

Running head: CAPABILITIES, EMPOWERMENT, AND GIRLS' EDUCATION

DOI: [10.1080/18146627.2015.1036577](https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2015.1036577)

**Post-primary education, employment, and capabilities: Insights from
young women in rural Uganda**

Shelley K. Jones

Aga Khan University-Institute for Educational Development, East Africa

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Email: shelley.jones@aku.edu

Abstract

Presumptions prevail about the relationship between girls' education and their enhanced well-being as women. However, few in-depth, longitudinal, qualitative studies explore the nature of that relationship and how girls' capabilities may be expanded as a result of education, and how those capabilities may impact girls' future opportunities, freedoms, and life situations (Unterhalter, North, Arnot, Lloyd, Moletsane, Murphy-Graham, Parkes and Saito 2014). This paper presents findings from the third stage of a longitudinal, qualitative study involving nine female participants from a class cohort in a secondary school in rural Uganda. Since 2004-05, this study has tracked the progress of these young women's lives, and the present aspect of the study explores the ways in which they have found that post-primary education has impacted their adult lives, particularly with respect to employment-related factors. I draw upon the conceptual construct of Amartya Sen's *capabilities approach* (1999) to interpret and present data. Findings considered in this paper indicate that post-primary education has been crucial to the capabilities development and socioeconomic well-being of the participants' lives.

Keywords: capabilities, empowerment, post-primary school, gender, Uganda

Introduction

Assertions that education for girls will lead to their empowerment as women (Bokova, 2014) as well as their ability to transform and enhance the well-being of their families, communities and societies at large feature prominently in current global development discourse (UNESCOPRESS, 2011). Although few would contest this claim, more needs to be known – especially through longitudinal studies (Unterhalter, North, Arnot, Lloyd, Moletsane, Murphy-Graham, Parkes and Saito 2014) - about how women themselves perceive the opportunities and benefits that education, particularly post-primary education, has afforded them. This paper reports on the third stage of a longitudinal study involving nine young women in rural Uganda who reflect upon the ways in which they believe their post-primary education provided them with opportunities to effect change in their lives as well as the lives of others.

I acknowledge that school experiences are not unproblematic, and although education can be beneficial and empowering, it can also exacerbate gender injustice and contribute to the stifling of girls' agency, opportunities, and self-esteem (Chisamya, DeJaeghere, Kendall & Khan, 2011; Dunne, Humphries, and Leach, 2003, 2007; Mirembe and Davies, 2001; Unterhalter, 2003). Certainly, the participants in this study faced such school-related challenges, including sexual harassment and abuse, negative teachers' attitudes about their abilities (Jones, 2007; 2008, 2011). And, there were many other factors - such as lack educational resources, abusive educational environments, underqualified teachers, inadequate facilities, lack of access to medical care, lack of sanitary materials, and onerous domestic demands -

that compromised the quality of their education and their educational opportunities. However, for the purposes of this paper, I do not factor in the nature or quality of the education the participants received because my investigation is focused on how young women have been able to use even a poor-quality post-primary education for transformative life changes. Their insights and experiences can inform educational policies and interventions that can respond to girls' needs and potential and improve the quality and relevance of their education.

Theoretical Perspective: The Capabilities Approach

Amartya Sen's (1999) capabilities approach provides a useful lens through which to consider *how* education serves to impact girls and women's opportunities and well-being, as well as ways in which education can be improved to further enhance their well-being (Kabeer, 2005; Nussbaum, 2003; Robeyns, 2003; Rose and Subrahmanian, 2005; Saito, 2003; Unterhalter, 2003, 2005a, b, c). Sen (1999) defines capabilities as '...the freedom to achieve various lifestyles' (p. 75), and they are intrinsically linked to functionings, freedoms, and agency. Functionings are defined as 'what a person is able to do or be' (Sen, 2005, p. 153), and capabilities are opportunities to achieve combination of functionings that the individual herself values and desires for her life (Sen, 1999; 2005).

Key to the capabilities approach is freedom and opportunities to *choose* to 'be' or 'do' in ways that one values. Sen (1985, 1999) distinguished between *well-being freedoms* and *agency freedoms*. Well-being freedom is a more passive result of having various combinations of functions converge in order to produce a state of well-being. Agency freedom, on the other hand, 'refers to what the person is free to

do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important' (Sen, 1985, p. 203). Sen (1999) argued that women's agency is critical to their achieving gender equality and justice, as well as the ability to lead the kinds of lives they have reason to value. Education is understood as a means - perhaps the most important means - through which girls may access opportunities to achieve valuable and significant functionings that enable them to expand their capabilities and become empowered, active, and full members of their societies (Nussbaum, 2003; Robeyns, 2003; Unterhalter, 2005a, b).

Well-being is not evaluated merely by what one *has* or *is* but the freedoms and opportunities that one experiences in reaching that state, engaging in that activity. Nonetheless, resources (e.g., income and property) do constitute important aspects of well-being. Consideration of contextual factors - both intrinsic and extrinsic - that shape the lives of individual girls/women promotes a more complex and holistic understanding of, on the one hand, their specific needs, obligations, desires, hopes and challenges, and on the other hand, of how the intersections between individuals and family, community and the larger society impact their opportunities, freedoms and agency (Robeyns, 2003).

The capabilities approach is generally understood as a *framework* rather than a comprehensive theory, and thus lacks an articulation of concrete capabilities that can be observed and assessed (Robeyns, 2003). However, Nussbaum (2003) and Robeyns, (2003) developed lists of capabilities that offer ways in which to operationalize the framework. Nussbaum (2003) '...attempt[ed] to justify a list of ten capabilities as central requirements of a life with dignity' (p. 40), linked to

human rights for which the government should be held accountable for upholding. Robeyns (2003), on the other hand, argued that Nussbaum's list is overly prescriptive and universalistic and instead proposed a 'list of capabilities at the ideal level' (p. 71)—which is used to inform the discussion in this paper— but which would then be subject to revisions in response to contextual and pragmatic considerations and limitations.¹

Sen resisted listing capabilities; his preference was to leave the identification and discussion open and responsive to public discussion (2005). The full debate around listing capabilities extends far beyond the scope of this paper, but despite differences in their ideological foundations, there is sufficient overlap between Nussbaum and Robeyns' lists to draw upon them both consider ways in which education has supported the development of the participants' capabilities that have contributed to the participant's well-being, namely, *Emotions*, *Practical Reason*, and *Affiliations* (Nussbaum, 2003), and *Bodily Integrity and Safety*, *Social Relations*, *Education and Knowledge*, *Domestic Work and Non-market Care*, *Paid Work and Other Projects*, *Shelter and Environment*, *Mobility*, *Time-autonomy*, and *Respect* (Robeyns, 2003).

Overview of longitudinal study and research participants

¹ It must be noted here that Robeyn's (2003) list was conceived with 'gender inequality in post-industrialised Western societies' in mind and, therefore, by drawing upon this list to consider gender-based capabilities in the Global South, I am working with it in a context other than that for which it was intended. However, I believe that the general capabilities Robeyns has identified are themselves pertinent and applicable to my study, even if the particulars of those capabilities may be context-specific.)

This paper represents the third stage of a longitudinal case study (2004 – present) involving a group of young women who attended a secondary school together in rural Uganda. The 15 girls who participated in the initial stage of the study, who were then 15-18 years old, are now in their mid to late twenties; nine participants remain involved in the study.

Stage 1

The first stage of the study (August 2004 – August 2005) investigated challenges and opportunities related to secondary schooling for 20 girls in their second semester of Senior 3 class (the equivalent of Grade 10) at Kyato Secondary School², a junior-level secondary school located in Kyato Village, Masaka District, southwestern Uganda (Jones, 2008). During the course of the year, for a variety of reasons (e.g., relocation, withdrawal for family reasons, and the taking up of employment) the number of girls in the class, and in my study, decreased to 15; these 15 girls transitioned from Senior 3 to Senior 4 (the final year of lower secondary) in January 2005. These girls belonged to one of the first cohorts of children who attended school under the Universal Primary Education (UPE) initiative instituted in Uganda in 1997. They then continued on to secondary school, which at that point was still fee-based. (Universal Secondary Education was implemented two years later, in 2006).

Stage 2

Upon completion of Senior 4, 12 girls continued with secondary education: seven pursued academic (A-Level) programs, and five pursued vocational training

² Pseudonyms are used for the school name, location, and all participants in the research to ensure their anonymity.

(tailoring, secretarial and hairdressing programmes). Three did not pursue further education. The 12 girls who continued with their education participated in the second stage of this study that investigated the ways in which engagement with ICT could promote access to important health information, improved literacy and English language competencies, as well as independent learning.

Stage 3

Over time, three of the 12 participants in Stage 2 moved away from the Kyato Village area and did not remain in contact with the remaining nine. Thus, the number of young women remaining in this study was nine. This purpose of this stage of the study was to explore the ways in which these young women believed post-primary education had shaped their adult lives.

Research context

Kyato Village was representative of many rural communities in Uganda. Poverty was extreme, and most families survived by subsistence-level farming and raising a small number of livestock. Incomes were sometimes supplemented through men's employment (for example, as labourers or in other occupations, such as tailoring or driving taxis), the sale of crafts such as mats and baskets made by women and girls, or the sale of extra food grown in the family gardens. Although some women were employed or self-employed, most were not. The Gross National Income per capita of Uganda for 2011 was \$549/yr., or approximately \$1.50/day (UNData, 2014). There was no running water (except for those very few who could afford to pay for it), and no power, except for that generated by solar panels at the Kyato Community Library (or available to the few households that could afford their

own solar panels). Malnutrition, disease, and poor living conditions were widespread, and this was one of the areas in the world hardest hit by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

There were distinct gender roles, responsibilities, and expectations in Kyato Village and the surrounding area. Women attended to most of the domestic work and farming and men typically sought income-earning opportunities (e.g., making bricks, digging, building houses, driving taxis and boda-bodas, and clearing land) that were not available to women. Women and children, particularly girls, spent hours every day collecting water and firewood, preparing meals, washing clothes and dishes, cleaning the compound, and tending to younger children, as well as the sick and elderly in the extended families and communities. There were many female-headed households due to unions with polygamous men (who spent time between various homes), male spouses who had employment elsewhere (e.g., in urban centres), widowhood, or divorce (although divorce was rare).

Participants

The young women in this study came from families representative of this area. Six of the nine young women came from primarily female-headed households, five had polygamous fathers, and each of the girls had been affected personally by HIV/AIDS (e.g., by the deaths of their siblings, parents, relatives and/or friends), and all came from families that were reliant upon subsistence-level farming, for which their mothers were primarily responsible. Only 13% of girls and boys in rural Uganda attended secondary school at this time (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2006).

The nine participants now live in different homes and locations than they did during Stage 1 of this study, although they all still live close (within about 15 kilometres) to Kyato Village, where they attended primary and junior secondary school, and where most of their parents and siblings reside.

Methodological approaches

The stages of this longitudinal study have consistently employed a critical, feminist, postmodernist ethnographic methodology (Lal, 1996; Lather, 1991; Mama, 2001; Naples, 2003; Visvanathan, Duggan, Nisonoff, & Wiegersman, 1997; Wolf, 1996). I have sought to make contribute to a global dialogue on education as a means of girls and women's empowerment and freedom by drawing on the concepts of the *global feminist discourse community* (Jaggar, 1998), and *feminist ethical realism* (Hutchings, 2000), that acknowledge the enormous diversity of girls and womens' experiences and challenges and foreground their voices build global momentum to effect wide-sweeping, transformative change that will achieve gender equality and social justice. In this spirit, my work i) situates the participants lives' within the social, economic, temporal/historical, and political contexts in which they live; ii) brings the participants' own voices to the fore on the issues under consideration; iii) holds myself, as a researcher, accountable for being self-reflexive (i.e., aware of my personal biases, interpretations, and positionality) throughout every stage of the research and dissemination processes, and; iv) ensures that I responsibly, effectively, sensitively and respectfully represent the participants' experiences through theoretical perspectives that I have selected.

I have used mixed methods to consider multiple facets of the participants' lives as well as the complexities of the research context in order to gain deep understanding and provide 'rich description' (Geertz, 1973) of the broad social context, as well as the unique and particular aspects of the participants' lives. My research assistant, D.A., has been involved with this longitudinal study since its inception, and has provided invaluable assistance in the organising of data collection schedules and translation, as well as in facilitating communication (often international) with participants. D.A. is a permanent resident of the village, and is the head librarian at Kyato Community Library.

For this stage of the study, participants completed a questionnaire (Q), and participated in a focus group discussion (FGD) via Skype, and semi-structured, one-to-one interviews with me, also via Skype. In addition, the participants provided written responses to a list of questions that I had sent to D.A. and that were meant to prepare the participants for the focus group discussion and interviews; this inadvertent data set (identified in the paper as (LQ)) contributed some immensely valuable insights and information. The questionnaires, focus group discussion, responses to the LQ, and interviews were completed in Kyato Village in March and April 2011.

Data analysis

I have used a triangulation design analysis approach (Cresswell, 2008) to interpret data. The analysis process was highly iterative (Grbich, 2013); I processed the data as I received them, and worked back and forth across the data sets to

confirm or question themes, and explore them in greater detail. I grouped quantitative findings from closed-ended questions on the questionnaire and LQ (related to, for example, employment, marital status, and material well-being). I then developed codes for emergent themes that arose from the open-ended questions. I coded qualitative responses from interviews and focus group discussions pertaining to pre-determined categories responding to Nussbaum's (2003) and Robeyns' (2003) lists of capabilities, and I developed new codes to account for emergent themes (e.g., the challenges participants faced to meet the financial needs of extended family and that accompanied their ability to earn an income).

Findings and discussion

Capabilities related and linked to employment wove through numerous aspects of the participants' lives. Two of the participants were teachers, two had administrative roles in schools (secretary and bursar), three were employed by a local company that manufactured reusable cloth sanitary pads (one worked as a tailoring assistant, one as a supervisor, and one a seamstress, and one as a general manager), and one had her own small business in the local trading centre.

Significantly, only 3% of all working women in Uganda are employed in professional, technical, or managerial positions, and most of these women live in urban centres; the vast majority work in the areas of agriculture, service, or unskilled manual labour (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The young women in this study were, therefore, atypical with respect to the nature of their employment. All participants attributed their ability to be employed to their post-primary

education. They believed that it had afforded them the various functionings - skills, knowledge, and qualifications - necessary for their positions.

Both Nussbaum (2003) and Robeyns (2003) acknowledge the importance of work in terms of capabilities. Nussbaum's capability, *Control over one's environment*, states, 'In work, being able to work as a human being exercising practical reason, and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers' (p. 42). Robeyns' (2003) capability, *Paid work and other projects*, identifies '...being able to work in the labor market or to undertake projects...' (p. 72) as important to one's life. Thus, employment is/can be/should be a meaningful and important engagement with other individuals as well as the larger society/labour market.

Most participants expressed a sense of personal satisfaction and fulfilment with respect to their jobs. During Tracy's interview (who worked as a supervisor in the sanitary pads cottage industry), when asked what she liked best about her life at the moment, she exclaimed, '...it's my job. I like it so much!' because, '[t]he management is good. We're all respect at the job.' Yudaya and Gloria echoed this sentiment during their interviews. When asked, *Do you like your job?*, six of the eight participants who had jobs indicated that they liked their jobs 'very much.' These responses reflect Nussbaum's (2003) capabilities of *Emotions* in which one is '...able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves' (p. 41), and *Affiliation* where one has '...social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others' (p. 41), and Robeyns' capabilities of *Social Relations* where one is '...able to be part of social

networks and to give and receive social support' (p. 72), *Paid Work and Other Projects* which enables one to '...work in the labor market or to undertake projects...' (p. 72), and *Respect*, '...being able to be respected and treated with dignity' (p. 72).

Employment (income-earning functionings) enabled the participants to exercise agency and actively engage with the economy in ways that significantly increased their well-being and quality of life. Yudaya stated that she had 'bought a bed, tables and some clothes' and was 'renting a house, opened an account, I have a bed and my own requirements that came from my hands'. Tracy had purchased 'a small bed and a stool, clothes'. Penina had used her money to establish a small pig farm, Shakila was able to rent her own flat, Jenenie had 'save[d] money for higher education' and 'purchased a mattress, cement, house necessities, sheets too as my home look nice', and Gloria had purchased land for farming. Engagement with the economy, and the ability to purchase goods to improve their standards of living, is an aspect of Nussbaum's (2003) capability *Control Over One's Environment*, which enables one to '...hold property (both land and movable goods) and having property rights on an equal basis with others' (p. 42), and is in accordance with Robeyns' (2003) capability *Shelter and Environment*, which acknowledges the opportunity to 'be sheltered and live in a safe and pleasant environment' (p. 72).

In addition, some participants had experienced the capability of *Mobility* (Robeyns, 2003), through which they were able to exercise agency in terms of their living situations. Penina, for example, discussed in her interview her enjoyment of being able to afford to move to a town and share an apartment with a friend:

Penina: I live in [C-Town].

Author: So do you have your own place?

Penina: No...I share with my friend...

Author: ...Do you like that?

Penina: Yes, I like it so much because she is my friend and I like to see her!

Collegial relationships were also an important aspect of the capability of social relations for the eight participants who were employed, which resonates with an aspect of Nussbaum's (2003) capability, *Control Over One's Environment*: 'In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason, and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers' (p. 42). Gloria wrote in response to the question, *What are some things you like the most about your life right now?*: '...new friends like S and P [her employers].' Tracy wrote about why she liked her job: 'The management is good. We're all respect[ed] at the job.' The ability to engage effectively in the larger world was highly valued by the participants, and some of the young women highlighted how post-primary education had facilitated their capacity to engage in meaningful dialogue and interactions with a wider community. In response to the question, 'What are some of the most important changes in your life over the past five or six years?', Penina replied, '...I have met my new friends, we have exchanged ideas...I have managed to exchange ideas in current issues.' Tracy emphasized the ability to engage in a global community: 'At my job, the employers are Bazungus [white people], due to my education, am able to talk to them in English'.

In addition to personal satisfaction gained from good social relations, these interactions - particularly with other women - are important for personal growth as

well as for societal change. As Stromquist (1993) argued:

When women talk to other women about their personal experiences, they validate it and construct a new reality. When women describe their own experiences, they discover their role as agents in their own world and also start establishing connection between their micro realities and macrosocial contexts. (p. 18)

Although it is not possible to make a causal link between post-primary education and the capability of social relations, it is reasonable so suggest that given the participants' own views of how their lives juxtaposed with the lives of young women their age who had not received post-primary education, their capability of social relations was greatly enhanced by post-primary education. Tracy wrote (LQ):

Young women of my age [who did not receive post-primary education] are suffering so much. Some women got married, with at least 5 children, with no home to live in, no support...Women who [were] normal are living as mad people. They move in dirty clothes, no shoes...but what she appears isn't what is in her mind. This is because of the situation. Some young women got married and they're now left in their houses lonely.

There is evidence from the participants' abilities to make new friendships, to participate in enjoyable activities with others, to engage in meaningful and thoughtful discussions/interactions with others that they had experienced a considerable amount of agency freedom as well as well-being freedom with respect to social relations. These interactions reflect the important capabilities of 'Senses, Imagination, and Thought' and 'Practical Reason' (Nussbaum, 2003), as well as

'Mental Well-being' and 'Education and Knowledge' (Robeyns, 2003). According to Stromquist (1993), 'a prerequisite to empowerment...necessitates stepping outside the home and participating in some form of collective undertaking that can be successful, thus developing a sense of independence and competence among...women' (p. 16).

All eight participants who were employed also contributed to the increased well-being of others by financially supporting their parents and/or siblings in various ways. Penina, for example, explained how she had supported her younger brother through secondary school and hoped to help him attend university:

Author: What are some of the things that you have done in your life that you are most proud of?

Penina: The first one is that I have managed to educate...the school fees for my younger brother and now he is in Senior 6...

Author: ...why are you proud of helping your brother?

Penina: I am proud of helping my brother because he is clever...I will be able to provide how we move. I will push him to go to university if God wishes.

The ability to help family members was another way that the participants experienced agency freedom:

- 'When I get money, used to help my mother through giving her some basic needs and also I used to take care when they are sick' (Gelly)
- 'For me I am supporting my parents through providing basic needs like sugar, soap, salt, paraffin etc.' (Gloria)

- 'I provide them [parents and siblings] with some basic needs, e.g. sugar, salts, paraffin, clothes, etc.' (Ireen)
- 'During holidays I support my mother in farming and taking care of the animals at home' (Shakila)
- 'I helping my parents, in case they need some money for like, farming or if someone is sick' (Yudaya)
- 'I support them by giving a little I get from job and they buy school needs' (Yudaya)
- 'I support my parents by paying school fees of my brothers, buying some necessities and also rehabilitating our home' (Jenie)

Nussbaum (2003) and Robeyns (2003) both consider the ability to care for others as a capability. Nussbaum's (2003) capability, *Affiliation*, reads: 'Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction...' (p. 41). Robeyns' (2003) identified capability, *Social Relations*, states, 'being able to be part of social networks and to give and receive social support' (p. 72), and her seventh, *Domestic Work and Nonmarket Care*, states, 'being able to raise children and to take care of others' (p. 72). Quite clearly, the participants felt they were able to 'live toward' as well as 'take care of' others, and this was something of which they were proud.

However, taking care of others entailed a significant financial burden on the participants. As Gelly stated, 'Now I have more responsibilities because I have to take care of my family but the income is not enough'. Six out of the eight participants with jobs were dissatisfied with their wages (ranging from 50,000 Ugandan

shillings/\$20 US per month to 250,000 Ugandan Shillings/\$100 US per month). In their opinion (as indicated in the questionnaire), salaries ranging from two to six times more than they were currently earning would be fair. Thus, although their ability to contribute meaningfully and practically to the well-being of family members was also a source of immense pride for the participants, this capability was limited by low incomes, and increased their burden of responsibility.

Not all participants were equally enthusiastic about their jobs, notably the two teachers, Shakila and Jenenie, who responded 'not very much' (Shakila), and the other, 'it's ok' (Jenie) to the interview question, *Do you like your job?*. These two teachers felt that they were overworked and that this negatively impacted their enjoyment of life and their personal relationships. Responses to the question, *Do you think having a job has or will impact romantic relationships and/or marriage for you?* are:

- 'Much time is wasted at school because you work for 12 hours.'
(Jenie)
- 'We overwork and we don't get enough time for husband.' (Shakila)

From Jenenie and Shakila's perspective the capability of employment also involved a capability deprivation of *Time-autonomy* 'being able to exercise autonomy in allocating one's time' (Robeyns, 2003, p. 72)

Lack of respect and harassment in the workplace were other negative issues that associated with employment. Penina, for example, experienced unwanted sexual attention and/or stalking and a feeling of being unsafe and vulnerable in the workplace: 'The problem is my boss he abuse me', and young men 'meet me in

different corner in the office and other working place.' And, Gloria relayed, 'some managers don't respect us'. Penina and Gloria's negative experiences related to employment reflect deprivations of Nussbaum's (2003) capabilities *Bodily Integrity* - 'being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault...' (p. 41) and *Affiliation* '...being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others' (p. 41), and Robeyns' (2003) capability of *Respect* - 'being able to be respected and treated with dignity' (p. 72).

Thus, there existed limitations to employment-related capabilities. On the one hand, the participants were able to earn incomes they would not have been available to them if they had not received post-primary education, but on the other hand, long working hours, low wages, and workplace harassment were constraints or unfreedoms to their employment capabilities. It can be argued that although well-being freedom related to earning an income was evident, agency freedom in varying capacities and degrees for the participants was much more limited. These capabilities limitations and deprivations reflect systemic unfreedoms that must be confronted and eradicated. As Kabeer (2013) argues: 'it is very clear that for poor and marginalized groups...it will be the strengthening of their collective capabilities through processes which emphasize the shared and structural nature of injustice that will serve to politicize the capabilities agenda' (p. 6)

Conclusion and implications

The participants in this study attributed to their very basic post-primary school education the acquisition of functionings (skills, abilities, knowledge

acquisition) that enabled them to expand their capabilities and improve their overall well-being. However, despite the tremendous gains made by these young women, there remain numerous, systemic unfreedoms that impinge their agency and, therefore, many of their gains with respect to agency and well-being are fragile. Extant unfreedoms - such as low wages, excessive working hours, harassment in the workplace, increased responsibilities (especially financial) towards others - are indicative of societal constraints that must be addressed to enable women to maximise their capabilities.

Also, it must be kept in mind that the gains made by these young women were made *in spite of* the poor quality of their education, because, as stated earlier, this paper is not claiming that the quality or content of the education the participants received was necessarily conducive to the development of their capabilities. Nonetheless, these young women were somehow able to exercise agency to harness those functionings they did manage to achieve through post-primary schooling (e.g., literacy, numeracy, qualifications, a broader knowledge-base). Thus, the findings from this study speak to the participants' own agency as much, or perhaps even more, than the freedoms available to them to achieve certain capabilities.

It is reasonable to argue, therefore, that young women's capabilities could be expanded and deepened tremendously if policies, programmes, and structures took into account and responded to the particular, contextually-relevant needs of adolescent girls. As Unterhalter et al (2014) claim:

There is promising evidence that shows that expanded education

opportunities for girls and women are beginning to challenge some aspects of unequal gender power. However, it is evident that...education cannot independently create empowerment; there needs to be continuous policy commitment (p. 52).

Such policies, programmes, and structures require a forum for the voices of girls to be heard (Unterhalter, 2015). Their knowledge and experiences need to inform agendas that will support the development of their capabilities, their agency, and their empowerment.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge and express my appreciation for partial funding for this research received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSRHC), and the International Development Research Centre of Canada (IDRC). I would also like to thank my colleague, Daniel Ahimbisibwe, for his invaluable support and contributions over the years. As always, my deep, heartfelt gratitude to the strong, generous, wonderful young women who have been enthusiastic participants in this longitudinal research project, willing to share their life stories to help us understand how to provide better educational opportunities for girls.

Notes

1 Pseudonyms are used for the school name, location, and all participants in the research to ensure their anonymity.

2 This study was part of a larger research project concerned with literacy and development in Uganda. Research permission was obtained from the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board.

References

- Aikman, S., and Unterhalter, E. 2005. Introduction. In S. Aikman and E. Unterhalter (eds), *Beyond access: Transforming policy and practice for gender equality in education*, 1-14. Oxford: Oxfam.
- Bokova, I. 2014. Girls' and women's empowerment. United Nations Educational , Scientific, and Cultural Organization. Retrieved Dec. 21, 2014 from

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/who-we-are/director-general/my-priorities/girls-and-womens-empowerment/>

Cresswell, J. W. 2008. *Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.). New Jersey: Pearson.

Chisamya, G., DeJaeghere, J., Kendall, N., and Khan, M.A. 2012. Gender and Education for All: Progress and problems in achieving gender equity. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(6), 743-755. doi: 10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.10.004

Dunne, M. 2007. Gender, sexuality, and schooling: Everyday life in junior secondary schools in Botswana and Ghana. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 27(5), 499-511. doi:[10.1016/j.ijedudev.2006.10.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2006.10.009)

Dunne, M., Humphries, S., and Leach, F. 2003. Gender and violence in schools. Background paper prepared for the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2003/4, Gender and education for all: the leap to equality*. Paris, UNESCO.

Dunne, M., Humphries, S., and Leach, F. 2007. Gender violence in schools in the developing world. *Gender and Education*, 18(1), 75-98.

Geertz, C. 1973. *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Grbich, C. 2013. *Qualitative data analysis: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Hutchings, K., 2000. Towards a feminist international ethics. *Review of International Studies* 26, 111-130.

- Jaggar, A.M., 1998. Globalizing feminist ethics. *Hypatia* 13 (2), 7-31.
- Jones, S. 2011. Girls' secondary education in Uganda: Assessing policy within the Women's Empowerment Framework. *Gender and Education*. 23(1), 385-413.
- Jones, S. K. 2008. Secondary schooling for girls in rural Uganda: Challenges, opportunities, and emerging identities (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada). [Online] Available at: <https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/279?show=full> (accessed March 10, 2011)
- Jones, S. and Norton, B. 2007. On the limits of sexual health literacy: Insights from Ugandan schoolgirls. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 1(4), 285-305.
- Kabeer, N. 2005. Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third Millennium Development Goal. *Gender and Development*, 13(1), 13-24. doi: 10.1080/13552070512331332273
- Kabeer, N. 2013. Rights, capabilities and collective action: the 'missing ingredient' in the MDGs. Paper presented at the *Expert group meeting: Structural and policy constraints in achieving the MDGs for women and girls*. Mexico City, Mexico.
- Lal, J. 1996. Situating locations: the politics of self, identity, and 'Other' in living and writing the text. In D. L. Wolf, ed, *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork* (pp. 185-214). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Lather, P. A. 1991. *Getting smart: feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. New York: Routledge.
- Mama, A. 2001. Challenging subjects: Gender and power in African contexts. *African Sociological Review*, 5 (2), 63-73. doi:10.4314/asr.v5i2.23191

Comment [SKJ1]: This is my own dissertation

- Mirembe, R., and Davies, L. 2001. Is schooling a risk? Gender, power relations, and school culture in Uganda. *Gender and Education*, 13 (4), 401-416.
doi:10.1080/09540250120081751
- Naples, N.A. 2003. *Feminism and method: Ethnography, discourse analysis, and activist research*. Oxon: Psychology Press.
- Nussbaum, M.C. 2003. Women's education: a global challenge. *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society*, 29(2), 325-355. doi: [10.1086/378571](https://doi.org/10.1086/378571)
- Robeyns, I. 2003. Sen's capability approach and gender inequality: Selecting relevant capabilities. *Feminist Economics*, 9(2-3), 61-92. doi: 10.1080/1354570022000078024.
- Rose, P., and Subrahmanian, R. 2005. Evaluation of DFID development assistance: Gender equality and women's empowerment. Phase II Thematic Evaluation: Education. London: Department for International Development.
- Saito, M. 2003. Amartya Sen's capability approach to education: A critical exploration. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 37(1), 17-33. doi: 10.1111/1467-9752.3701002
- Sen, A.K. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Sen, A. 2005. Human rights and capabilities. *Journal of Human Development*, 6(2), 151-166. doi:10.1080/14649880500120491
- Uganda Bureau of Statistics. 2006. *Uganda demographic and health survey*. Kampala, Uganda: AUTHOR. [Online] Available at: <http://www.measuredhs.com/pubs/pdf/FR194/FR194.pdf> (accessed **June 13, 2010**).

UNData. 2014. *Country profile: Uganda*. United Nations Statistics Division.

[Online] Available at:

<http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Uganda#Economic>

(accessed **November 6, 2014**).

UNESCO PRESS. 26.05.2011. UNESCO launches Global Partnership for Girls' and

Women's Education. AUTHOR. Retrieved Nov. 11, 2014 from

[http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/unesco_launches_global_partnership_for_girls_and_womens_education/#.VSJa8N7XHdt)

[view/news/unesco_launches_global_partnership_for_girls_and_womens_education/#.VSJa8N7XHdt](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/media-services/single-view/news/unesco_launches_global_partnership_for_girls_and_womens_education/#.VSJa8N7XHdt)

Unterhalter, E. 2003. The capabilities approach and gendered education: An

examination of South African complexities. *Theory and Research in Education*, 1(1), 7-22. doi:

Unterhalter, E. 2005a. Fragmented frameworks? Researching women, gender,

education, and development. In S. Aikman, and E. Unterhalter, eds. *Beyond access: Transforming policy and practice for gender equality in education*.

Oxford: Oxfam. [Online] Available at:

http://www.ungei.org/resources/files/oxfam_BA_17.pdf#page=21

(accessed **March 9, 2006**)

Unterhalter, E. 2005b. Global inequality, capabilities, social justice: The Millennium

Development Goal for gender equality in education. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 25, 111-122. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2004.11.015

Unterhalter, E., 2005c. Mobilization, meanings and measures: Reflections of girls' education. *Development*, 48(1), 110-114. doi:

10.1057/palgrave.development.1100120

Unterhalter, E., and Deaghere, J. (27 March 2015). Measuring gender equality in education: A challenge for the Sustainable Development agenda. *World Education Blog*. Available at:

<https://efareport.wordpress.com/2015/03/27/measuring-gender-equality-in-education-a-challenge-for-the-sustainable-development-agenda/>

(Accessed March 27, 2015)

Unterhalter, E., North, A., Arnot, M., Lloyd, C., Moletsane, L., Murphy-Graham, E., Parkes, J., and Saito, M. 2014. *Interventions to enhance girls' education and gender equality: Education rigorous literature review*. London: Department for International Development.

Visvanathan, N., Duggan, L., Nisonoff, L., and Wieggersman, N. eds. (1997). *The women, gender and development reader*. London: Zed Books.

Wolf, D. L., ed. (1996) *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press