

Ayelazuno, Jasper Abembia; Aziabah, Maxwell A.

Working Paper

Leaving no one behind in Ghana through university education: Interrogating spatial, gender and class inequalities

UNRISD Working Paper, No. 2021-1

Provided in Cooperation with:

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Geneva

Suggested Citation: Ayelazuno, Jasper Abembia; Aziabah, Maxwell A. (2021) : Leaving no one behind in Ghana through university education: Interrogating spatial, gender and class inequalities, UNRISD Working Paper, No. 2021-1, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), Geneva

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/246258>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



UNRISD

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Working Paper 2021-1

Leaving No One Behind in Ghana Through University Education

Interrogating Spatial, Gender and Class Inequalities

*Jasper Abembia Ayelazuno
Maxwell Akansina Aziabah*

Prepared for the UNRISD project on
Universities and Social Inequalities in the Global South

January 2021

UNRISD Working Papers are posted online
to stimulate discussion and critical comment.



The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) is an autonomous research institute within the UN system that undertakes multidisciplinary research and policy analysis on the social dimensions of contemporary development issues. Through our work we aim to ensure that social equity, inclusion and justice are central to development thinking, policy and practice.

UNRISD, Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0)22 9173060
info.unrisd@un.org
www.unrisd.org

Copyright © United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

This United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) Working Paper has been produced in collaboration with Professor Ananya Mukherjee Reed, with funds provided by the University of British Columbia and UNRISD institutional funds.

This is not a formal UNRISD publication. The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed studies rests solely with their author(s), and availability on the UNRISD website (www.unrisd.org) does not constitute an endorsement by UNRISD of the opinions expressed in them. No publication or distribution of these papers is permitted without the prior authorization of the author(s), except for personal use.

Introduction to Working Papers on Universities and Social Inequalities in the Global South

This paper is part of a project which explores what role universities play in overcoming persistent and rising inequalities. Participation in tertiary education has increased significantly across the globe, in parallel with heightened social aspirations and the expectation of better labour market opportunities stemming from a university degree. However, these assumptions rely on certain economic and social conditions being fulfilled, some of which have worsened in the age of jobless growth. The project asks: What potential does higher education have today to increase social mobility, reduce inequality and contribute to the advancement of society through the production of knowledge and skills? Are institutions of higher education contributing to inequality rather than equality, and if so, through what specific actions and mechanisms? How can the transformative potential of such institutions be fully harnessed for overcoming inequality?

Working Papers on Universities and Social Inequalities in the Global South

Leaving No One Behind in Ghana Through University Education: Interrogating Spatial, Gender and Class Inequalities

Jasper Abembia Ayelazuno and Maxwell Akansina Aziabah, January 2021

Higher Education Expansion and Social Inequalities in Sub-Saharan Africa: Conceptual and Empirical Perspectives

Yann Lebeau and Ibrahim Ogachi Oanda, October 2020

Inequalities in Higher Education Access and Completion in Brazil

Tristan McCowan and Julio Bertolin, April 2020

Climbing the Ladder: Determinants of Access to and Returns from Higher Education in Chile and Peru

Anja Gaentzsch and Gabriela Zapata-Román, April 2020

“A Public and a Private University in One”: Equity in University Attendance in Kenya Since the Liberalization Reforms of the 1990s

Rebecca Simson and J. Andrew Harris, March 2020

Table of Contents

List of Acronyms	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Keywords.....	iii
Bios.....	iii
1. Introduction	1
2. Context and Background of the Case Study.....	3
2.1. The development trajectory of the political economy of Ghana under neoliberalism	4
2.2 Developments in the higher education landscape of Ghana.....	7
3. Expansion and Growth of Universities: Barriers to Inclusion.....	9
3.1 Overview of tertiary institutions and enrolment in Ghana	9
3.2 Inequity in access between women and men.....	11
3.3 Class dimension of inequity in access	14
3.4 Establishment and spatial distribution of universities	15
4. Efforts by Universities to Address Access Inequities	19
5. Conclusion.....	20
References	23

List of Tables

Table 1: Enrolment in public and private tertiary institutions in Ghana	10
Table 2: Student enrolment by subject – 2016/2017 academic year	13
Table 3: Graduate output for public universities – 2016/2017.....	14
Table 4: Distribution of public universities across regions in Ghana.....	17

List of Figures

Figure 1: Proportion of female enrolment in tertiary institutions in Ghana	13
Figure 2: Map showing the North-South Development Divide	16

List of Acronyms

AFUF	Academic Facility User Fees
CKT-UTAS	C. K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
GET Fund	Ghana Education Trust Fund
GHS	Ghanaian Cedi
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GLSS	Ghana Living Standards Survey
GoG	Government of Ghana
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
HDI	Human Development Index
IDI	Inclusive Development Index
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KNUST	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
LESS	Less Endowed Secondary Schools
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education
NAB	National Accreditation Board
NCTE	National Council for Tertiary Education
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NDPC	National Development Planning Commission
NPP	New Patriotic Party
RFUF	Residential Facility User Fees
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLTF	Student Loan Trust Fund
SSNIT	Social Security and National Insurance Trust
STEM	Science, Engineering, Technology and Math
UCC	University of Cape Coast
UDS	University for Development Studies
UEW	University of Education, Winneba
UG	University of Ghana
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
URC	University Rationalisation Committee
WASSCE	West African Senior School Certificate Examination

Abstract

The number of higher education institutions in Ghana has soared in the last three decades and university enrolments have shot up in tandem. Yet the number of Ghanaians living in poverty is higher than ever before, and social inequality is on the rise. Against this backdrop, this paper critically examines the role universities play in addressing the problem of social inequality in Ghana. It specifically explores the possibilities and limitations Ghana faces in meeting the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 4 on education. Based on analysis of secondary data, both qualitative and quantitative, the paper argues that the widening of participation in university education in Ghana is not inclusive in terms of gender, class or geographic location. Far from addressing inequalities in access to university education, the dynamics shaping the provision of university education in Ghana exclude marginalized social groups such as women and the poor, as well as the those living in rural areas and in the northern part of the country. The paper concludes by highlighting critical areas and issues needing further research to inform policy reforms aimed at widening access and promoting equity in higher education in Ghana.

Keywords

Ghana; higher education; inequality; SDG 4; universities

Bios

Dr. Jasper Abembia Ayelazuno is Associate Professor and Vice Dean of the Faculty of Communication and Cultural Studies, University for Development Studies, Nyankpala Campus. He researches and writes on democracy, inequality, subalterns' politics, agency and resistance in Ghana. He is the author of the book *Neoliberal Globalization and Resistance from Below: Why the Subalterns Resist in Bolivia and not in Ghana* (2019, Routledge).

Dr. Maxwell Akansina Aziabah is a Lecturer and Quality Assurance Officer of the Faculty of Planning and Land Management, Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies, Ghana. He is also a Fellow of the Africa Science Leadership Programme. His research focuses on education and social policy, social mobility and higher education, and theories of institutional change. He is author of the book *The Politics of Educational Reform in Ghana: Understanding Structural Persistence in the Secondary School System* (2018, Springer AG).

1. Introduction

The trend of higher education massification has spread across the globe over the last three decades, and Ghana is no exception.¹ Universities and other higher education institutions have exploded in number in the country (Apusigah 2009), with student enrolment shooting up to match. For example, “from a total of about 10,000 in the early 1980s, student enrolment in public universities reached about 110,000 in the 2008/2009 academic year” (Effah 2011:376); and in 2014, about 157,626 students were enrolled in higher education institutions, more than double the enrolment in 2005.² Paradoxically, as will be discussed below, inequality between the poor and the rich, men and women, and the northern and southern parts of Ghana has also been widening in the last three decades (Annim et al. 2012).³ The widening social inequality in Ghana corresponds with current global trends in inequality.⁴

While we are by no means suggesting a direct causal relationship between the massification of higher education and widening social inequality in Ghana, the paper examines the ways in which trends in university education have influenced this problem. Specifically, it interrogates the spatial, gender and class dynamics shaping the prospects for and challenges of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4,⁵ which underlines the centrality of education in *leaving no one behind*, the axiom driving the SDGs. It seeks to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UN 2015:14). This will equip people with the requisite knowledge and skillsets “to exploit opportunities and to participate fully in society” (UN 2015:7). One of the targets of SDG 4 (4.3) pivots on higher education: to “ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university” (UN 2015:17). The government of Ghana (GoG), through its Ministry of Education (MoE), has aligned its education strategic plan with SDG 4 (MoE 2019).

Situated in the current development thinking and practice of the SDGs, this paper addresses the following closely related fundamental questions:

1. How do overlapping inequalities in gender, class and geographical location affect access to quality university education in Ghana?
2. What role do universities play in widening social inequality in Ghana?
3. What are universities doing to address the problem of social inequality in higher education in Ghana?

¹ Effah 2011; Mohamedbhai 2014; UNESCO 2016.

² See UNESCO (2017), Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah (2013), and MoE (2019).

³ See also GSS (2018), Oxfam International (2019), Osei-Assibey (2014), Cooke et al. (2016) and Huq and Tribe (2018).

⁴ Milanovic 2016; World Inequality Lab 2017; UNRISD 2019.

⁵ Of course, these are not the only dynamics structuring inequality of access to university education in Ghana, and for that matter, the achievement of SDG 4 on higher education. There are other dynamics structuring inequality, such as physical disability and age (see Mosley et al. 2010). These and other dynamics of inequality of access to higher education are legitimate areas of research in Ghana.

Based on analysis of secondary data, both qualitative and quantitative, this paper argues that even though the Ghanaian government and universities in the country have shown their commitments to widening access in tandem with promoting equity in university education, there is still wide disparity in various dimensions, including gender, class and geography. This situation is microcosmic of a global problem. One of the major problems underlined by the global “Framework for Action” on SDG 4 is the limited opportunities for access to university education, especially by marginalized social groups and the poor in developing countries. The Framework for Action notes:

All forms of tertiary education have expanded rapidly with total enrolment rising from 100 million in 2000 to 199 million in 2013. Yet wide disparity in access to tertiary education, in particular at university level, with regard to gender, to social, regional and ethnic background, and to age and disability remain. (UNESCO 2016:40)

Yet university education is widely known for its great potential to engender upward social mobility of the lower classes and disadvantaged social groups, including women. As fountains of knowledge and institutions of training, university education is, in Piketty’s (2014:22) formulation, “a force of convergence in an increasingly unequal world.” Quality university education provides the advanced knowledge and skillsets an individual requires to get a good-paying job based on merit. In addition, it enhances the capability and agency of the individual to act to reconfigure the power relations of inequality, thereby contributing to building a more just and peaceful society (Morley et al. 2010).⁶ Increased educational attainment, as one authoritative source correctly notes, “helps transform lives by reducing poverty, improving health outcomes, advancing technology and increasing social cohesion” (UNESCO 2016:10). The Ghanaian state recognizes the central role universities play in the economy by “producing a class of highly qualified Ghanaians to support the economic and social development of the country” (MoE 2019:54).

Prioritizing primary education, the World Bank previously viewed university education in developing countries as a luxury, only for those who could afford its high cost. In one of its subsequent reports, the World Bank changed its view on the broader importance of higher education, stating that: “[a]s knowledge becomes more important, so does higher education. Countries need to educate more of their young people to a higher standard—a degree is now a basic qualification for many skilled jobs” (World Bank 2000:9; see also World Bank 2009). University education, if made accessible to the poor and disadvantaged social groups like women, the physically disabled, rural inhabitants, and citizens from historically marginalized regions or ethnic groups, can empower and enhance their “capability to choose the lives they have reason to value” (Sen 1999:3; see also Morley 2011).

⁶ See also Morley (2011), UNESCO (2014) and Martel (2019).

In the rest of the paper, we flesh out our main arguments in the following order: first, we describe the case study and the data used to analyse it. Second, we discuss our findings in relation to the research questions set out above. In the penultimate section, we give a brief overview of strategies being adopted by some Ghanaian universities to widen and promote equity in access. In the conclusion, we summarize our main findings and point to key areas for further research to inform policy interventions to expand and promote equity in access to university education in Ghana.

2. Context and Background of the Case Study

As a case study, Ghana yields fascinating theoretical and policy insights into the impact of universities on social inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa because of three main reasons. First, Ghana is a clear example of a country with rising inequality in the context of a democratic government and a classic neoliberal economy that grows nominally without creating jobs. Second, and as will be illustrated below, the increasing inequality in Ghana is happening against the backdrop of significant growth in tertiary institutions, both public and private, as well as a significant rise in participation in university education. Therefore, it represents the puzzling situation across the world where, as noted above, participation in tertiary education has grown exponentially without addressing existing inequalities between social groups. Third, and closely related to first and second, Ghana is also a quintessential case of the marketisation of universities that swept across the world in the era of neoliberalism (between the 1980s and the present), characterised by drastic cuts of funding to universities by the government and the levying of various fees and charges by university authorities on students and their parents. Meeting the entry requirements and cut-off points are not enough for a student to attend and complete a university programme of her choice in Ghana. In addition to this, she (and her parents) must have money to pay the high fees and charges of the university.

Our study utilises secondary data, both qualitative and quantitative, drawn from scholarly and grey literature: scholarly publications, policy documents and official reports from supranational organisations, and official reports/data of public and private universities obtained mainly from the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), the National Accreditation Board (NAB) and the Ministry of Education in Ghana.

Constituting the backdrop to the case study are two related developments in Ghana that took place between the 1980s and 2000s: 1) the development trajectory of the country's political economy under the neoliberal order; and 2) developments in the higher education landscape of the country under this economic order. In the rest of this section, we briefly discuss the above-mentioned developments to situate inequality in university education in the political, economic and historical context of Ghana.

2.1. The development trajectory of the political economy of Ghana under neoliberalism

The political-economic landscape that has characterized Ghana for the last four decades has been marked by yawning inequality. Even though the Ghanaian economy has been growing significantly since Ghana implemented structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in 1983 (Ayelazuno 2014), it exemplifies the neoliberal development paradigm and its inherent tendencies to engender significant socioeconomic inequalities and poverty in the world.⁷

As is a common feature of neoliberal economies, managed with laissez-faire doctrines of the free market and a minimalist state, a tiny minority of Ghanaians have fared well, accumulating huge wealth. For perspective, the combined wealth of the majority of Ghanaians amounts to just a fraction of that held by this wealthy minority. A recent Oxfam report somberly notes:

In Ghana, West Africa's second biggest economy, one of the richest men earns more in a month than one of the poorest women could earn in 1,000 years. In the decade ending in 2016, the country saw 1,000 new US dollar millionaires created, but only 60 of these were women. While a few people grew super-rich, nearly one million more, mostly from the Savannah Region of the country, were pushed into the poverty pool, while thousands of those who were already poor sank even deeper. The wealthiest 10% of Ghanaians now account for 32% of the country's total consumption. This is more than the consumption of the bottom 60% of the population combined, while the very poorest 10% of Ghanaians consume only 2%. (Oxfam International 2019:4)

There is a sense that this high inequality is inevitable in Ghana and other neoliberal economies of Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, the Ghanaian economy is a quintessential case of “jobless growth”, a characteristic of most economies managed on the doctrines of neoliberalism (Li 2013). This jobless growth has given rise to massive youth unemployment in Ghana (Ayelazuno 2015:24; see also Baah-Boateng 2004), invoking images of Marx's relative surplus population (Li 2013). As illustrated below, Ghana's economic growth may be positively related to poverty reduction in the country, but it is indisputably leaving segments of Ghanaians behind. Rather than a rising tide that lifts all boats, the market-based management of the Ghanaian economy has sent the poor racing to the bottom. Nominally, poverty has been dropping in Ghana in the last three decades. Between 1992 and 2013, it decreased from 56.5 percent to 24.2 percent, achieving the Millennium Development Goal 1 (MDG1) on poverty reduction in Ghana.⁸ However, the latest Ghana Living Standards Survey 7 (GLSS 7) reports that more Ghanaians were living in extreme poverty in 2017 than in 2013, increasing from “2.2 million in 2013 to 2.4 million in 2017” (GSS 2018:x).

⁷ Milanovic 2016; World Inequality Lab 2017; UNRISD 2019.

⁸ See Cooke et al. (2016), Novignon et al. (2018), Huq and Tribe (2018) and Annim et al. (2012).

This stark picture of grinding poverty side-by-side with economic growth evokes the raging debate on the impact of economic growth on reduction of poverty and inequality. While the jury is still out on this issue, there is broad agreement on the specific qualities of economic growth that engender the reduction of poverty and inequality in a country. Economic growth with this potential must be based on:

...a more intensive process of structural economic transformation that includes (1) labour productivity growth in all major sectors of the economy (agriculture, industry and services); (2) a continued transition of labour out of low productivity sectors (e.g. subsistence agriculture, informal economy) towards high productivity sectors; and (3) a relatively even distribution of the income growth that results from labour productivity growth, so that the poorest strata of African societies profit as much as, or even more than the higher income strata. (Frankema and Waijenburg 2018:544)

African countries have witnessed spurts of growth in the era of neoliberal globalization, but in direct contradiction with all three qualities noted above. Economic growth in most African countries has been uneven and spurred by the production and export of commodities (raw materials such as crude oil). A boom in the prices of these commodities in the twenty-first century, in particular between 2000-2014, has engendered growth without any significant structural transformation along the three axes specified above (Jerven 2010). Ghana's economy is the clearest example of this pattern of economic growth in Africa. The growth of the Ghanaian economy has been driven mainly by the production and export of raw materials such as cocoa, gold and oil (Whitfield 2018).

As an economy that is growing without structural transformation, the Ghanaian economy is ill-equipped to address inequality and poverty in any significant and concrete human development terms. However, it would be misleading to talk about poverty and inequality in Ghana with sweeping generalizations. Poverty and inequality vary in several dimensions, including location and gender. Geographically, it is the rural populace of Ghana that is hardest hit by poverty. About "15.6 percent of the projected 14.2 million persons in the rural localities are extremely poor, and they contribute 93.8 percent to this national extreme poverty" (GSS 2018:14). Yet poverty does not afflict rural people evenly across Ghana. It is worse in some regions and districts than in others. For example, of Ghana's sixteen regions, the Northern, North East, Savannah, Upper East and Upper West Regions are the poorest in the country (Annim et al. 2012; Huq and Tribe 2018).⁹

Interestingly, despite its appalling and deepening inequality and poverty, Ghana is widely acclaimed as an African success story of democratization and economic liberalization (Abdulai and Hickey 2016; Ayelazuno 2019). It has enjoyed political stability for over 35 years and is considered an oasis of peace in the West Africa sub-region, where its

⁹ See figure 2, map of Ghana showing the regional divisions of Ghana.

neighbouring states such as Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso have experienced varying forms of political instability. It has held relatively peaceful, free and fair elections over the last 25 years. However, they have been characterized by zero-sum competition between the political elites of the two dominant parties, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC).

Since 1993, Ghanaian electoral democracy and politics have taken a specific form that has fed into the inequality and poverty described above. As observed by Abdulai and Hickey (2016:46), “the underlying form of politics and power relations that comprise Ghana’s political settlement are preventing the country from achieving developmental progress in terms of structural transformation and challenging deep-seated inequalities in access to basic services.” Electoral democracy has created a patron-client relationship, fueled by distributive politics¹⁰—a form of politics that feeds on political corruption, with the political class using the influence and authority of their offices to funnel public resources and funds to enrich themselves, their kinfolk, cronies and political clients/entrepreneurs. This political behaviour promotes and exacerbates inequality, as Ghanaian democratic governments—both NDC- and NPP-led—are less concerned about recognizing and promoting equality of citizens irrespective of class, gender, ethnicity and region than their personal political survival—namely, winning the next election through patronage and distributive politics. This is compounded by the fact that in this scenario, those who are well-connected to powerful politicians are able to expand their wealth even further, while the majority of the poor and other Ghanaians not so well-connected are left behind.

Additionally, patronage politics depletes the scarce resources and funds needed to provide basic necessities like health and educational services, further marginalizing the poor and vulnerable. Millions of dollars that should have been used to provide these services are instead funneled into distributive politics through political corruption.

Finally, the situation has created widespread cynicism about politics and politicians in the country, as many Ghanaians, especially the middle class, see politics/politicians as inherently corrupt, and think that nothing can be done to change the situation (Daswani 2020).

In simple terms, patronage and distributive politics hurt the wellbeing of the majority of poor Ghanaians, while enabling the accumulation of illicit wealth by the political class and their cronies. The corollary of all of this is that inequality in Ghana is shaped as much by patronage and distributive politics (Abdulai and Hickey 2016; Ayelazuno 2019) as it is shaped by other factors, such as education, family background, geography and free enterprise.

¹⁰ See Lindberg (2003), Ayelazuno (2019), Paller (2019) and Driscoll (2020).

2.2 Developments in the higher education landscape of Ghana

Another reason why Ghana is a good case study is its trajectory of development and the characteristics of its higher education landscape in the last three decades. The history of university education in Ghana goes back to the colonial era. In 1948 the colonial government established the University College of the Gold Coast as part of the University of London, offering programmes in the humanities, arts, sciences and agriculture. The Kumasi College of Technology was later established in 1952 to run programmes in science and technology. After independence, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first leader of the postcolonial government of Ghana, implemented accelerated development programmes, including expansion of education, to realize his vision of modernization and development for the country. He established the University of Ghana and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in 1961. Three more universities were established by subsequent governments, including: The University of Cape Coast (UCC) in 1971, the University for Development Studies (UDS) in 1992, and the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), also in 1992 (Manuh et al. 2007).

In principle, the Ghanaian state has historically aimed to promote equity in access to university education for all Ghanaians irrespective of gender, class, ethnicity, geographic location and physical disabilities. For example, the 1992 constitution of Ghana enshrines not only the right to basic education but also university education for all Ghanaians: Article 25, section 1 (c) states that higher education is also to be made “equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular, by progressive introduction of free education” (Republic of Ghana 1992; see also Manuh et al. 2007:37). One of the goals of the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) of the government of Ghana is to improve “equity, with affirmative action taken to address gender and wealth inequities and to improve access for students with disabilities” (MoE 2019:56). The ESP indicates that some measures are being taken by the Ghanaian state to promote equity of access to university education. For example, the state is reviewing the financing of tertiary education to address the financial challenges that pose access barriers to university education (MoE 2019).

Previously, the Ghanaian state promoted equity through its university funding policy. University funding was generous and gave equal opportunity to qualified applicants from both rich and poor family backgrounds. Between 1960 and 1975, each university student “received a government scholarship that covered not only tuition, but books, clothing, travel, examination fees [and activity fees], but also provided students with spending money and room and board” (Kosack 2014:427). As correctly observed by Gruber and Kosack (2013), free university education of this sort tended to favour the elite class rather than the poor. The reason, as will be illustrated below, is that inequality of access to university education starts from inequality of access to quality primary and secondary education (UNESCO 2016). Relative to the rich and urban dwellers, children from poor families and rural areas rarely receive this quality of primary/secondary education. Yet, it is indisputable—as Kosack (2014) makes clear in his analysis—that funding for

university education as a public good also benefits the few students from poor families who, despite the low quality of their primary/secondary education, still qualify for admission to university.

However, this window of opportunity for access to university by the poor was sealed in the 1980s. The neoliberal policies implemented by the Ghanaian state wiped away the generous scholarships and subsidies, shifting the burden of funding university education to students and their families. Implemented by the Ghanaian state in the 1980s, these neoliberal reforms channelled resources away from universities to improving primary education (Kosack 2014). The reforms were based on the recommendations of the University Rationalization Committee (URC) that was established and worked between 1986 and 1988 (Girdwood 1999).

University education has, since the 1980s, been subjected to budget cuts, leaving universities to make up for the shortfall in funding through various methods of generating funds internally. Most university funding lost through budget cuts has since then been generated from students and their families through cost-sharing and cost-recovery measures (Girdwood 1999). This means students and their families pay various fees and charges for academic-user facilities, residential facilities and meals, things that hitherto were paid by the government. Public universities also generate funds internally by rolling out income generating programmes in business and administration, law, medicine and pharmacy, among others. These programmes, which are often oversubscribed by applicants, are made available to those who can afford to pay full fees through a dual-track tuition policy: applicants with the highest grades are admitted to university with partial funding by the state, while others whose grades meet the minimum entry requirements gain admission on a fee-paying basis (see Marcucci et al. 2008). In simple terms, it means students who have the resources to pay, but did not make the cut-off for admission on a subsidized fee-paying basis, will be admitted as fee-paying students (Anyan 2009). Fee-paying students pay as much as two times more in fees than subsidized fee-paying students. For the 2019/2020 academic year, fee-paying medical students at the University of Ghana paid GHS 6,773, whereas their colleagues on subsidized fees paid GHS 2,047 (University of Ghana 2019). The neoliberal educational reforms also opened the floodgates for private providers of university education, the subject of the next section.

These developments in the Ghanaian political economy in general and the higher education sector in particular set the context for interrogating how universities influence social inequality in Ghana, as well as their potential for contributing to accomplishing the vision of the SDGs, that is, “leaving no one behind.” Ghana was the second country, after Mexico, to develop an SDGs budget report, a baseline report upon which to effectively track Ghana’s performance towards achieving the SDGs. In addition, Ghanaian President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo is the co-chair of the UN Secretary-General’s SDG Advocates, a team of seven eminent persons assisting the UN Secretary-General in the campaign to achieve the SDGs. The Ghanaian president has expressed his determination to make the country “a shining example of the implementation of the SDGs” (NDPC

2018:iii). Besides being a member-state of the UN, the special role given to the Ghanaian president in the implementation of the SDGs makes it particularly important to probe the state of inequality in Ghana, and based on that, to examine what the government is doing (or can do) to address inequality with its policies on university education, especially public universities.

3. Expansion and Growth of Universities: Barriers to Inclusion

One of the significant developments in the higher education sector of Ghana in the last four decades has been the exponential growth in the number of tertiary institutions. The cost of university education has risen in parallel, but the demand for university education and enrolment numbers have not declined. These developments are characterized by class, gender and spatially driven inequities of access to university education, calling into question the capacity of universities to contribute to “leaving no one behind” in Ghana by 2030. In this section, we illustrate these inequities with empirical data.

3.1 Overview of tertiary institutions and enrolment in Ghana

The number of public universities in Ghana has been increasing since 2010, a development that indicates the efforts by the Ghanaian government to widen participation in university education. There were only eight public universities in Ghana in 2010:

- University of Ghana
- University for Development Studies
- University of Cape Coast
- Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)
- University of Education, Winneba
- University of Mines and Technology
- Ghana Institute of Management and Administration
- Ghana Institute of Journalism

Between 2010 and 2020, the government established six additional universities (see table 4):

- University of Health and Allied Sciences
- University of Professional Studies
- University of Energy and Natural Resources
- University of Environment and Sustainable Development
- Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies
- C. K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences

The government also upgraded all ten public polytechnics in the country to technical universities, by enacting the Technical Universities Act 922, 2016. The technical universities are:

- Accra Technical University
- Bolgatanga Technical University

- Technical University of Tamale
- Kumasi Technical University
- Koforidua Technical University
- Ho Technical University
- Wa Technical University
- Takoradi Technical University
- Cape Coast Technical University
- Sunyani Technical University

The total number of public universities, including the ten newly established technical universities, increased from eight in 2010 to 24 by 2020. Similarly, as will be illustrated further below, private tertiary institutions have increased from fifty-one in 2010 to eighty-nine in 2020.¹¹

Corresponding to the rise in number of both public and private tertiary institutions is the growth in student enrolment. Table 1 presents figures on enrolment of full-time, sandwich¹² and distance education students in Ghanaian tertiary institutions between the 2008/09 and 2018/19 academic years. Overall, enrolment increased more than threefold from 102,548 in the 2008/09 academic year to 348,845 in the 2018/19 academic year. Specifically, table 1 illustrates that enrolments in public universities increased steadily between the 2008/09 and 2010/11 academic years, slowed down in the 2011/12¹³ academic year, and recovered thereafter. Thus, enrolment of full-time students in public universities¹⁴ has increased consistently from 2011/2012 to 2015/2016 by an average of 10.9 percent. With regard to private tertiary institutions, enrolment growth has actually fluctuated over the period under consideration.

Table 1: Enrolment in public and private tertiary institutions in Ghana

Details	2008/ 09	2009/ 10	2010/ 11	2011/ 12	2012/ 13	2013/ 14	2014/ 15	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2018/19
Public Universities	102,548	107,058	115,452	109,278	128,326	138,416	147,180	219,596	258,669	244,079	284,057
Private Institutions	-	-	2,275	59,899	61,874	75,272	63,360	71,327	66,022	63,452	64,788
Total tertiary enrolment	102,548	107,058	147,727	169,177	190,200	213,688	210,540	290,925	320,691	307,531	348,845

Source: GoG 2015; NCTE 2016, 2017a&b, 2019

¹¹ Ghana's National Council for Tertiary Education defines *Private Tertiary Institutions* to include the following: universities, university colleges, tutorial colleges and distance education institutions. See NAB (2019) for a list of accredited tertiary education institutions for 2017/2018.

¹² Study programmes running during long vacation periods or in-between usual terms, mainly for workers.

¹³ The introduction of a four year Senior High School system in the 2007/08 academic year consistent with Article 1(3) of the 2008 Education Act (Act 778) resulted in the production of two cohorts (4-year and 3-year graduates) for entry into tertiary institutions in the 2012/13 academic year. In addition, one public specialized institution—the Institute of Professional Studies—was converted into a university and so its students were reclassified to include public university enrolment in the 2012/13 period, hence the sharp rise in enrolment for that particular academic year. It must be noted however that the four-year system ran for only two academic years following a legislative reversal occasioned by a change in government in 2009 (Republic of Ghana 2008).

¹⁴ In discussing public university enrolment, technical universities are excluded since no meaningful trend analysis can be made of student figures as these institutions began admitting students as “universities” in the 2017/2018 academic year.

Though private tertiary institutions far outnumber public ones, the data shows that public universities' share of student enrolment far outweighs that of private tertiary institutions. In the 2018/19 academic year, total enrolment in both public and private universities/university colleges reached a high of 348,845, with public universities accounting for 81.4 percent of total enrolment while private universities accounted for 18.6 percent.

On the surface, the expansion and growth of university education demonstrates the opening up of educational opportunities for marginalized social groups such as women, poorer segments of the population, and residents of marginalized northern parts of Ghana. These opportunities hold promise for bridging the capability gap between these subordinated classes and the powerful classes, because of the intrinsic value of university education to human wellbeing: it gives people a sense of dignity and confidence as human beings, and empowers them in their social relations with the elite classes (Robeyns 2006). Their political agency is enhanced by the knowledge they acquire from university education, giving them a voice (World Bank 2014) and making them agents of struggles to reconfigure "the matrices of social power" (Mukherjee Reed 2008:10), and, for that matter, making them agents of their own emancipation from oppressive power structures.

However, the reality is far more complex. As noted in the introduction, extensive literature exists on the subject of university expansion and growth, with many studies illustrating that university education tends to favour the elite classes and reinforces and reproduces the existing social inequalities in countries.¹⁵ This global pattern repeats itself in Ghana. Much research on access to university education illustrates that in parallel with the significant expansion of access and participation in university education is the exclusion of a greater number of people from disadvantaged regions, women and low-income groups.¹⁶ Manuh, Gariba and Budu (2007:37) put it baldly: the explosion of university institutions and growth in enrolment "hide structural inequalities based on age, region, social class, gender, ethnicity and rural/urban origin that determine access to university education." These inequities are the subjects of the discussion below.

3.2 Inequity in access between women and men

Inequality among women and men is a historical structural reality in Ghana. Furthermore, lower classes and poor women suffer more from capabilities deprivations, poverty and human underdevelopment broadly than their male counterparts in Ghana (UNDP-Ghana 2018). While the human development index (HDI) for females in Ghana was 0.563 in 2017, it was 0.619 for males. The gender inequality index (GII) value for the same year was 0.538 in Ghana, ranking it 131 out of 160 countries. The GII is measured by parliamentary seats held by women, women's secondary and higher education attainment

¹⁵ See Gruber and Kosack (2013), Atherton (2017) and UNESCO (2016).

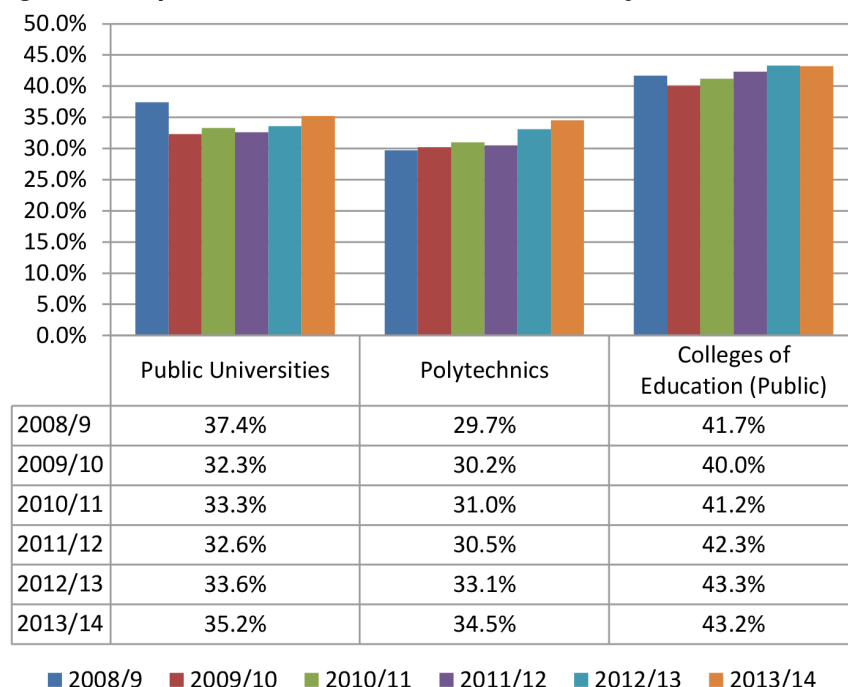
¹⁶ Sawyerr 2004; Manuh et al. 2007; Apusigah 2009; Morley et al. 2009; Senadza 2012; Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah 2013.

relative to men, as well as their participation in the labour market relative to men (UNDP 2018).

Historically, males have dominated access to educational opportunities across all levels of the Ghanaian education system. Nevertheless, there exists intra-gender inequality in access. For example, women from rich or middle-class family backgrounds who live in urban areas and attend elite secondary schools have advantages over their poorer and rural-based counterparts in terms of access to university education (see Senadza 2012). One authoritative source argues that in Ghana, “while participation is increasing for women, students continue to be predominantly from wealthier socioeconomic backgrounds” (Morley et al. 2009:59).

With these nuances considered, males continue to outnumber females in enrolment at the tertiary level. Figure 1 describes the proportion of females enrolled in tertiary institutions in Ghana over five academic years, between 2008/2009 and 2013/2014. The data show that female enrolment in public universities and polytechnics is below 40.0 percent across the five academic years, and below 50.0 percent in public colleges of education. What is more disturbing is that the proportion of females enrolled in public universities dropped between the 2008/2009 and 2012/2013 academic years. It decreased from 37.4 percent in 2008/2009 to 32.3 percent in 2012/2013 before increasing to 35.2 percent in the 2013/2014 academic year. In the 2018/19 academic year, female enrolment reached 42.2 percent in public universities, 38.3 percent in polytechnics/technical universities, 47.1 percent in colleges of education and 42.6 in private universities (NCTE 2019). Clearly, there have been improvements, albeit marginally since the 2013/14 academic period. What is also striking is the slow growth of female enrolment in polytechnics/technical universities. This is a far cry from the NCTE norm of a 50:50 enrolment parity for men and women.

Figure 1: Proportion of female enrolment in tertiary institutions in Ghana



Source: GoG 2015

Gender inequality is also reflected in enrolment in various disciplinary or subject areas, as well as the graduate outputs of universities. Table 2 presents enrolment figures for males and females in the major fields of study for the 2016/2017 academic year. It illustrates clearly the disparities between males and females in all fields of study. The widest gaps occur in engineering and the sciences, by an average of three quarters, and the lowest occurs in pharmacy. Fields of study like medicine/pharmacy, law and business administration are highly rated and prestigious in Ghana because it is believed they open opportunities for their graduates to get good jobs, making them vehicles for upward social mobility. Yet structural barriers constrain females from venturing into some fields of study, in particular science and engineering, because sociocultural norms socialize them to believe that some professions are the preserve of men. There is clearly a “gendering of disciplinary choice”, and this is significant “because higher education subject areas track students into different types of occupations and social hierarchies, thus contributing more widely to gender inequalities in civil society” (Morley and Lussier 2009:75).

Table 2: Student enrolment by subject – 2016/2017 academic year

Subject	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total
Humanities and Social Sciences	42,028 (58.4)	29,930 (41.6)	71,958
Business Administration	16,762 (63.1)	9,802 (36.9)	26,564
Science	23,329 (73.9)	8,198 (26.1)	31,527
Applied/Technology and Health Science	11,651 (60.7)	7,526 (39.3)	19,177
Engineering	9,110 (83.1)	1,853 (16.9)	10,963
Pharmacy	800 (53.9)	684 (46.1)	1,484
Medicine	3,396 (56.0)	2,667 (44.0)	6,063
Total	107,076 (63.8)	60,660 (36.2)	167,736

Source: NCTE 2017a

There is also a wide disparity between female and male graduates of universities in Ghana. Table 3 shows data on graduates produced by public universities for various programmes in the 2016/2017 academic year. Only in the lower level programmes such as certificates and diplomas do female graduates outnumber male graduates. In first degree programmes, which produced the highest numbers of graduates, there were almost twice as many male graduates as female graduates. For the highest-level programme, PhD, the number of male graduates was more than double the number of female graduates.

Table 3: Graduate output for public universities – 2016/2017

Programme	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total
Certificate	20 (20.83)	76 (79.17)	96
Diploma	6,531 (48.96)	6,808 (51.04)	13,339
First Degree	20,903 (63.72)	11,898 (36.28)	32,801
PG Cert/Dip	28 (68.29)	13 (31.71)	41
Master	2,339 (59.06)	1,621 (40.94)	3,960
MPhil	399 (69.87)	172 (30.13)	571
PhD	105 (70.46)	44 (29.54)	149
Total	30,325 (59.51)	20,632 (40.49)	50,957

Source: NCTE 2017a

3.3 Class dimension of inequity in access

As discussed previously, cost of university education in Ghana, consistent with the situation all over the world, has been rising under the neoliberal economic order. Public universities—which hitherto offered services on the principles of public good—started offering services based on market principles such as ability to pay. Fees and charges such as academic facility user fees (AFUF), residential facility user fees (RFUF), registration fees and examination fees—all previously paid by the government—have now become the responsibility of students and their parents (Atuahene 2012).

Poverty is one of the key structuring dynamics of various dimensions of inequality, including inequality in access to higher education. It is common knowledge that “poverty and the uneven distribution of material, social and cultural capital influences who has the capacity to aspire to higher education” (Morley et al. 2010:17), a claim that is particularly relevant in Africa where grinding poverty afflicts more people than any other place (Morley and Lussier 2009; Morley et al. 2010). A study by Brossard and Foko, referenced by Morley et al. (2010:18), establishes that “on average a student from the lowest socio-economic quintile in sub-Saharan Africa has fifteen times less chance of entering a university than one from the highest quintile.” The situation in Ghana is consistent with this finding. The rising cost of university education is closing out opportunities for people

in the lower classes to enrol in and complete university in Ghana (Morley et al. 2010:52-55; Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah 2013).

Despite the opportunities offered by the growth and expansion of universities across Ghana as already noted, the poor are, relative to the rich, unable to take advantage of these opportunities; availability in itself is not enough to reduce inequality. Why? The answer is simple: low-income students are unable to take advantage of these opportunities to actually obtain a university education. The concept of “conversion factors” (Robeyns 2017:46, 2016) is helpful in elaborating this assertion. Conversion factors determine the ability of, say, those in poverty to convert available resources and opportunities to attain the quality of life they desire, such as being well-nourished and highly educated. Poverty is itself an unfavourable conversion factor because it translates to a lack of various necessities of life that one needs before they can take advantage of class-/gender-neutral opportunities such as the availability of universities across Ghana.

In simple terms, poor and disadvantaged students face unfavourable social conversion factors, that is, the disadvantages inherent in the power and material hierarchies of the society to which they belong. For example, they do not have money to pay all the above-mentioned fees and charges to attend and complete university. On the other hand, they may have favourable personal conversion factors, for example, their academic brilliance. This may qualify them on merit to gain admission into university, but they may not be able to enrol in and complete the programmes of their choices. Their favourable personal conversion factors have been cancelled out by the unfavourable social conversion factors. This denies them the opportunity to attain a university education and the quality of life which comes with it. An earlier study on inequity in access based on class concluded that “higher education in Ghana then functions largely to place the children of the elite in high occupational positions” (Hurd and Johnson 1967:77). More than 50 years later, this conclusion is still valid because of similar class dynamics, despite widening participation in contemporary times (Leach et al. 2008; Morley et al. 2009).

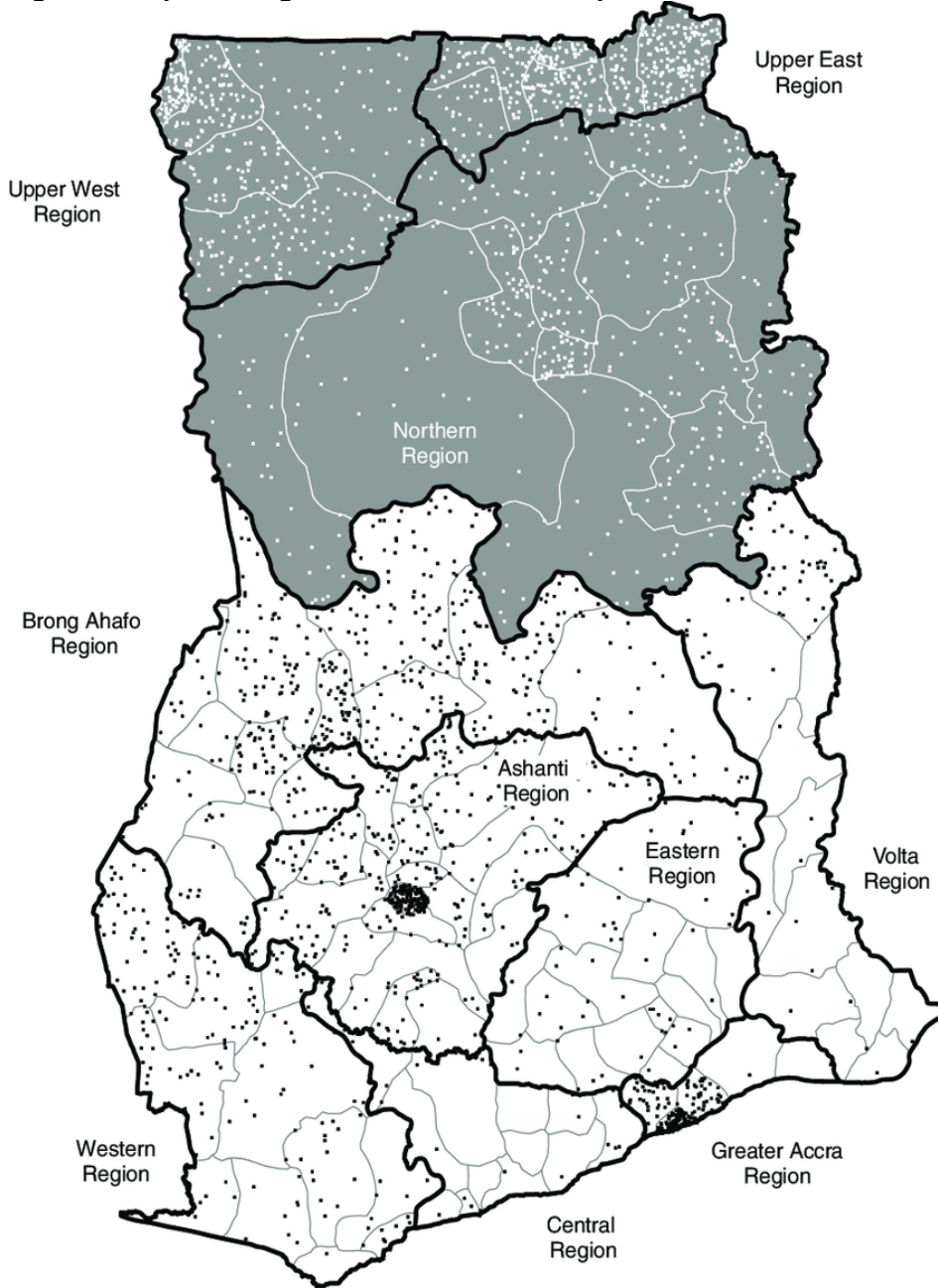
3.4 Establishment and spatial distribution of universities

In terms of spatial inequality, Ghana is broadly divided into north and south, a division commonly referred to as the north-south divide or the north-south gap (World Bank 2004; UNDP-Ghana 2018).¹⁷ As discussed above, the south is relatively more developed with less poverty, and the north less developed and with higher poverty levels. The country is also divided into administrative regions, of which there used to be ten (see figure 2), but six more regions were created in 2020 from four existing ones: Western Region, Volta Region, Brong Ahafo Region and Northern Region. For the purpose of this paper, the ten old administrative regions are used in the analysis of inequality in the spatial distribution of universities across the north-south divide. As Figure 2 illustrates, three of the ten

¹⁷ See also van der Geest (2011) and Mohammed (2018).

regions were located in the northern part (Northern, Upper East and Upper West), and the remaining seven were located in the southern part.

Figure 2: Map showing the North-South Development Divide¹⁸



Source: van der Geest (2011e:75)

Redolent of the north-south development divide, the majority of universities, both public and private, are concentrated in the southern part. Up until 2020, the University for Development Studies (UDS) was the only public university (out of a total of 12 in the country) located in northern Ghana (see table 4). The remaining eleven public universities were all located in the southern part of the country, with some of them running distance education centres in the north. With the establishment of two new universities in the

¹⁸ The shaded part of the map is the north and the rest is the south. The ten old administrative regions and their names are also illustrated in the map. The white dots in the north and the black in the south are not important to this paper.

Upper East and Upper West regions in 2020, northern Ghana now has three out of 14 public universities (table 4). Similarly, only three of the 10 new technical universities listed above are located in the northern part.¹⁹ Further, all these universities are located in urban centres—mostly in the regional capitals—posing challenges to access for rural applicants from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Table 4: Distribution of public universities across regions in Ghana

No.	University	Year Established	City	Region
1	University of Ghana	1948	Accra	Accra Region
2	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology	1951	Kumasi	Ashanti Region
3	University of Cape Coast	1962	Cape Coast	Central Region
4	University for Development Studies	1992	Tamale	Northern Region
5	University of Education, Winneba	1992	Winneba	Central Region
6	Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration	2004	Accra	Accra Region
7	University of Mines and Technology	2004	Tarkwa	Western
8	Ghana Institute of Journalism	2006	Accra	Accra Region
9	University of Energy and Natural Resources	2011	Sunyani	Bono Region
10	University for Health and Allied Sciences	2011	Ho	Volta Region
11	University of Professional Studies, Accra	2012	Accra	Accra Region
12	University of Environment and Sustainable Development	2014	Somanya	Eastern Region
13	C. K. Tedam University of Technology and Applied Sciences	2020	Navrongo	Upper-East Region
14	Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies	2020	Wa	Upper-West Region

Source: Authors' compilation based on various sources

The distribution of private universities and other tertiary institutions follows a similar pattern of geographic inequality. Most private universities are concentrated in three main cities in the southern part of Ghana, extremely skewed against rural, peri-urban, and northern parts of Ghana. There are 74 private universities and university colleges with valid accreditation in the country (NCTE 2017b), of which almost 65 percent (48) are located in Ghana's capital, Accra, 10.8 percent (8) in Kumasi, and 5.4 percent (4) in Tema. The rest are spread thinly across mainly urban centres in the southern part of the country, with only three located in northern Ghana, specifically in the regional capitals of Tamale (Northern Region), Bolgatanga (Upper East Region) and Wa (Upper West Region). Given that nearly half (49.1 percent) of Ghana's population lives in rural areas (GSS 2013), this highly uneven distribution of universities has negative implications in terms of access by the rural poor. Proximity to a tertiary institution reduces cost in terms of transportation and housing. The concentration of universities in regional capitals and

¹⁹ At the time of writing, the ten technical universities were not yet all fully operational; but if added to the 14 traditional public universities, Ghana has a total of 24, of which six are located in the northern part of the country.

urban areas raises the already high cost and adds another layer of exclusion of the rural and peri-urban populace from access to university education.

Spatial inequality is not a natural phenomenon. It is created and shaped by social relations and structures of power (see Mukherjee Reed 2008); and in this specific case, state-society relations where both the colonial and postcolonial state designed and implemented development policies biased in favour of southern Ghana and the urban areas, thus, marginalizing northern Ghana and rural areas.²⁰ Policies on formal education are some of the clearest examples of these biased development policies (Abdulai 2017). While the colonial state started and promoted formal education in the southern part of the country, it restricted the extension of the same to the northern part until several decades later (Behrends and Lentz 2012; UNDP-Ghana 2018). Education in northern Ghana was not a priority to the colonial government, because, in the scheme of things, it viewed the role of this part of the country as a source of cheap labour to work in its mines, railways and plantations (UNDP-Ghana 2018; Abdulai 2017). From the colonial era to present, the northern part of Ghana has lagged far behind the southern part in educational infrastructure and quality education, leading to a huge disparity in literacy between the two (Abdulai and Hickey 2016).²¹

Of course, the postcolonial Ghanaian state has implemented various development policies, some of which are aimed at closing the gap of development between urban and rural Ghana and southern and northern Ghana. These policies include the expansion of primary and secondary school infrastructure to rural areas and the northern regions. However, as already noted above, these policies have not significantly bridged the huge development gulf between the south and north, including asymmetry in the distribution of university infrastructure and access to university education.

The explosion of tertiary institutions discussed above has not transformed the spatial inequalities of access to university education between the northern and southern parts of Ghana, or the urban and rural. This point is illustrated not only by the uneven distribution of universities between the south and the north articulated above. It is also demonstrated by the low quality of primary and secondary education that students in the north and rural areas of the country receive relative to many of their southern counterparts in cities and towns. There are few good quality primary and secondary schools located in the rural areas of Ghana, especially northern Ghana, that can produce highly qualified candidates to compete based on merit for admission into university.²² After reviewing the enrolment figures by subject area in Ghana, Addae-Mensah (cited in Sawyerr 2004:22-23) concluded that:

With our present education system, over 70 percent of our future doctors, scientists, engineers, architects, pharmacists, agriculturists, future managers and

²⁰ See Plange (1979), Behrends and Lentz (2012) and Osei-Assibey (2014).

²¹ See also UNDP-Ghana (2018) and Blampied et al. (2018).

²² Sawyerr 2004; Manuh et al. 2007; Morley et al 2009; Morley and Lussier 2009.

other professionals in the humanities including lawyers, accountants and administrators will emerge from just about 10 percent of our schools, with almost 50 percent of all these categories emerging from...only 18 out of 504 Senior Secondary Schools.

The inequality in access to quality primary and secondary education impedes the ability of most secondary school students in northern Ghana, as well as their counterparts in the rural areas of southern Ghana, to convert opportunities offered by the expansion and growth of university education and institutions to actually gaining access to university education.

4. Efforts by Universities to Address Access Inequities

Some Ghanaian universities have adopted a range of strategies to widen access, as well as deal with inequities between men and women, rich and poor, southern and northern Ghana, and endowed and less-endowed secondary schools. Affirmative action policies, both formal and informal, have been implemented to bridge the gap of participation between men and women. Quotas and flexible admissions systems have been instituted to open more opportunities for poor and marginalized Ghanaians, namely “non-traditional” students such as women, people with physical disabilities, mature applicants and workers, as well as students from rural and deprived secondary schools (Morley et al. 2007). Financial barriers to participation by students from poor/deprived family backgrounds are also being addressed through student loan schemes, scholarships and financial aid schemes for underprivileged but talented students (Manuh et al. 2007).²³

The strategic plans of some of the public universities capture these equity policies. The UDS Strategic Plan for 2017-2023 outlined eight main goals and their key performance indicators. Three of the indicators of Goal 2, “Innovative Academic Programmes in tandem with Current Realities”, are on widening access and promoting equity of access: 1) attain a 50-50 ratio of male to female enrolment; 2) socially excluded groups make up 10 percent of student populations; 3) Increased access to Distance Education Programmes (UDS 2016:42). The University of Ghana (UG) Strategic Plan 2014-2024 identifies nine strategic priorities critical to accomplishing its vision as a “world class research-intensive university” over the next decade (UG 2014:7). Priority 4 is on gender and diversity, with one of its objectives being to develop and implement programmes and policies to promote gender equity and diversity in the University of Ghana (UG 2014). The key performance indicators of this priority are: 1) gender policy approved by University Council; 2) UG Day Care Centre completed and commissioned; 3) 25 percent access (facilities & services) for differently-abled persons; 4) 5 percent non-competitive admissions; 5) affirmative action policy is functional and supportive of the mission of the university (UG 2014:18).

²³ See Leach et al. (2008), Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah (2013) and Yussif and Ali (2013).

The existing literature demonstrates that the implementation of similar policies has had a positive impact on expansion of access and equity. Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah (2013) reported that the University of Ghana has since 2003 been admitting and giving financial aid to students from secondary schools designated by the Ministry of Education as Less-Endowed Secondary Schools (LESS). LESS schools are usually located in the rural areas of Ghana, ill-equipped to provide high-quality secondary education, and often draw their students from poor and rural families (Yusif and Ali 2013). The grades of students of these schools are usually low, unable to compete with their peers from elite, well-endowed secondary schools for the few admission slots in various university programmes. Yet, some exceptionally bright students of LESS schools overcome all the challenges they face to meet the minimum entry requirements set by the universities. However, because of the intense competition for admission, merely meeting the entry requirements may not suffice to gain admission. The quota—in place at UG, UCC, KNUST, UDS and others—therefore ensures that LESS students are offered admission when they meet minimum entry requirements. Similarly, innovative delivery systems such as distance learning and sandwich programmes designed by these universities are opening up more opportunities for people to gain access to university education.²⁴

Despite the efforts to widen participation, access in Ghana, as in most African countries, is still highly limited. While the demand for university education continues to rise, universities lack the capacity to meet this demand, even with the rise in the number of private universities. Many qualified applicants are not admitted to university because of the limited capacity of existing universities to absorb the rising number of applicants (Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah 2013:3; NCTE 2016). The gross enrolment ratio (GER) of tertiary education in Ghana is dismal, estimated at 14.2 percent and 16 percent in the 2014/15 and 2015/16 academic years respectively.²⁵ For comparison, in 2013, South Asia’s GER was about 25 percent, and that of Latin America and the Caribbean was about 70 percent (Gandhi 2018; see also UNESCO 2016:229).

In addition to the very low GER, disparities in access, shaped by gender, class and geographical location still abound, despite the above-mentioned interventions by some universities to promote access and equity. This foregrounds one fundamental question for further research: what more can *feasibly* be done by the Ghanaian state and universities to increase the GER and effectively address inequities in access?

5. Conclusion

This paper critically examines the role Ghanaian universities play in influencing the growing social inequality in Ghana. Against the backdrop of the current global development compact—the SDGs—the paper critically examines the ways in which university education may be contributing or not to “leaving no one behind” in Ghana by 2030. Considering the explosion of tertiary institutions and enrolment in the last three

²⁴ Morley et al. 2007; Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah 2013; Yusif and Ali 2013.

²⁵ MoE 2019. See also Morley et al. (2010) and Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah (2013).

decades, we have analysed why and how the inequalities of gender, class and geographic location shape access to university education in Ghana.

Empirically, the analysis is based on secondary data, both quantitative and qualitative. The key findings of the paper are consistent with developments in the global landscape of university education: participation has widened in Ghana in the last three decades, just as it has across the world. Paradoxically, this has not significantly bridged the wide gap in access/participation between the elite classes and disadvantaged groups in Ghana: women, the poor, and segments of the populace living in northern and rural parts of Ghana.

One of the reasons accounting for the persisting gap in access/participation is the increasing commodification of university education, as both public and private universities charge fees which underprivileged Ghanaians cannot afford to pay. This has gravely constricted the capacity of poor Ghanaians to take advantage of the opportunities opened by the expansion of universities in the country to attain higher education. A corollary of the foregoing is the deprivation of critical capabilities of life, including employable skills and the ability to meet the desire to “escape poverty” and to “become a somebody” (Morley et al. 2010). Another is that it constrains the agency of the disadvantaged classes to struggle to transform the matrices of power in favour of their own emancipation (Mukherjee Reed 2008).

Even though the Ghanaian government and universities are committed to widening university participation and promoting equity in access, the policies and measures they have adopted have not addressed these problems in any significant or sustainable way. They have implemented, for instance, affirmative action admission quotas, aimed at bridging the gap in access between men and women, between rural and urban, and between rich and poor. However, the gap in access remains wide, and reinforces, rather than transforms, the widening social inequality in Ghana. The reason for the dismal failures of these policies, despite the good intentions shaping them, is that they do not go far enough to address—borrowing from Mukherjee Reed (2008)—the enduring power structures which have, on one hand, limited the opportunities and life chances of disadvantaged and underprivileged Ghanaians, and on the other, constrained their ability as agents of their own emancipation.

In light of these findings, we suggest four main thematic areas for further research, aimed at providing solid evidence upon which policy interventions may serve to make university education in Ghana more accessible and equitable. First, and in no particular order of priority, is the impact of university education on inequality. What role do universities play in increasing or ameliorating inequalities in Ghana, especially those linked to class, gender and geographic location? The second thematic area is finance and funding: as a major factor affecting poor people’s access to education, it is important to assess the effectiveness of existing funding schemes addressing inequity in access between the rich and poor classes, and to explore how to improve them. The third thematic area is widening

access: in light of the myriad of measures being adopted by both government and universities to widen participation, it is critical to assess the affordability, effectiveness and quality of service provided by these innovative measures of delivering higher education. The quality of university education is as important as the widening of participation, yet it seems the measures of government and universities are heavily weighted towards widening participation. As correctly noted by Morley (2011:342), a lot of work has to be done to ensure that “widening participation and underfunded expansion in African HE is not just a question of ‘a flood of students into increasingly dysfunctional institutions.’” Could it be that the universities and other tertiary institutions being established in Ghana to expand access are ill-equipped to meet the challenge? The last, and certainly not least, area for further research is E-education: with the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution, opportunities exist for widening access without compromising quality through E-learning, by drawing on resources and expertise across the world. But attention must be paid to counteracting challenges, such as the ICT access gap between the developed and less-developed countries, and within the less-developed countries, the ICT gap between the rich and the poor, and the urban and rural populace. Research into the possibilities and challenges of E-delivery of university education in the specific setting of ICT development in Africa will push the boundaries of knowledge and policy interventions on widening access and promoting equity in participation.

References

- Abdulai, Abdul-Gafaru. 2017. "Rethinking spatial inequality in development: The primacy of power relations." *Journal of International Development*, 29(3):386-403.
- Abdulai, Abdul-Gafaru and Sam Hicke. 2016. "The politics of development under competitive clientelism: Insights from Ghana's education sector." *African Affairs*, 115 (458):44-72.
- Annim, Samuel Kobina, Simon Mariwah and Joshua Sebu. 2012. "Spatial inequality and household poverty in Ghana." *Economic Systems*, 36(4):487-505.
- Anyan, James. 2009. *The impacts of tuition fees on higher education accessibility and equity: The case of the University of Ghana*. Masters Dissertation. Finland: University of Tampere.
- Apusigah, Agnes Atia. 2009. "Over Fifty Years of Independence - What has Happened to Equity in Higher Education." Afribary.com. <https://afribary.com/works/over-fifty-years-of-independence-what-has-happened-to-equity-in-higher-education>.
- Atherton, Graeme, ed. 2017. *Access to higher education: Understanding global inequalities*. London: Palgrave Macmillan Education.
- Atuahene, Francis. 2012. "The impact of 'tuition-paying' policy on retention and graduation rates at the University of Ghana." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 14(1):37-65.
- Atuahene, Francis and Anthony Owusu-Ansah. 2013. "A Descriptive Assessment of higher education access, participation, equity, and disparity in Ghana." *SAGE Open*, July-September 1-16.
- Ayelazuno, Jasper Abembia. 2019. "Electoral democracy and the attenuation of subaltern resistance in Ghana: Why democracy is increasingly becoming a poisoned chalice in Africa." *Nokoko*, 7:47-78.
- Ayelazuno, Jasper Abembia. 2015. "African Youth and Global Resistance to Neoliberalism: Exploring the Dialectics between Cosmopolitan and Identity politics." In *Globalizing the African Youth: Challenges, Agency and Resistance*, edited by P. Ugor and L. Mawuko-Yevugah. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing.
- Ayelazuno, Jasper Abembia. 2014. "Neoliberalism and growth without development in Ghana: A case for state-led industrialization." *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 49(1):80-99.
- Baah-Boateng, William. 2004. *Employment policies for sustainable development: The experience of Ghana*. A Paper presented at a national workshop on an Employment Framework for Ghana's Poverty Reduction Strategy, Accra, 7 May.
- Behrends, Andrea and Carola Lentz. 2012. "Education, careers, and home ties: The ethnography of an emerging middle class from northern Ghana." *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 137(2):139 -164.
- Blampied, Catherine, Imran Aziz, Soumya Chattopadhyay, Christine Ellison, Romilly Greenhill, Rachel Thompson, Abdul-Gafaru Abdulai and Adam Salifu. 2018. *Leaving No One Behind in the Health and Education Sectors: An SDG Stock Take*

- in Ghana*. London: Overseas Development Institute. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12146.pdf>.
- Cooke, Edgar, Sarah Hague and Andy McKay. 2016. *The Ghana poverty and inequality report – 2016*. Accra: UNICEF.
- Daswani, Girish. 2020. “On cynicism: Activist and artistic responses to corruption in Ghana.” *Cultural Anthropology*, 35(1):104-133.
- Driscoll, Barry. 2020. “Democratization, party systems, and the endogenous roots of Ghanaian clientelism.” *Democratization*, 27(1):119-136.
- Effah, Paul. 2011. “A Ghanaian response to the study on ‘Widening participation in higher education in Ghana and Tanzania’: Developing an equity scorecard.” *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 6(4):374 -382.
- Frankema, Ewout and Marlous Van Waijenburg. 2018. “Africa rising? A historical perspective.” *African Affairs*, 117(469):543-568.
- Gandhi, Dhruv. 2018. *Figures of the week: Higher education enrolment grows in Sub-Saharan Africa along with disparities in enrolment by income*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2018/01/10/figures-of-the-week-higher-education-enrollment-grows-in-sub-saharan-africa-along-with-disparities-in-enrollment-by-income/>.
- Ghana National Commission for UNESCO. 2017. *More People Attend University in Ghana as Global Number Increases – UNESCO*. Accra: Ghana National Commission for UNESCO. <http://unescoghana.org/more-people-attend-university-in-ghana-as-global-number-increases-unesco/>.
- Girdwood, Alison. 1999. *Tertiary education policy in Ghana – An assessment: 1988-1998*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/226311468750536874/Tertiary-education-policy-in-Ghana-an-assessment-1988-1998>.
- GoG (Government of Ghana). 2015. *Education Sector Performance Report*. Accra: Ministry of Education.
- Gruber, Lloyd and Stephen Kosack. 2013. “The tertiary tilt: Education and inequality in the developing world.” *World Development*, 54:253–272.
- GSS (Ghana Statistical Service). 2018. *Ghana living standards survey round 7 (GLSS 7): Poverty trends in Ghana 2005 – 2017*. Accra: GSS. https://www2.statsghana.gov.gh/docfiles/publications/GLSS7/Poverty%20Profile%20Report_2005%20-%202017.pdf.
- GSS (Ghana Statistical Service). 2013. *2010 Population and housing census: National analytic report*. Accra: GSS. https://statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/2010_PHC_National_Analytical_Report.pdf.
- Hurd, G. E. and T. J. Johnson. 1967. “Education and social mobility in Ghana.” *Sociology of Education*, 40(1):55-79.
- Huq, Mozammel and Michael Tribe. 2018. *The economy of Ghana: 50 years of economic development*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Jerven, Morten. 2010. "African growth recurring: An economic history perspective on African growth episodes, 1690–2010." *Economic History of Developing Regions*, 25(2):127-154.
- Kosack, Stephen. 2014. "The logic of pro-poor policymaking: Political entrepreneurship and mass education." *British Journal of Political Science*, 44:409-444.
- Leach, Fiona, Louise Morley, Rosemary Lugg, Amandina Lihamba, James Opare, Rosemarie Mwaipopo, Linda Dzame Forde, Godwin Egbenya and Eustella Bhalalusesa. 2008. *Working Paper 4: Policies for Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania*. Brighton: University of Sussex. <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=working-paper-4.pdf&site=43>.
- Li, Tania Murray. 2013 "Jobless growth and relative surplus populations." *Anthropology Today*, 29(3):1-2.
- Lindberg, Staffan I. 2003. "'It's our time to 'chop': do elections in Africa feed neo-patrimonialism rather than counter-act it?" *Democratization*, 10(2):121-140.
- Manuh, Takyiwaa, Sulley Gariba and James Budu. 2007. *Change and transformation in Ghana's publicly funded universities: A study of experiences, lessons and opportunities*. Oxford: James Currey Ltd.; Accra: Woeli Publishing Services.
- Marcucci, Pamela, Johnstone, D. Bruce and Mary Ngolovoi. 2008. "Higher Educational cost-sharing, dual-track tuition fees, and higher educational access: The East African experience." *Peabody Journal of Education*, 83(1):101-116.
- Martel, Mirka. 2019. *Leveraging higher education to promote social justice: Evidence from the IFP Alumni Tracking Study*. Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program Alumni Tracking Study Report, No. 5. New York: Institute of International Education. <https://p.widencdn.net/kei61u/IFP-Alumni-Tracking-Study-Report-5>.
- Milanovic, Branko. 2016. *Global inequality: A new approach for the age of globalization*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- MoE (Ministry of Education). 2019. *Education strategic plan 2018-2030*. Accra: Ministry of Education, Ghana. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2019-05-education-strategic-plan-2018-2030.pdf>.
- Mohamedbhai, Goolam. 2014. "Massification in higher education institutions in Africa: Causes, consequences and responses." *International Journal of African Higher Education*, 1(1).
- Mohammed, Abdul-Wadudu Adam. 2018. "Political Economy of State Intervention in the 'Regional Problem': Insights from the Savannah Accelerated Development Programme (SADEP)–Ghana." *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 5(12):548-569.
- Morley, Louise. 2011. "Experiencing higher education in Ghana and Tanzania: The symbolic power of being a student." In *Widening Participation in Higher Education*, edited by Tamsin Hinton-Smith, 245-262. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Morley, Louise, Fiona Leach, Kattie Lussier, Amandina Lihamba, Rosemarie Mwaipopo, L. Forde and Godwin Egbenya. 2010. *Widening participation in higher education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing an equity scorecard*. Research Report. Brighton: University of Sussex. <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=full-report---final.pdf&site=43>.
- Morley, Louise, Fiona Leach and Rosemary Lugg. 2009. "Democratising higher education in Ghana and Tanzania: Opportunity Structures and Social inequalities." *International Journal of Educational Development*, 29:56–64.
- Morley, Louise and Kattie Lussier. 2009. "Intersecting poverty and participation in higher education in Ghana and Tanzania." *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 19(2):71-85.
- Morley, Louise, Fiona Leach, Rosemary Lugg, Amandina Lihamba, James Opare, Eustella Bhalalusesa, Linda Dzama Forde, Godwin Egbenya and Rosemarie Mwaipopo. 2007. *Widening participation in higher education in Ghana and Tanzania: developing an equity scorecard - Working paper 1: Setting the scene*. Brighton: University of Sussex. <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=working-paper-1.pdf&site=43>.
- Mukherjee Reed, Ananya. 2008. *Human development and social power: Perspectives from South Asia*. London: Routledge.
- NAB (National Accreditation Board). 2019. *Accredited Public Universities in Ghana*. Accra: NAB. <http://www.nab.gov.gh/public-universities>. Accessed on 5 August 2019.
- NCTE (National Council for Tertiary Education). 2019. *Summary of basic statistics on tertiary education institutions 2018/19*. Accra: NCTE. Mimeo.
- NCTE. 2017a. *Summary of basic statistics on public universities 2016/2017*. Accra: NCTE. <http://ncte.edu.gh/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PUBLIC-UNIVERSITIES16.pdf>. Accessed 15 July 2019.
- NCTE. 2017b. *Summary of basic Statistics on private universities 2016/2017*. Accra: NCTE. <http://ncte.edu.gh/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/PRIVATE-UNIVERSITIES16.pdf>. Accessed 15 July 2019.
- NCTE. 2016. *Statistical report on tertiary education for 2015/2016 Academic Year*. Accra: NCTE. <http://ncte.edu.gh/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FINAL-STATISTICAL-REPORT-ON-TERTIARY-EDUCATION16.pdf>. Accessed 15 July 2019.
- NDPC (National Development Planning Commission). 2018. *Ghana sustainable development goals (SDGs): Indicator baseline report*. Accra: NDPC.
- Novignon, Jacob, Justice Nonvignon and Richard Mussa. 2018. "The poverty and inequality nexus in Ghana." *International Journal of Social Economics*, 45(2):246-258.
- Oxfam International. 2019. *The West Africa Inequality Crisis: How West African governments are failing to reduce inequality, and what should be done about it*.

- Oxford: Oxfam International. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/west-africa-inequality-crisis>.
- Paller, Jeffrey W. 2019. *Democracy in Ghana: Everyday politics in urban Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Piketty, Thomas. 2014. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Plange, Nii-K. 1979. "‘Opportunity cost’ and labour migration: A misinterpretation of proletarianisation in Northern Ghana." *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 17(4):655–676.
- Republic of Ghana. 2008. *2008 Education Act (Act 778)*. Accra: Parliament House.
- Republic of Ghana. 1992. *Constitution of the Republic of Ghana*. Accra: Ghana Publishing Company Limited.
- Robeyns, Ingrid. 2017. *Wellbeing, freedom and social justice: The capability approach re-examined*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.
- Robeyns, Ingrid. 2006. "Three models of education: Rights, capabilities and human capital." *Theory and Research in Education*, 4(1):69-84.
- Sawyerr, Akilagpa. 2004. "Challenges facing African universities: Selected issues." *African Studies Review*, 47(1):1-59.
- Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Senadza, Bernardin. 2012. "Education inequality in Ghana: Gender and spatial dimensions." *Journal of Economic Studies*, 39(6):724-739.
- UN (United Nations). 2015. *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015*. New York: UN. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf.
- UNDP-Ghana (United Nations Development Programme - Ghana). 2018. *Northern Ghana human development report: Bridging the poverty gap and fostering socio-economic transformation and empowerment to contribute to human development for all*. Accra: UNDP. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/2935/undp_ng-hdr20report_2018_igc_online.pdf.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2018. *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update. Briefing note for countries on the 2018 Statistical Update*. Ghana. New York: UNDP. https://www.gh.undp.org/content/dam/ghana/docs/Reports/UNDP_GH_HDI_Countrynote%202018_%20Global.pdf. Accessed 22 December 2018.
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation). 2016. *The global education monitoring report*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
- UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation). 2014. *Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
- UDS (University for Development Studies). 2016. *Strategic plan 2017-2023*. Tamale: University for Development Studies. <http://udspace.uds.edu.gh/jspui/bitstream/123456789/2340/1/UNIVERSITY%2>

- 0FOR%20DEVELOPMENT%20STUDIES%20STRATEGIC%20PLAN%202017-2023.pdf.
- UG (University of Ghana). 2019. *Schedule of fees: Provisional fees for 2019-2020 Academic Year*. Accra: University of Ghana. <https://www.ug.edu.gh/aad/fees>.
- UG (University of Ghana). 2014. *Strategic plan 2014 – 2024*. Accra: University of Ghana Public Affairs Directorate. <https://www.ug.edu.gh/pad/publication/ug-strategic-plan>.
- UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development). 2019. *Overcoming inequalities in the context of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. Issue Brief No. 10. Geneva: UNRISD.
- van der Geest, K. 2011. “North-South migration in Ghana: what role for the environment?” *International Migration*, 49:e69-e94.
- Whitfield, Lindsay. 2018. *Economies after colonialism: Ghana and the struggle for power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- World Bank. 2014. *Voice and agency: Empowering women and girls for shared prosperity*. Washington, D.C: The World Bank.
- World Bank. 2009. *Accelerating catch-up tertiary education for growth in sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- World Bank. 2004. “Bridging the North South Divide in Ghana.” Washington, D.C.: The World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/9053>.
- World Bank. 2000. *Higher education in developing countries: Peril and promise*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- World Inequality Lab. 2017. *World inequality report 2018*. Paris: World Inequality Lab. <https://wir2018.wid.world/files/download/wir2018-summary-english.pdf>.
- Yussif, H. M. and B. Ali. 2013. “Academic performance of less endowed high school students in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.” *Journal of Science and Technology*, 33(2):104-117.