

Longitudinal impact on Empowerment for Ugandan Women with Post-Primary Education

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Abstract : Assumptions abound that education for girls will, as a matter of course, lead to their economic empowerment as women; yet, little is known about the ways in which schooling for girls, who traditionally/historically would not have had opportunities for post-primary, or perhaps even primary education – such as the participants in this study based in rural Uganda - in reality, impacts their economic situations. There is a need for longitudinal studies in which women share experiences, understandings, and reflections of their lives that can inform our knowledge of this. In response, this paper reports on stage four of a longitudinal case study (2004-2018) focused on education and empowerment for girls and women in rural Uganda, in which 13 of the 15 participants from the original study participated. This paper understands empowerment as not simply increased opportunities (e.g., employment) but also real gains in power, freedoms that enable agentive action, and authentic and viable choices/alternatives that offer 'exit options' from unsatisfactory situations. As with the other stages, this study used a critical, postmodernist, global feminist ethnographic methodology, multimodal and qualitative data collection. Participants participated in interviews, focus group discussions, and a two-day workshop, which explored their understandings of how/if they understood post-primary education to have contributed to their economic empowerment. A constructivist grounded theory approach was used for data analysis to capture major themes. Findings indicate that although all participants believe that post-primary education provided them with economic opportunities they would not have had otherwise, the parameters of their economic empowerment were severely constrained by historic and extant sociocultural, economic, political, and institutional structures that continue to disempower girls and women, as well as additional financial responsibilities that they assumed to support others. Even though the participants had post-primary education, and they were able to obtain employment or operate their own businesses that they would not likely have been able to do without post-primary education, the majority of the participants' incomes were not sufficient to elevate them financially above the extreme poverty level, especially as many were single mothers and the sole income earners in their households. Furthermore, most deemed their working conditions unsatisfactory and their positions precarious; they also experienced sexual harassment and abuse in the labour force. Additionally, employment for the participants resulted in a double work burden: long days at work, surrounded by many hours of domestic work at home (which, even if they had spousal partners, still fell almost exclusively to women). In conclusion, although the participants seem to have experienced some increase in economic empowerment, largely due to skills, knowledge, and qualifications gained at the post-primary level, numerous barriers prevented them from maximizing their capabilities and making significant gains in empowerment. There is need, in addition to providing education (primary, secondary, and tertiary) to girls, to address systemic gender inequalities that mitigate against women's empowerment, as well as opportunities and freedom for women to come together and demand fair pay, reasonable working conditions, and benefits, freedom from gender-based harassment and assault in the workplace, as well as advocate for equal distribution of domestic work as a cultural change.

Keywords : girls' post-primary education, women's empowerment, uganda, employment

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