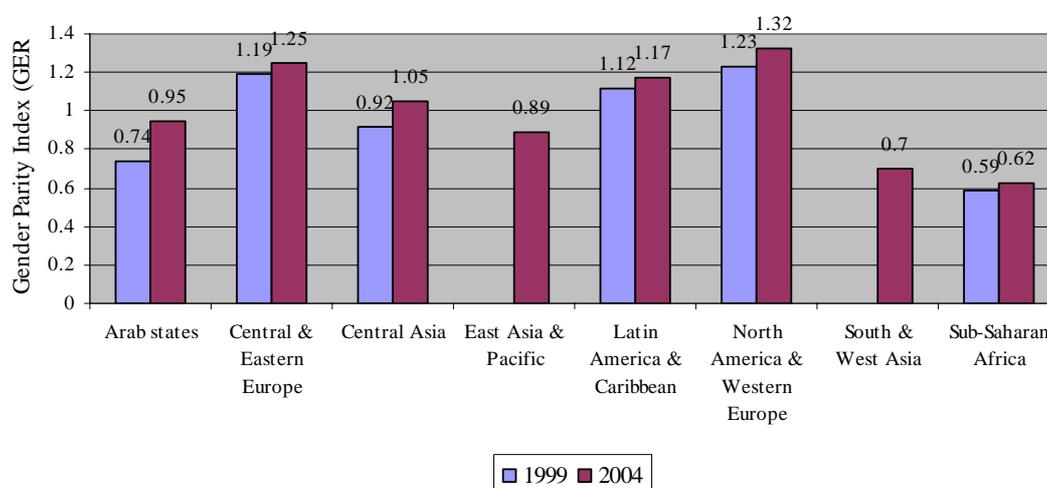
*Source:* Student enrolment (MHEST, 2006)

## Gender Equity in Higher Education

Gender equity in education is increasingly viewed as an indicator of development and indeed of political maturity. The creation of a world polity means that states become more visible in their gender policies and statistics. In the UK, the current policy emphasis is on widening participation in relation to socio-economic status while in many African studies, the focus is on gender as the central structure of inequality (Kwesiga, 2002; Morley *et al*, 2006; Odejide, 2003).

Although globally participation by women has increased, women constitute only 32 per cent of higher education students in Ghana, and 29 percent in Tanzania (UNESCO, 2006) (compared to 21 per cent in Ghana (Effah, 2003) and 17 per cent in Tanzania in 1991 (Cooksey *at al.*, 2003)).

**Figure 4: Gender Parity Index for Gross Enrolment in Tertiary Education, in 1999 and 2004, by region**



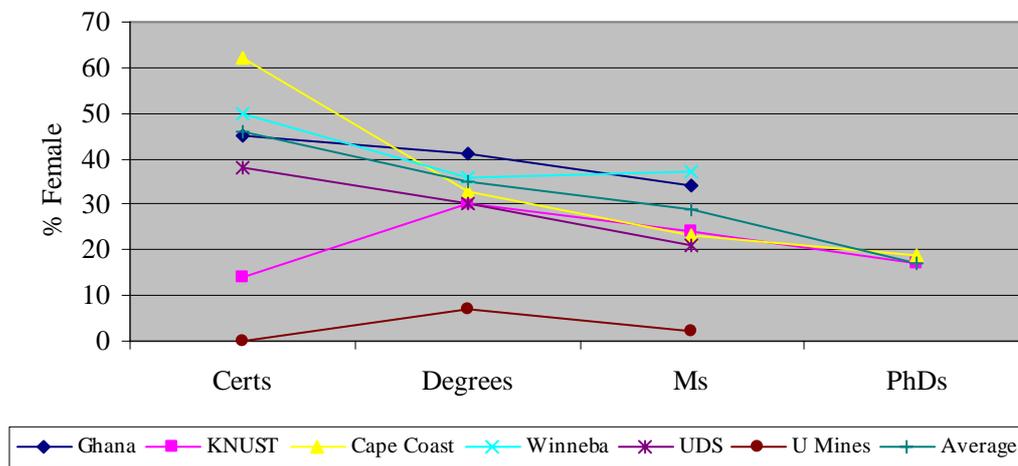
Source: Gender Parity Index (GER) (UNESCO, 2006:128)

As the increase in the Gender Parity Index in Figure 4 shows, participation rates for women increased between 1999 and 2004 in all regions of the world. It would seem that increasing Gross Enrolment Ratios have generally been of benefit to women (UNESCO, 2006). Yet, in several regions of the world, 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 remains well below one (see Figure 4) (UNESCO, 2006). UNESCO statistics also appear to suggest that across the globe graduation rates are higher for women than for men. However, half of the countries in the world do not provide separate figures for male and female graduation rates. The countries without available data on education outcomes tend to have lower participation rates for women (UNESCO, 2006: 19). Globally, participation by women has increased, but is still not equitable in many African countries; in 2004 the GPI for the Sub-Saharan region was 0.62 (UNESCO, 2006) .

In Ghana, 32 percent of students in higher education are women (UNESCO, 2006:126). With a Gross Enrolment Ratio for men that is double that for women, the Gender Parity Index for Gross Enrolment in higher education is 0.48, falling far short of equity (UNESCO, 2006: 126). Even so, participation for women has improved over the past 17 years; in 1991/2 only 21 percent of students in Ghanaian universities were women (Effah, 2003). Participation rates for women are higher in the private sector than in the public sector. Women make up 41 percent of students in private universities (NCTE, 2006b), compared to 35 percent of undergraduates in the public sector (Lugg *et al*, 2007:17).

Women’s participation in higher education decreases at each level of the system. It is highest on programmes leading to certificate and diploma level qualifications where 46 percent of students are women; it falls to 35 percent for degree programmes, and is lowest at post-graduate study. Only 29 percent of Masters students and 17 percent of PhD students in Ghana are women (NCTE, 2006a). Women’s participation decreases at each level of higher education.

**Figure 5: Women’s participation in public universities in Ghana, by university and by level of programme, 2005/6**



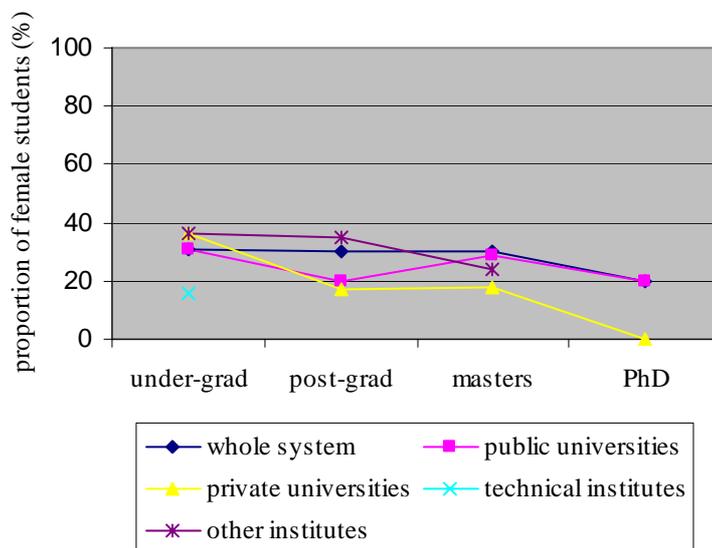
Source: Student Enrolment (NCTE, 2006a: Tables S5)

Figure 5 reveals that women’s participation differs between public universities. This varying participation reflects different subject specialisms of the universities. Women’s participation is greatest in universities that specialise in Education (Winneba and Cape Coast), and at the University of Ghana - a university that historically has been predominantly a Social Sciences university. Women’s participation is lowest in the universities that specialise in Science, Engineering and

Technology (*i.e.* the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and the University of Mines and Technology).

Twenty-nine percent of students in higher education in Tanzania are women (UNESCO, 2006: 128). This inequity is reflected in a Gender Parity Index for Gross Enrolment that is 0.41 (UNESCO, 2006). However, women’s participation in higher education has increased. Cooksey *et al*, (2003) note that in 1992/1993, only 17 percent of admissions to the main campus of the University of Dar es Salaam (at that time, the larger of Tanzania’s two universities) were women. Data from the MHEST show that by 2001, 23.7 percent of all students in higher education in Tanzania were women, but by 2005/6 this rose to 30 percent (MHEST, 2005: 6).

**Figure 6: Women’s participation in higher education in Tanzania 2004/5, by level of programme and type of institution**



Source: Student Enrolment in Higher Learning Institutions (MHEST, 2005: Summary 2)

The under-representation of women as students in African higher education has received research and policy attention (Bunyi, 2004; Morley *et al.*, 2006). Tanzania and Uganda have introduced affirmative action, pre-entry programmes, gender mainstreaming and sensitisation courses to help promote gender equity (Lihamba *et al.*, 2006; Kwesiga and Ssendiwala, 2006; Morley, 2007).

There are many explanations for the gender gap including low enrolment in basic education and gendered socio-cultural practices (Dunne and Leach, 2005). Recent research findings suggest that the gender gap has been slightly reduced in quantitative terms, but it still remains in qualitative terms, and that gender is not always considered in relation to other structures of inequality including socio-economic background, age, sexuality, disability and ethnicity (Morley *et al.*, 2006).

Our life history interview data, to date, are already 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:

*Because during that time as I said earlier, 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 and that survival involved complex splitting and disconnection between the two highly gendered worlds.

### **Conceptualising Widening Participation in Ghana and Tanzania**

This research project is developing a conceptual framework based on socio-cultural and feminist theories of higher education (Morley, 2005). While aggregated quantitative data on participation are available via UNESCO and other international organisations, there have been some silences in policies and in research on widening participation in low-income countries. For example, there has been scant theorisation of how different structures of inequality intersect or how higher education relates to policy discourses of poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals at the micro level. International statistics on participation rates in low-income countries are rarely illuminated by qualitative data on the lived experiences of students and staff.

There has been little consideration of the part that private higher education plays in widening participation- particularly for women. International comparative studies of higher education often exclude consideration of low-income countries (e.g. Shavit *et al*, 2007). In short, there has been limited scholarship on the sociology of higher education in general (Deem, 2004) and specifically in low-income countries. One area where there is a noticeable lack of sociological data is the growth of private higher education.

### **Private Higher Education**

Globally, the provision of higher education remains predominantly public. Expansion has been achieved by increased state investment and also by the rise of private education, offshore and satellite expansion, increasing the number of students and providers (Altbach, 1999). The expansion of ICT throughout the 1990s also began to change both the world economy and the place of higher education institutions in that economy, with distance education and e-learning allowing more people to participate (UNESCO 2002).

According to UNESCO (2006), the private sector plays a large role in three regions, namely Latin America, East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the development of a private sector in higher education has been seen as a solution to widening participation and is embedded in reform measures of the sector (Varghese, 2004). It is growing at a considerable rate generally in Africa, and specifically in our two research countries. Much provision has a religious base.

Private higher education occupies a complex material and discursive space.

International policies tie education closely to national economic interests and locate it as a public good. However, private higher education involves a decoupling of education from direct state control, subjecting it to the disciplines of the market and redefining it as a competitive private good (Ball, 1998). Reliance on market forces and the incapacity of the fiscal state to finance education have contributed to the growth of private higher education (Varghese, 2004). The rapid and often unplanned growth can be theorised in terms of neoliberalism, marketisation and ‘disorganised capitalism’ (Lash & Urry, 1987). While equity is usually a residual concern in marketised education systems, the development of new provision can paradoxically offer new opportunity structures for new constituencies of students.

Private universities became part of the national higher education system in Ghana in 1999. Since then, the number of nationally-recognised private universities has risen steadily. Students in private universities now make up ten percent of all university students in Ghana. The number of private universities has steadily increased since they first arrived in Tanzania in 1994. To date, there are 17 private universities catering for 5,275 students (MHEST, 2006).

At the global level, trade liberalisation through the World Trade Organisation’s General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS), is likely to accelerate the trends transforming higher education into a commodity that can be invested in by private and foreign providers operating on a global scale. The rise of private higher education has been theorised in terms of market colonialism, that is, new forms of economic and

political domination unleashed on developing countries through the ‘neutral’ interplay of market forces in the global arena (Chossudovsky, 1998). Concerns also relate to issues of accreditation, standards and quality assurance (King, 2003). Private higher education is rarely sociologically interrogated and there is limited information on how it interacts with social structures such as gender, age and socio-economic status.

Some of the private provision is from offshore, often commercial organisations, but a great deal is religiously based. In our study, both private institutions are Christian universities. However, many of the students interviewed entered private higher education because they had failed to enter or achieve in state run universities, rather than because of the religious affiliations. A Tanzanian female student describes her reduced expectations and *faute de mieux* approach:

*I did not have any information about this university. I only came to know about it after applying here University of Dar es Salaam and could not get a vacancy. Then a friend of mine called and said there is this University called Tumaini why don't you apply and I replied I am not in a position to go to Iringa. She told me there is campus at Dar.*

It is interesting to note that proximity can be a factor in decision-making. This is evocative of research findings in the UK, where it was discovered that socially disadvantaged groups often made decisions about which institution to enter based on pragmatic, rather than academic reasons (Ball *et al.* , 2002). The quotation also suggests that some members of socially disadvantaged groups, while demonstrating

the qualities of enterprising subjects, ultimately have fewer opportunities for consumer choices in a hierarchalised higher education system.

A Tanzanian male student describes how he had begun to overcome his initial disappointment at failing to gain entry to a state university:

*Of course at the first incidence, I didn't have feelings because I wanted to be a student of University of Dar es Salaam but as the time goes on I am breaking down that experiences. Today is OK.*

While more quantitative data are now available on the growth of higher education, it is rare to hear what the consumers have to say about the quality of provision.

Ghanaian students in private higher education in our study complained about lack of democratic processes, commercialisation and poor quality assurance *e.g.* turnaround time for written assignments. A Ghanaian female student laments:

*We cannot see our copies of exam scripts unless we pay.*

A common binary in educational policy is the belief that markets promote efficiency and a successful economy and that the state protects equity, both in terms of a value commitment and to deflect the more corrosive effects of market forces through state regulation and state support for the most vulnerable groups in society (Hirst, 1999; Naidoo, 2000). Varghese (2004) suggests that the public sector in many African countries has been criticised for inefficiency and that the private sector is promoted for its efficiency. In our study, however, there were complaints about inefficiency and

lack of accountability to the consumers of the private higher education product. Poor quality assurance in a market economy can mean that stakeholders do not always feel that they are getting a good return for their investment. A Ghanaian female student describes how failing systems caused her father to doubt whether she was actually attending her private university:

*We wrote the paper I think last February ok, and they brought the result only in May ... My father was asking me because I told him about the exam, he was asking me about the result and where are they, and so on and so forth. So every time I will tell him the same story but, I reached a point where he was asking me if I was really going to school, if I was saying the truth but every now I told him that the result have come so he asked me to go to the admission office and get a copy and send it to him for the scholarship. But there is something on the net when you can check our result and so on. But I went there only three of the external results are there so I didn't know what to tell my daddy ....*

A Ghanaian female student believes that there is an absence of student voice and democratisation processes. She explains that if students fail, that is, if they break the commercialised learning contract, they have to leave, with no second chances of support intervention:

*They don't listen to students ... no matter not even when they do a petition ...I heard that 32 students were withdrawn from the school because they*

*didn't perform well. And it is true that if they don't learn, if they don't perform, they have to be sacked, ok*

The locus of blame and responsibility shifts from the individual who carries the aspirations and resources of whole families to institutional failure:

*They didn't learn... they are wasting their time. They are wasting the parents' money. They are maybe people who are the hope of some families and so on and so on. They are not serious. But it is not totally their fault. The school has part of the responsibility.*

In both countries students expressed concerns about whether the quality was comparable between public and private universities. A female Tanzanian student describes her doubts:

*Actually what came into my mind, was, this is a private University will they really meet the standards required a University. When I spoke to my husband, he told me No, you can't go to a private University. We actually had an argument; I told him, just give me a chance. Let me give it a try because I have failed to get a vacancy at UDSM. Let me try it maybe for a year and see.*

If rates of participation for women are higher in private, rather than public higher education, and there is a common perception that the former is of lower standard than the latter, this poses questions about core and periphery provision. Socially

disadvantaged groups could be getting diverted into lower status, peripheral higher education, with private higher education reinforcing stratification of the sector and social differentiation. In this analysis, widening participation in higher education can be conceptualised as a process of diversion, *i.e.* a re-routing of members of socially disadvantaged groups into to lower-status institutions in order to reserve the higher-status universities for the elite (David, 2007). ‘*Buying* an education becomes a substitute for *getting* an education’ (Kenway *et al.*, 1993: 116).

### **Researching Widening Participation in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing Equity Scorecards**

Widening participation research in high-income countries has tended to focus on barriers and enablers- often in a highly dichotomised way. Taxonomies of the educational barriers have been identified to explain the low participation rates of ‘non-traditional students’ that identify material and aspirational poverty, lack of family support and cultural capital, low employment prospects and inadequate schooling as the causes of under-representation of lower socio-economic groups (Allen, 1971; Gordon, 1981). Thomas (2001) identifies four categories of barriers: features of the compulsory and post-compulsory education systems; economic factors, particularly the impact of the labour market and of unemployment; the influence of social and cultural factors; and finally, the notion that individual “deficits” are to blame for non-participation. She argues that these four categories interact to limit participation. These theories have yet to be tested in the developing world.

Barriers to access are complex and dynamic (Ferrier & Heagney, 2000). The modalities of barriers and explanations of causation vary according to different theoretical approaches. For example, functionalists located the barriers to university participation in the value orientations of particular social classes. Neo-Marxists focused on the correspondence between the structure of higher education and the prerequisites of capitalism. The new sociology of education examined the relationship between class background, university participation and social reproduction. Gorard and Smith (2006) are highly critical of the quality of most research on widening participation. They berate it as ‘pseudo-research, poor quality reporting of research, deficiencies in datasets, analytical errors, a lack of suitable comparators, obfuscation, a lack of scepticism in general, and the regular misattribution of causal links in particular’ (p. 575). Cognizant of the many traps involved in widening participation research, we have attempted to balance a culture of evidence with opportunities for the multivocality of interviews. Our overarching aims are to build theory about socio-cultural aspects of higher education in low-income countries, to expand the research capacity in the countries concerned, and to provide new knowledge and literature that could contribute to making African higher education more socially inclusive.

Kettley (2007) suggests that 3 strands of widening participation research emerged last century: the desire to extend citizenship rights, the quantitative monitoring of participation rates and the qualitative exploration of student lifestyles. We wish to suggest that, in Africa, research attention has largely been paid to quantitative participation rates. Hence, this is a mixed method, comparative study that utilises an action research and capacity-building approach to research in low-income countries. Central to the inquiry are Equity Scorecards (Bensimon, 2004).

Based on a culture of evidence, Equity Scorecards are being developed by this project. Measurement relates to three sociological variables: gender, socio-economic status and age; three educational processes: access, retention and achievement; four organisations (two public and two private universities) and four programmes of study in each university. Below are some examples of how datasets have been transformed into Equity Scorecards for the University of Cape Coast in Ghana.

**University of Cape Coast Equity Scorecard 1: Rates of participation on the four programmes; for different social groups**

	<b>% of all students who are women</b>	<b>% of all students who attended a deprived school</b>	<b>% of all students who are women and who attended a deprived school</b>
BSc Physical Science	15.3	2.2	0.6
B Commerce	28.8	3.3	1.0
B Education (Primary Education)	41.2	4.6	1.2
Business and Management Studies (BMS)	42	2.8	1.4

*Datasources:* i) Students from deprived schools enrolled on four selected programmes in 2006/7, by programme, level and gender; Data Processing Unit, University of Cape Coast. ii) Total number of

students enrolled on four selected programmes in 2006/7, by programme and gender; Data Processing Unit, University of Cape Coast

As this Scorecard indicates, women, in general, have a low participation rate in the sciences, and this rate decreases for women from deprived schools.

**Equity Scorecard 2: Rates of participation for women; all students, and deprived students on the four programmes**

	<b>% of all students who are women</b>	<b>% of deprived students who are women</b>
BSc Physical Science	15.3	29.4
B Commerce	28.8	32.6
B Education (Primary)	41.2	25.0
BMS	42	50.0

*\*\* Note: the numbers of deprived women in science are very small.*

This Scorecard reveals that rates of participation for women are different for the student body as a whole, compared to the community of students from deprived schools. Women make up 31 percent of the undergraduate population at the University of Cape Coast (UCC, 2006). This Equity Scorecard reveals that, compared to the university as a whole, women are over-represented in Education and Business Management Studies. Thirty-five percent of students from deprived schools on these programmes are women. Amongst students from deprived schools, participation by women in Science and Management is increased, but their participation in Education is lowered.

**Equity Scorecard 3: Rates of participation for deprived students; for all students, and for women, on the four programmes**

	<b>% of all students who are from deprived schools</b>	<b>% of women who are from deprived schools</b>
BSc. Physical Science	2.2	4.2
B Commerce	3.3	3.8
B Education (Primary)	4.6	2.8
BMS	2.8	3.3

The University of Cape Coast has established a quota of 5 percent to encourage admission of students from deprived schools. This Scorecard reveals that this quota is only close to being met for students enrolled on the BEd (Primary), and women enrolled on the BSc Physical Science. The evidence suggests that widening participation strategies, such as the quota system, and pre-sessional programmes for entry to Science programmes may be working to facilitate men’s entry to Education, and women’s entry to Science. However, the strategies do not appear to be having the same level of success in gaining entry to subjects such as Commerce and Management Studies.

**Equity Scorecard 4: Equity Indices**

	<b>Gender Index</b>	<b>SES Index</b>
BSC Physical Science	0.5	0.4
BComm	0.9	0.7
B Ed Primary	1.3	0.9

BMS	1.4	0.6
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The indexes calculated in this Scorecard compare the representation of women, and of students from deprived schools on the selected programmes, with their participation in the university as a whole.

Women, while still being in the minority, are ‘concentrated’ in BMS and B Ed Primary, and underrepresented in Science. One interpretation is that academic disciplines continue to be linked to gender and to socio-economic backgrounds (Walkerdine, 2001). Although globally Education is the second most popular field of study, only eight to 20 percent of graduates in higher income countries are in Education (UNESCO, 2006). In many low-income countries, the discipline of Education accounts for a greater share of the nation’s small number of graduates. For example, in Sierra Leone, over 60 percent of graduates in higher education studied in the field of Education (UNESCO, 2006:17). Wealthier countries tend to have lower shares of graduates in social sciences, and a larger share in health and science fields. The proportion of graduates in science is sometimes three times higher in ‘developed’ countries (with the exception of the USA) than in ‘developing countries’ (UNESCO, 2006). This suggests that disciplinary engagement is also regionalised and highly influenced by wealth.

Globally, women students are concentrated in non-science subjects. There is still a sense of gender appropriate disciplines in many high and low-income countries, with worldwide concern about the under-representation of women in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects. In many countries, two-

thirds to three-quarters of graduates in the fields of Health, Welfare and Education are women (UNESCO, 2006). Thus, women continue to be concentrated in subjects associated with low-wage sectors of the economy, in particular Health and Welfare, Humanities, Arts and Education (OECD, 2007). Men predominate in subjects related to Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, and Maths and Computer Science (OECD, 2007). However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, and some parts of East and South Asia, where enrolment rates of women are lower than for men, men also dominate Health, Welfare and Education (UNESCO, 2006:19).

### **Preliminary Conclusions**

The findings so far from our study suggest that opportunity structures in Ghana and Tanzania appear to reflect social inequalities, despite 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; 32 percent of students in Ghana, and 29 percent in Tanzania, are women (compared to 21% in Ghana and 17% in Tanzania in 1991). The market also seems to have played a part in widening participation for women as there is now a participation rate of 40% in private higher education (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). However, it is still unclear if gender equality gains are including women from lower socio-economic groups or older age groups. Whether this is social inclusion, stratification, opportunity or exploitation is open to debate.

Shavit *et al.* (2007) and David (2007) pose questions about the relationships between expansion and differentiation and between diversion and inclusion. This 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. The most striking finding so far in our research is that students' socio-economic background is still strongly correlated with the school they attended. In a socially deterministic way, this influences access to higher education, the type of programmes enrolled on and the age for participation. Social stratification is strongly related to educational opportunities, processes and systems. 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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