**Girls claiming education rights: Reflections on distribution, empowerment and gender justice in Northern Tanzania and Northern Nigeria**

***Abstract***

The article considers the analytical connection between two approaches to discussing girls’ schooling and gender justice. One trend considers injustice primarily as a question of inequalities in distribution and raises few questions about the nature of the gender norms associated with inequitable distribution. A second approach looks at issues of empowerment, the ways in which structural gendered inequalities in the political economy and socio-cultural formations constrain the capacity of girls inside and outside school to claim the rights promised by education, but tends to underplay issues of distribution. The article considers what the relationship between these two approaches to gender justice might be though a detailed discussion of baseline data collected in 2008 for the NGO led TEGINT (Transforming education for girls in Nigeria and Tanzania) project. Girls’ identification of the obstacles to claiming education rights and possible solutions are used as proxies for empowerment, while different features of distribution are examined with regard to gender parity in access and progression, governance and management, and teacher qualifications. Quantitative data based on responses to a survey allows for correlation between aspects of distribution and empowerment to be considered across different contexts. The strongest association between empowerment and distribution is found with regard to the levels of teachers’ qualifications, although there is not sufficient data to explain the reasons for this. The conclusion highlights the importance of contextual factors in understanding the relationships between distribution and empowerment evident from the data and the importance of designing future studies to look more closely at the dynamic two way relationship of distributional and empowerment aspects of gender justice in education.

*Keywords:* gender, schooling, capabilities, rights, indicators, Tanzania, Nigeria

***Introduction***

The default position in discussing gender in national and international education policy for many decades has been to consider injustice primarily as a question of inequalities in distribution. This approach implicitly raises few questions about the nature of the gender norms associated with inequitable distribution, and gives little attention to the issue of empowerment. Partly as a critique of this, a literature developed that stressed the significance of examining the ways in which structural gendered inequalities in the political economy and socio-cultural formations constrained the capacity of girls inside and outside school to claim the rights promised by education. This approach, in highlighting inequitable gender norms, often gave insufficient attention to issues of distribution, particularly what girls gained from schooling, despite the persistence of gender inequalities. This article explores the importance of attempting to build an analytical connection between the two approaches, so that the ways in which education rights are claimed and realized, in contexts of uneven achievement of gender equality, is better understood.

The first part surveys some discussion in the literature on gender, distribution, inequality and empowerment drawing out some of the tensions between approaches that stress the importance of access and distribution and those, often concerned with features of empowerment, that downplay this. The second part reports on research conducted for the baseline study for the Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria and Tanzania (TEGINT) project and how this linked with practice. The project attempted to link discussion of distribution with considerations of gender relations and empowerment, but keeping the two in a dynamic relationship was not always an easy matter. The data indicate that simple correlations cannot be made, and point to the need for further work that looks at the form of the relationship between distribution and empowerment.

***An over narrow conception of distribution?***

A feature of education policy discussion at international and national level over more than a decade has been the prominence given to gender in discussions of distribution (Unterhalter, 2007;Dejaeghere, 2012). Gender has been consistently remarked on, while other aspects of social division, such as income, race, ethnicity or location have only relatively recently been noted (Lockheed, 2008; UNESCO, 2010). However, although there is a long history of concern with gender inequalities in schooling, there are many different positions on what is the appropriate space in which to identify those inequalities and how they may be measured. For example, do we see the primary space of inequality as the school, and is the main question concerned with distribution of opportunities for enrolment, progression and attainment for girls, relative to boys in particular population groups? This was the position of one of the first syntheses of analysis in this area in the early 1990s conducted by the World Bank (King & Hill, 1993) Or is the distributional problem not simply one of access, but of what girls and boys have access to, how they engage with schooling, and how they are treated in school and after they complete particular phases of education? This was the position put forward by a range of analysts associated with considering inequality as located ‘beyond access’ (eg. Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005; Maslak, 2008; Fennell & Arnot, 2008). Thus inequalities are not merely associated with resources, but with attitudes, structures, socio-cultural processes, uneven forms of empowerment, capabilities, and outcomes.

These different positions have consequences for the approach to measuring gender inequality and distribution. Gender parity, that is, the measure of the numbers of girls and boys in school, has long been used as a proxy to understand gender equality (UNESCO, 2004). Its usefulness is partly pragmatic, in that these data are routinely collected, but its limits are acknowledged. In recent years, the attention has shifted from access *to* school to quality *in* school (World Bank, 2011; Perlman Robinson, 2011). The distributional question has changed its shape from being one about largely publicly situated questions of education provision – that is how many children states can enroll or progress through different phases of schooling - to one about largely individually located issues of attainment – that is what level of competence in literacy or mathematics or what exam scores particular children achieve and who is to be held accountable for this. Generally the research base for the focus on gender parity and questions of distribution are the monitoring and evaluation systems of governments, based on the administrative records complied by the education officers of government departments (UNESCO, 2011, pp 262; UNICEF, 2012, pp 107). It is noticeable that the focus on parity and distribution assumes either that the school is an equitable institution in which the gender norms of the household or the society can be undone, or that these norms are relatively trivial and can be confronted by, for example, delaying the age of marriage or ensuring girls, who complete school, have access to the labour market. The ways in which marriage relations and labour market access are themselves marked by gender inequalities tends to be largely underplayed.

Critiques of the parity approach come from a number of directions associated with GAD (gender and development), analysis of capabilities and empowerment, and postcolonial theorizing about processes of representation and discourse (Unterhalter, 2005a). While there are different emphases in these approaches all agree that simple distribution of resources is not adequate as a framework for justice. With regard to rights and capabilities some have pointed out how the idea of gender equality is a normative idea about opportunity, dignity, agency and justice and that realizing this in education is not simply about enrolling equal numbers of girls and boys in school (Unterhalter, 2005b; Subrahmanian, 2005; Unterhalter, 2007). GAD analysts have built up a considerable literature using largely qualitative research methods to show how gendered relations in school have resonance with those in the labour market, with patterns of ownership of assets, the distribution of power in the political, cultural, and social sphere, constructions of masculinity, femininity and ideas about bodily integrity, relationships of care and what is depicted as the private space of the family (eg. Aikman, 1999;

Raynor, 2008; Chege and Arnot, 2012). Thus the actions of educated girls always need to be understood in terms of gendered norms that constrain the possibilities for change ( National Research Council, 2005; Mascarenhas, 2007; Maslak, 2008; Ross, Shah and Wang, 2011). Some authors, in bringing together elements of GAD and capabilities analysis highlight how a simple stress on distribution and education provision fails to take account of what is learned and how this learning can be used ( Stromquist, 2002; Unterhalter, 2003; Monkman, 2011; Murphy Graham 2012).

A notable critique is that in monitoring school systems and the provision of opportunities to learn primarily in units of resource, that is how many years of enrolment or what level of attainment, analysts miss aspects of situatedness, collectivity, emotion, and the sense of vulnerability which has been a key component of postcolonial feminist assessments of inequality and experience of education *whether or not there have been achievements*. Thus, a number of African feminist analysts ( Salo and Mama, 2001; Nnaemeka 2003; Mama, 2007) draw attention to the nuance of locale, and the ways in which particular kinds of relationships form and re-form in response to particular conditions. Thus reducing inequalities in access to schooling might happen in conditions of expanding women’s rights to assets, labour market participation, or political participation. However, sometimes girls have rights to and within education, but few economic and social rights in public and private arenas. In some contexts, women have considerable economic power in certain spheres, like trade, but do not participate in schooling. The fine-grain of context is important at both national and local levels. One trend of commentary draws out how engaging with equality entails not only what is learned formally in school, but draws on larger lessons about generosity, tolerance and the effects of suffering, where much wisdom may reside with women and men, who do not necessarily have formal schooling, and where a key element of learning entails engaging with emotion and vulnerability (Nnaemeka, 2003; Abrahams, 2007) In some of this analysis, while much attention is given to the complexity of gendered power and the difficulties of confronting it, relatively little attention is given to the significance of the expansion of education provision, which is sometimes treated as an area of almost deceitful false promises to girls or boys (Youdell, 2006). However, some very nuanced accounts draw out how formal learning in school or higher education can only touch the surface of insight into these connections, which are key to appreciating features of gender justice (Abrahams, 2007; Andreotti, 2011). These accounts, however, do not discount the significance of being in a formal education setting. But, they are concerned at how difficult it is, under current conditions, which overlook many injustices, for schools to engage with addressing these larger values.

A problem for the first group of analysts, who suggest the main problem is the distribution of education opportunities, is that in looking primarily at what Unterhalter (2007, p xii-xiii) has called gender as a noun, that is numbers of girls and boys in school, *gender relations*, aspects of gender identity, and particular representations of this become the background conditions that result in particular patterns of enrolment or attainment. Gender relations and identities and the contexts that produce them are thus displaced as a focus of injustice. As the remit, for example of OECD, UNESCO or UNICEF in assessing education has generally been to compare the stock and flow of education provision, regardless of the content of what is taught or the social context of schooling, it can appear from these studies that there is not a problem of distribution of schooling except for certain groups, for example poor, rural girls, as the UNESCO Global Monitoring Reports highlight (UNESCO 2010, p.5).

However, a problem for the second group of analysts, whether they step off from a GAD approach, an engagement with capabilities, or post colonial theorizing, is that in highlighting the gender inequitable structures in schools and societies and the constraints on empowerment, even for girls and women with experience of education, the significance of increasingly large numbers of girls completing school, making substantial claims on the state, the economy, and social relations may be overlooked. The ways in which these first generation women with education may suggest to their peers and daughters very different kinds of aspirations to those who have not had education may not be adequately documented if we focus only on the reproduction of gender inequality. While the too narrow concept of distribution, strongly influenced by Women in Development (WID) missed many aspects of the ways in which gender inequalities worked normatively and relationally, the highly faceted appreciation of the located setting of gender inequality associated, with GAD, capabilities and postcolonial theorizing may miss the significance of the expansion of education provision. This suggests that the conceptual vocabulary for understanding gender work in education, particularly with regard to ideas of justice and empowerment, needs expanding.

We acknowledge there is considerable debate on the definitions of gender justice and empowerment and their use in relation to education (Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Goetz, 2007; Robeyns, 2010; Monkman, 2011; Unterhalter, 2012a; Unterhalter, 2012b; Aikman and Unterhalter, 2013), but consider that exploration of these issues needs to proceed *both* through abstract theorizing *and* through consideration of particular contexts and issues. In order to engage in this in the next section we look at the relationship between distributional aspects of gender justice, and various facets of empowerment through a discussion of data collected and analysed for a project on girls’ education and empowerment in Tanzania and Nigeria .

***The TEGINT project***

The TEGINT project, which ran between 2007 and 2012, was a partnership between Action Aid, Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP), an NGO based in Nigeria and Maarifa ni Ufunguo, an NGO based in Tanzania. TEGINT was funded by Comic Relief and the Tubney Charitable Trust. Its overall goal was to achieve a transformation in the education of girls in Tanzania and Nigeria, enabling them to enrol and succeed in school by addressing key challenges and obstacles that hinder their participation in education and increase their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS (Wetheridge and Mamedu, 2012; Wetheridge and Kapaya, 2012). A unique feature of Comic Relief’s support for TEGINT was the requirement that there should be a substantial research component linked with project implementation. To effect this researchers in Tanzania, Nigeria and the UK, staff from ActionAid and the two implementing partners designed a number of studies (TEGINT, 2011a; TEGINT, 2011b; Unterhalter and Heslop, 2011; Wetheridge and Mamedu, 2012; Wetheridge and Kapaya, 2012; Unterhalter and Heslop, 2012). The exploration of the relationship between distributional and empowerment approaches to education in this article, draws largely on the baseline studies for TEGINT conducted in 2007-9 in Tanzania and Nigeria.

***Education distribution and empowerment in Tanzania and Nigeria***

In Tanzania and Nigeria much writing on questions of gender and schooling has been framed by the high profile given to these issues in government policy. In both countries concerted efforts have been made to develop policy and roll out provision for expanded access to primary education, and particular attention has been paid to girls. Primary education was made free in 2001 in Tanzania, and since 2000 there has been a spectacular increase in enrolment in primary education, which grew by 50% from 4.4 million in 2000 to 6.6 million in 2003, and reached 8.4 million in 2009 (Pitamber and Hamza, 2005; MoEVT, 2009). Throughout this period national statistics show equal numbers of girls and boys enrolling in primary school, with UNESCO reporting a gender parity index (GPI) of 0.99 for Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in 2007 (UNESCO, 2010: 418). The latest figures for primary NER for the school year ending in 2007 give this at 98% (98 for boys and 97 for girls) (UNESCO, 2010: 347).

In Nigeria, the new Constitution adopted in 1999 with the end of military rule acknowledged the importance of free, compulsory primary education. A wide range of Universal Basic Education (UBE) programmes were designed to ensure free Basic Education for nine years to all Nigerian children, many with an explicit focus on girls. However, translating this aspiration into practice has proved extremely challenging. The latest (2007) assessments for the country indicate a NER for primary school of 64% (68 for boys, 60 for girls and a GPI of 0.88) (UNESCO, 2010: 347).

There are thus clear differences between Tanzania and Nigeria in relation to their capacity to expand school provision, despite policy commitments to free education. However, the aggregate figures for both countries mask regional differences and problems with distribution. In both countries there are particular geographical areas where access to schooling has been more limited and forms of exclusion of girls more marked. TEGINT was set up partly to address this and the project was implemented in northern districts of Tanzania and northern states in Nigeria, where, patterns of gender disparities in access to school had been noted (Nsanjama, 2007).

Academic analysis of gender and schooling in both countries highlights uneven access according to levels of poverty, location and local gender dynamics. In Tanzania this analysis has highlighted the impact of structural adjustment policies on the capacities of families to keep girls in school beyond a basic cycle, despite government promotion of access (Vavrus 2003; 2005; Samoff 2008), changing emphases in and responses to government policy (Mbilinyi, 1998; Bendera, 1999; Wedgewood, 2007), and the different engagements of communities in Northern Tanzania with the education of daughters. For example, the Chagga, who grow cash crops, but have had limited high yield land for women to inherit, have actively sought high levels of education for young women over generations (Stambach, 1998; Hattori and Larsen, 2007). Other groups in this region, many engaged in nomadic pastoralism, withdraw girls from school at or before puberty, sometimes because of the importance of marriage relationships in building up and maintaining herds (Burke and Beegle, 2004; Kloumann, Manongie and Klepp, 2005). Okkolin et al (2010) and Thomas and Rugambwa (2011) show how gender parity, evident in the expansion of provision for primary education, does not translate fully into secondary schooling or support for children with disabilities. They conclude on the need for policy to move from gender sensitization to gender responsiveness taking on board the multiple formations of gender inequality in Tanzanian society.

In 2007 the Tanzania Gender Network published a gender profile of Tanzania (Mascarenhas, 2007) which acknowledged the presence of women in political decision-making and gains in women’s access to economic resources, education and health. However, it highlighted women’s continued insecurities in access to land despite legal reforms. These were often associated with the persistence of customary law and practices which inhibited women’s inheritance rights. A number of socio-cultural practices and inequalities with regard to health and risk of violence meant that much work on gender equality remained to be done. The report identified key areas for gender equality initiatives, such as early marriage, local legal practices entrenching male authority over marriage and land, and female genital mutilation (FGM). It pointed out how these combined with inadequate access to reproductive health and family planning provision, higher levels of HIV infection for women compared to men, and high levels of rape and domestic violence in some areas. A changing political economy in Tanzania and the complexity of regional histories and socio-economic practices mean that realizing policy aspirations for wider education provision and gender equity is a difficult process.

In Nigeria changing policies on education provision in the North have been documented, drawing out the impact and inequalities on boys and girls in school (Moja, 2000; Obasi, 2000; Denga 2000; Dyer, 2001; Usman 2006; Usman 2008; Tuwor and Sossou, 2008). Numerous government reports and academic assessments indicate that despite government policy on expanding education and supporting gender parity in enrolments, these have been difficult to achieve (Egunyomi, 2006; UNICEF, 2007; Akunga and Attfield, 2010). Dauda (2007), reviewing the range of policy initiatives on girls’ education, concluded that while there had been some clear gains in improving access, in general government policy entailed ‘lots of talk and no action’. In addition, a number of commentators highlight how, in spite of the expansion of education, ideas that emphasise women’s subordination have not been confronted (Okome, 2000; Pereira 2002). Much attention has been given to improving access to schooling, but less focus has been placed on gender relations within schools, processes of learning and teaching, and what opportunities girls have beyond school. The extensive gender inequalities which exist in political, economic, social and cultural life make schooling a particularly significant site with the potential for for girls to develop some of the skills, insights and social relations to question these.

Thus the contextual issues regarding gender relations in Tanzania and Nigeria are also somewhat different. In Tanzania much of the institutional distributional framework for equality is in place and key challenges include addressing a range of socio-cultural practices associated with attainment, marriage, sexual harassment, and levels of gender-based violence which are associated both with a thicker notion of distribution and with empowerment. The obstacles girls from the poorest communities face in completing primary school and entering secondary school, and the difficulties teachers encounter in teaching about equality and engaging with boys and girls to contest assumptions about gendered norms and practices talk both to problems of distribution and empowerment. In Nigeria the contextual problems relate to many aspects of distribution, notably putting an institutional framework for equality in place *and at the same time* addressing deeply entrenched politico-economic and socio-cultural attitudes to marriage and control over girls and women. While in Tanzania transforming education for girls is about working with them, boys at school, teachers, parents and communities to engage with largely equitable institutions, in Nigeria it is about working with all these groups to try to establish those institutions equitably. Thus whether concern with the distributional features of gender justice and empowerment run in parallel with each other, or are facets of the same process, seems partly to be a feature of particular histories.

***The TEGINT conceptual framework***

TEGINT has been concerned with the inter-relationship between expanding girls’ access to school, improving their experience of learning and addressing conditions of gender inequality. The baseline studies for the project were located at the intersection of a number of the approaches to distribution and empowerment. It drew from Women in Development (WID), which emphasises numbers of girls and boys enrolling in school, progressing to completion and participating in the labour market and political decision-making (King and Hill, 1993), the Gender and Development (GAD) approach that considers unequal structures of power within schools and societies (Moser, 1993; Kabeer 1999), the work of a number of African scholars documenting the complexity of communities and the politics of knowledge about gender (Nnaemeka, 1993; Mbilinyi, 1998; Beoku Betts, 2008; Arnfred and Adomako, 2010); and, the gender, empowerment and capabilities approach, which looks at the ways in which opportunities can be expanded for girls and boys to secure lives they have reason to value, with a focus on what a person is able to do and to be, opportunities and freedoms to realise this, and concern to address injustice and inequality (Nussbaum, 2000; Agarwal, Humphries, Robeyns, 2005; Unterhalter, 2007).

Each of these broad frameworks pointed to some aspect of the context of shifting gender relations and schooling in Northern Tanzania and Northern Nigeria, but none appeared a ‘best fit’ with the general goal of the project for the transformation of education for girls and its concern with systemic and strategic working. The research team thus drew selectively on each approach. From the WID approach it identified the importance of collecting information on the numbers of girls and boys enrolling, attending, progressing through and completing school, coupled with documentation on school facilities, teacher numbers and their level of training and qualifications. This information was considered valuable in charting trends in particular areas, which would alert the project team to particular local variations and strategies for action. However, it was acknowledged that these distributional aspects could not explain why and how change may be taking place, nor highlight features of empowerment. The GAD approach stresses the significance of gendered power relations inside households with regard to allocations of time, money and esteem, which have particular consequences for how girls’ schooling is negotiated and what happens when girls are pregnant or leave school. It also points to the importance of understanding gendered forces at work in schools and the ways in which the cultures of teaching and learning and the hidden curriculum with regard to status may enforce particular identities of subordination for girls and some boys. The work of many African theorists of gender have urged attention to the complexity of relations within households, schools and communities, and interpreting the complexities of reproductive rights, voice and political mobilization. They point to the significance of studying the connections between communities as much as the divisions. The capabilities or empowerment approach identifies the importance of attending to what particular actors (pupils, teachers, school managers or education officials) say they have reason to value and what they view as significant constraints and possibilities for change. In operationalising the approach and developing indicators of human development a number of writers have pointed to how illuminating the cultivation of particular indicators for ranking levels of human development, gender development and gender empowerment can be (Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 1999; Fukuda Parr and Kumar, 2003). Thus the project built on this work on indicators and also used ideas from GAD and the capabilities approach to engage with communities of parents, teachers and school management committees to discuss a number of gender issues, including division of labour in households, work and attending to girls’ voices. It drew from post-colonial approaches by playing close attention to local context and diversity in interpreting the data gathered.

The TEGINT project team thus developed a conceptual framework at the centre of which we placed the agency, judgment, and actions of girls. The framework reflects the project’s commitment to understanding girls’ voices, reflections and actions, and the ways in which their capabilities are constrained or can expand with the result that they may claim and develop their rights to education and strengthen their capacity to protect themselves against HIV. Thus while giving a central place to empowerment views concerning gender in education, the research analysis also highlighted some significant features of distribution.

The conceptual framework was developed to indicate that the project understood girls as active agents, who think about their lives, articulate their views and act. These girls are engaged in social relations with each other, with boys, parents, teachers, education officials, men and women in their communities, and the project’s implementing partners to bring about change. Each girl is important, and the project acknowledged the networks of social relations in which they live. A range of forces were seen to constrain the opportunities for education and empowerment of girls in both countries. They live in societies that are stratified by gender, class, ethnicity, religion and other social divisions, which have complex histories and dynamics and differ between locales. These intersecting divisions entail forms of discrimination, inequality and poverty although in both countries government have policies that are attempting to address this. Thus girls’ lives are seen as being constrained by a range of forces which ‘press down’ through the exercise of various forms of power, although these do not all act in the same way or have equivalent significance at all times. These forces are gendered forces associated with production and the economy, livelihoods, drought, migration, access to housing, education, family, community, the actions of some Civil Society Organisations (CSOs); cultural forces , such as language, religion, forms of knowledge production, constraints on movement e.g. purdah, household chores; political forces; health issues associated with HIV, access to food, pregnancy. While all these and other forces press down on the girls, the project was concerned to enhance the spaces and opportunities that girls have to articulate views and take action for change, that is engage in strategies and actions for empowerment. In addition it attended to aspects of the distributional question, particularly teachers’ engagement with girls’ learning and how the work of School Management Committees (SMCs) could support girls at school. It can thus be seen that the focus of the project was intended to be on distribution and empowerment. However, the relation between them was not clearly specified in the project aims.

***Local contexts where the project worked***

In Northern Tanzania the TEGINT project operated in 57 schools (47 primary and 10 secondary) in six districts: Arusha, Monduli, Moshi Rural, Hai, Babati and Mbulu. In Northern Nigeria the project worked in 72 schools (36 primary and 36 junior secondary) in eight states: the Federal Capital Territory, Niger, Plateau, Nassarawa, Gombe, Bauchi, Katsina and Kaduna.

Schools were identified for project work by local education officials in each country, and there was considerable diversity in the conditions of school communities. Some schools were located in rural areas, some in peri-urban and some in urban areas. Each district or state also had its own history of school provision, or lack of provision, and economic and political contexts varied. For example around half the population in two districts in Tanzania, Babati and Mbulu, were classified on the basis of information collected for the 2002 census as living below the poverty line (Government of Tanzania, 2005). In these two districts infant mortality was very high. In Mbulu less than a quarter of households had access to piped or protected water. Meanwhile, in three districts, Moshi Rural, Monduli and Hai, about a quarter of the population was estimated as living below the poverty line, and the infant mortality rates were lower than in Babati and Mbulu, although the proportion of children whose mother and/or father had died was similar. Arusha Municipal, closest to the urban centre at Arusha, had only 12% of the population classified as below the poverty line, but infant mortality was high and the proportion of children whose parent(s) had died was higher than in some other districts. Income poverty and relatively high levels of infant mortality are therefore an issue in all the districts. Arusha has the highest levels of adult literacy with good literacy levels for women. In 2005 in Arusha the pupil-teacher ratio was 46:1 and the primary NER was 93% (Government of Tanzania, 2005). Indicators were somewhat similar in Moshi and Hai, where there were also high general literacy levels and very good levels of women’s literacy. This contrasted with Monduli, Babati and Mbulu, where only around two thirds of adults were literate, the proportion of literate women was less than men, and pupil: teacher ratios were 66:1 in Babati , with primary NER 71 % in Mondluli (Government of Tanzania, 2005).

In Nigeria there were also variation between the states in which the project worked. A 2008 study (UNDP, 2008) used the Human Poverty Index (HPI), a composite index to measure the proportion of a state’s population suffering ill health, inadequate education and lack of access to safe water. This indicated that there are very concerning effects of poverty in Katsina, Gombe and Bauchi, which had the highest proportion of people living below the poverty line, whilst Plateau, Nasarawa and Kaduna had smaller proportions of their populations with this level of want. There were large gender gaps in already low levels of adult literacy in all the states in which TEGINT worked (Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, 2006), with only FCT having a somewhat higher women’s literacy rates Although literacy levels were improving, with higher literacy rates amongst young people, a gender gap was evident. Young adult literacy rates reflected historically low levels of school provision and some of their gendered consequences. Whilst in 2006 FCT, Kaduna, Plateau and Nasarawa had more than 80% literacy in young adult men, in no state were there such high proportions of young literate women (Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, 2006). Bauchi and Gombe had the lowest primary enrolment rates for boys and girls and the largest gender gaps. Together with Katsina, these states have the lowest proportion of children completing six years of primary schooling.

***The baseline studies***

The baseline studies (TEGINT 2011a, TEGINT 2011b, Unterhalter and Heslop 2011) set out to investigate aspects of the provision of education in the schools in which the project was to work and how this aligned with what girls said about their schooling, what obstacles they anticipate encountering and how they felt that these could be overcome. They were thus designed to consider a notion of distribution and girls’ views on obstacles and solutions as a proxy for empowerment. The studies comprised surveys undertaken in all the schools (57 in Northern Tanzania and 72 in Northern Nigeria) in which the project was working. Data was collected by teams of enumerators trained by researchers and the implementing partners. They worked in local languages but were generally not from the immediate areas. It was considered older girls would be able to give the most considered responses so girls in their final year of primary or junior secondary school were surveyed. Data was also assembled from teachers, head teachers, members of school management committees, and village officials. Table 1 gives details of the total numbers of respondents in each country.

Table 1 about here

his is odd!igeria girls speak out about more obstacles in schools with less active school management.

Data collected for the baseline was analysed to produce a number of composite variables relating to school conditions and different facets of distribution. These variables grouped data to give summary measures for each school: one looked at gender parity in girls’ opportunities and outcomes (the ‘gender profile score’), one looked at the level of activity of school management on girls’ education (the ‘gender management profile score’) and one looked at teacher qualifications (the ‘teacher qualification profile score’). These three composite variables allowed analysis of distributional questions to be more nuanced than a simple gender parity count. They also facilitated some contextualised examination of empowerment in relation to what girls say. Girls’ responses to the survey regarding the obstacles and solutions to schooling they could identify could be read as expressions of understandings of empowerment in relation to locale and aspects of distribution.

The gender profile score was constructed to gain a summary measure of gender parity in girls’ opportunities and outcomes at each school as an indicator in how it was succeeding in supporting girls’ education. A series of key variables (including enrolment, attendance, progression, repetition, completion and attainment, weighted in favour of attainment and completion) were grouped together and transformed into an overarching school ‘score’ on gender and education. The gender profile score had to be calculated differently for the schools in Nigeria because of the extent of missing data. This is a serious problem in Nigerian schools, where records have not been routinely kept. Even the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report resorts to making estimates for some measures in Nigeria based on Demographic Surveys rather than using the data collected through the education system (UNESCO 2011: 309). With a limited school dataset to draw from, the gender profile scores could not include attainment or completion measures at primary schools and used proxies for progression in Nigeria. It should be borne in mind that in constructing the gender profiles for sites in both countries gender *parity rather than promotion of girls’ education per se* was being measured because the measure is relative (girls as a ratio of boys) rather than absolute. A high gender profile score may sometimes in fact indicate problems around the enrolment, attendance or progression of boys, making boys’ and girls’ outcomes equally low, rather than automatically denote ‘success’ in girls’ education. Data could only be calculated for the schools in which TEGINT was working and not for all children in a district or locale.

A second summary measure was the gender management profile. This brought together information collected through surveys with head teachers, school management committee representatives, village leaders, teachers and girls on elements of school management action on girls’ education. Management performance on girls’ education is conceptualised as including: provision of training and information for school management, teachers, parents and pupils on issues such as gender, HIV/AIDS, reproductive health and educational management; involvement with political campaigning ; outreach activities to help the most disadvantaged and socially excluded families; monitoring gendered access, enrolment and teaching and the mobilisation of pupils and staff in order to promote community development.

The third summary measure developed was the teacher qualification profile. Overall levels of qualifications within schools in which the project is working constituted an important independent variable by which to consider aspects of empowerment. A score was calculated which represented the proportions of teachers in the school with qualifications in each of four categories, therefore a higher proportion of teachers with higher qualifications resulted in a higher overall teacher qualification profile score.

All three summary variables may thus be seen to look at aspects of the distributional question in a more multi-dimensional way than simple gender parity. They allow a consideration of resources both to access and complete school (the gender profile and the teacher qualification profile) and to be treated with dignity, and have some engagements with conditions of inequality (the gender management profile). We were thus able to look at how aspects of girl’ empowerment[[1]](#footnote-1), that is their capacity to identify obstacles and solutions, as one feature of agency, did or did not link with features of distribution. Drawing on the conceptual framework this feature of empowerment was used to help understand, how or whether girls considered they might shift the gendered spaces that constrained rights and capabilities.

In the discussion that follows we examine the relationship between the obstacles and solution girls highlighted and the three composite variables, allowing us to see aspects of empowerment in relation to different features of distribution. We do not have an objective measure of the extent of these obstacles do exist at each school, but our analysis privileges girls’ voices about obstacles to claiming rights and solutions to secure rights, as we consider girls’ perceptions and voice to be an important feature of empowerment and justice. One of our assumptions, borne out by the data, is that the range of obstacles and solutions identified are higher in districts or states, where there are higher levels of relative, rather than absolute poverty (Unterhalter, 2012). We acknowledge that we do not however have objective data and the responses may partially reflect the real constraints of the locale as well as girls’ ability to articulate these.

***Distribution and empowerment in the TEGINT project schools***

Table 2 looks at the correlation[[2]](#footnote-2) between the proportion of girls citing particular obstacles to their completing schooling, such as early marriage, pregnancy and poverty, and the solutions they suggest to overcome these obstacles, that is aspects if empowerment, with the gender profile score, that is gender parity in opportunities and outcomes at school, in the two countries.

Table 2 about here

Puzzlingly, we see different patterns between empowerment and distribution across the schools in Tanzania and those in Nigeria. Whilst there is no uniform pattern in the strength of relationship between the various obstacles and solutions and the gender profile within each country, we see that the overall direction of relationships is opposite across the two countries. In Tanzania the negative correlations show that in general girls are more likely to cite obstacles and solutions in schools with lower gender parity, that is in schools where girls are doing least well in enrolment, attendance, progression and achievement compared to boys. Meanwhile in Nigeria the relationships are less clear, but tend to go in the opposite direction, that is girls are more likely to articulate many aspects of empowerment in schools with smaller gender gaps.

We might expect to see this positive relationship between distribution and empowerment, but we see that across the two contexts the relationships are far from uniform. Thinking about the two distributional and empowerment contexts may help us understand these two patterns. Girls in Tanzania and Nigeria cited similar aspirations for what their desired level of schooling is, with approximately nine-tenths of girls in both contexts expressing wish to reach tertiary education. However, girls were 21% more likely to cite obstacles and 79% more likely to cite solutions to reaching these education levels in the Nigeria project schools than the Tanzania schools. Meanwhile, the gender profile scores were more similar across the two contexts. This may be surprising, but bigger gender gaps in enrolment were counterbalanced by smaller gaps in performance in the Nigerian schools compared to the Tanzanian schools, which raised the gender profile scores. It is difficult to explain why girls in the Nigerian schools seem to be more able to recognise obstacles and particularly to articulate solutions, including political solutions, but this may relate to localised political, social and economic contexts. As discussed earlier, the local contexts of the schools are very diverse and we are also likely see different patterns emerging across different kinds of locality. Girls’ tendency to cite obstacles and solutions may be partly a function of their exposure to alternatives around them as well as the localised nature and extent of some of the barriers discussed, such as poverty and early marriage (Unteralter, 2012c). Hence we see that the relationship between these aspects of empowerment and gender distribution are far from linear and may be complicated by many other factors.

Table 3 looks at the correlation between the proportion of girls citing particular obstacles and solutions to their completing schooling, with the gender management score, that is the range of actions that schools are taking in support of girls’ education, in the two countries.

Table 3 about here

Here we tend to see a negative relationship between girls citing obstacles and the gender management score, that is, girls are more likely to articulate obstacles to their schooling in schools with less school action on gender. However, relationships are weak and statistically insignificant in Tanzania, except for two obstacles, but strong and significant for nearly all obstacles in Nigeria. This general pattern is not followed for one obstacle – being old for class – which is positively correlated with gender management in Nigeria. There is no clear pattern with regard to the proportion of girls identifying particular solutions and the size of the gender management profile across the two countries. However, the relationships for at least some solutions appear to be in the opposite direction than were obstacles, even if they are weak. The only statistically significant relationship is that girls tend to suggest provision of better facilities in schools with more active management.

It is difficult to draw conclusions on the relationship between aspects of girls’ empowerment and distributional aspects of school management. Again, the correlations hide significant variations between school management performance in the two contexts, with school gender management profile scores being much higher in the Tanzanian than the Nigeria schools. At the time of the research school based management committees were barely functional in Nigeria and many outreach activities to draw and keep girls and other marginalised children in school that were taking place in Tanzania were not occurring in Nigeria schools. The gender management profile scores pick up the extent of action taken but not its nature or quality, which may vary across schools and may also help explain unclear relationships.

Table 4 now looks at the same aspects of girl’s empowerment alongside the distribution of teacher qualifications across the two project areas in Tanzania and Nigeria.

Table 4 about here

The relationship between aspects of girls’ empowerment and teacher qualifications appears to be clearer and more uniform across the countries that with other measures of distribution (the gender profile and the gender management profile). Although correlations are not statistically significant for all obstacles and solutions, in general girls are more likely to articulate their concerns and ideas about schooling in schools where teachers are better qualified (with the exception of ‘enlightenment of parents’ in Nigeria). Interestingly the significant relationships of specific obstacles and solutions with qualifications are rarely the same across the two countries. However, in schools with better teacher qualifications across the two project areas, girls’ are more likely to state ‘distance to school’ and ‘pregnancy’ as obstacles. In these schools they are also more likely to recommend more ‘political’ solutions that we might associate more strongly with empowerment, such as ‘abolishing fees and levies’ and implementing ‘family life, or sexual and reproductive health, education’. Also worth noting is that there was not much variation between teacher qualification levels across the two countries, with approximately equal proportions of teachers holding the highest, and the national minimum, qualifications. The relationship between teacher qualifications and empowerment appears to be particularly strong in Tanzania, with most obstacles and solutions being strongly associated with qualifications.

In summary, if we compare across the two countries the correlation between the proportion of girls who cite obstacles and solutions with the three composite variables regarding distribution, it is evident that there is no clear relationship with the gender profile of schools or management action taken on girls’ education. However there does seem to be a relationship with teacher qualification. What these patterns suggest is that the relationship between empowerment and distribution is not straightforward. Thus, in some settings distributional issues associated with gender justice concerning access, progression and the effectiveness of school management appear linked with girls articulating features of empowerment and the identification of problems and solutions, while in others they do not. The clear association of teachers’ level of qualification with girls’ empowerment raises questions as to whether this might be causal, or whether other background areas, not yet investigated, are associated with this correlation.

In interpreting this data to develop project activities, the project teams responded partly through stressing additional distribution and partly through attending to girls claims on rights in ways that did not separate out concern with distribution and empowerment. The findings of the baseline research became available in the middle of the project (around 2009) after some preliminary activities had begun, notably the establishment of girls’ clubs, SMCs, and Community Circles for adults to reflect on community development and gender issues. The baseline research prompted ‘Research to Action’ workshops which led to particular attention being given to distributional aspects including attending to teacher training, advocacy for more women in school management, the establishment of schools closer to where children live, and SMC efforts to monitor teachers (Unterhalter and Heslop, 2011, 42). In addition, there was a stress on aspects of empowerment, particularly supporting initiatives to improve girls’ and their parents’ knowledge of their rights, SMC and teachers’ knowledge and work on gender and education, and the level of trust between schools and communities (Unterhalter and Heslop, 2011, 43). In Nigeria, the advocacy message emerging from the baseline varied from one state to another, but in urban schools it came to focus on poverty, as girls mentioned this as a key obstacle. Thus opposition to user fees and levies was prioritised in campaigning. In Tanzania, an advocacy campaign was conducted on the re-admission of pregnant schoolgirls, in response to many girls’ citing this as an obstacle. In both countries the finding that girls appeared to lack information and the capacity to voice obstacles and claim rights when teachers were under -qualified and schools were isolated, led to the project initiating a programme of school exchange visits so that girls could see conditions elsewhere in the country, and enhance the information from which they developed approaches to empowerment.

It can thus be seen that, in response to the baseline findings, a relationship between distribution and empowerment was addressed, but that this was very much linked to overall project reflections in context, rather than a particular attempt to follow a clear line regarding what might work either to improve distribution or empowerment. In the conceptual framing and project aims it was implicitly assumed that the distributional issues (girls enrolling and attaining in school) was to be approached through the empowerment issues (overcoming obstacles and attending to girls’ voices). But the nature of this connection was not given close attention. The baseline data showed that this simple linear connection was not always evident and that this relationship needs much more rigorous examination.

***Conclusion***

The analysis has highlighted how we do not know enough analytically, empirically or through practice regarding the nature of the relationship between education, distribution and empowerment. While for some theorists there is a causal relationship between distribution and empowerment, for some it is correlational or weakly associated, and for others the two aspects of justice need to be considered separately. We clearly need thicker meanings of distribution and empowerment and better understanding of the connections between these different paths to social justice. The data from the TEGINT project show there is a need for a much closer examination of these relationships, for without this the focus of development projects may become too diffuse. It also highlights the need in thinking about distribution and empowerment to pay attention to specific school locations, rather than generalisations about countries, regions or districts. We have much still to learn to understand how, where and why particular kinds of social mobilisation and action will help us to listen well to girls’ claims on rights and to open multiple spaces for realisation.

**Acknowledgements**

This paper reports on research conducted for the project *Transforming education for girls in Nigeria and Tanzania* , a special education initiative partnership between Action Aid, Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP) in Nigeria and Maarifa ni Ufunguo (Maarifa) in Tanzania, funded by Comic Relief and the Tubney Charitable Trust. Our thanks to the project partnership for permission to use research data gathered as part of the research component of the project, for collaboration on data collection and analysis, and for the rich discussions which have accompanied the process connecting research and implementation. Particular acknowledgement to Sonia Exley and Vincenzo Mauro for help with statistical analysis. Thanks to Louise Wetheridge, Jenny Parkes and Joan DeJaeghere for written comments on the paper, and to Claire Postles for assistance in formatting the final manuscript and completing bibliographic entries.

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1. A composite empowerment variable was not constructed for this study, although work on this has been undertaken for the TEGINT endline study (Unterhalter and Heslop, 2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. We analyse the relationship between aspects of distribution and empowerment in this section through using Pearson product-moment correlation, presenting the correlation coefficient (r) first and statistical significance of the relationship (p) in brackets in the tables. Statistically significant correlations at a 95% confidence limit of are shown in bold text. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)