

# POLICY BRIEF



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## From school to work in six African countries: how are women faring?

Despite significant gains in education, evidence from six African countries shows that formal employment opportunities are not keeping pace, while girls and women are disadvantaged by care duties.

### WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Female labour force participation in sub-Saharan Africa is higher than in many other areas of the developing world, but fewer young women work in formal waged jobs. Female educational attainment levels are also lower than in other regions, while fertility rates are higher, with women typically having children at younger ages.

Young African women commonly balance work and family responsibilities by working more in household activities or engaging in agriculture, or in casual wage work. By leaving school early and having children in their teens, young women have fewer livelihood options and face diminished horizons. Interventions that can reach them early in life to help them stay longer in school can have a greater impact on the skills they learn, their future careers, and the contributions they make to their societies.

### CONSULTATION HIGHLIGHTS

#### KEY RESULTS

- Education levels have increased substantially and gender gaps have narrowed.
- Employment opportunities have not kept pace with progress in educational attainment.
- Young women are tending to marry later and remain in school longer, though progress is varied.
- Marriage for women is associated with lower education and literacy rates and lower chances of occupying a white-collar job.
- Having young children at home decreases young women's educational and employment outcomes.

To shed light on the factors that may be encouraging or deterring young women from achieving higher education and better employment outcomes, researchers examined evidence on school-to-work transitions in six African countries: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Using comparable survey data from each country, the research examined the education and employment outcomes for young women and men, along with a range of related household and individual characteristics, and how these have changed over time.

The findings presented here aim to inform policymakers in relevant country ministries and in international organisations seeking to design interventions that will enhance women's educational and employment outcomes.

## METHODS

Using datasets from the most recent and earliest available Demographic and Health Surveys from each country, researchers compared data on the key education and employment outcomes over time and across the six countries. The periods of time covered ranged from 11 to 21 years.

Research teams first analysed changes over time in each country, and then examined how factors such as wealth, marital status, and household composition are associated with education and employment outcomes for young women and men over time. They examined literacy rates and completion of secondary education among students ages 15 to 20, as these years are crucial to labour market transitions. In terms of employment outcomes, researchers analysed the percentage of 21- to 29-year-olds working in agriculture as well as in professional, managerial, technical, and clerical jobs which require higher levels of education. Lastly, they analysed marital/cohabitation status and the number of children in households, as these factors correlate with the educational and employment outcomes.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Education levels have increased substantially and gender gaps have narrowed.

Data shows that literacy and secondary schooling rates have improved significantly over the time periods examined in almost all countries, with particularly large gains in Ghana. In the other five countries, there were significant gender

gaps in educational outcomes in the base year, but these have largely been reduced, and sometimes eliminated by the most recent year. Girls are catching up with boys in terms of educational outcomes. For example, in Kenya and Uganda 15- to 20-year-old girls have reached parity with boys in the same age range in terms of having attended some secondary schooling.



### Employment opportunities have not kept pace with progress in educational attainment.

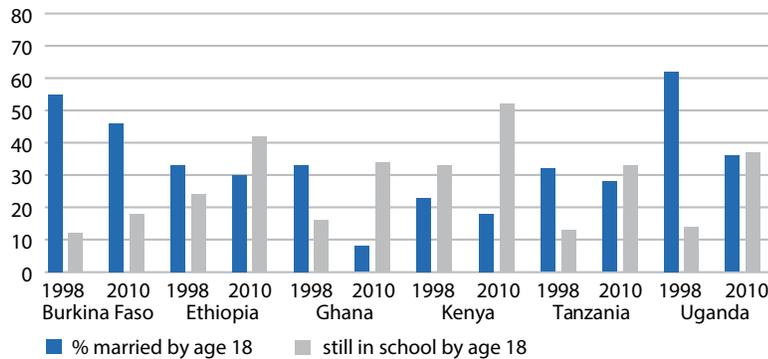
While there have been considerable gains in education and addressing gender gaps, over the same period, there has been substantially less progress in terms of work outcomes. Only in Ghana and Kenya has there been significant movement out of agricultural and into better quality "white collar" jobs. In Ghana, 7.6% of young women aged 15 to 29 worked in a professional, managerial, technical, or clerical position in 2014, compared with only 1.6% in 1993, while those in agriculture dropped from 25.1% to 12.5%.

But the numbers able to obtain white collar jobs are substantially less than those who may have the required levels of education for these positions. For instance, 31.7% of 21- to 29-year-old Ghanaian women have completed secondary education or higher, but only 11.1% in the same age range have white collar jobs. By contrast, 17.5% of men in this age range report having white collar jobs. In the other countries, there is limited growth in opportunities for educated workers, and in Burkina Faso, Tanzania, and Uganda, there has been movement of workers into agriculture. In broad terms, there is less evidence of females catching up with males in the workplace than is the case for education.

### Young women are tending to marry later and remain in school longer, but progress is varied.

The age at which most young women are married has been rising in each of the countries, though at varying rates. Even in the later year in all countries other than Ghana and Kenya, more than one-quarter of young women are married by age

### Percentage of women married by age 18 and still in school by age 18



Source: Authors' calculation from DHS survey data.

18 (See figure). In all cases, the proportion marrying by age 18 has fallen compared with the base year. In Burkina Faso, Tanzania, and Uganda, girls get married earlier than those in Kenya and Ghana. In Uganda, which previously had the highest percentage of young women married by the age of 18, 63% of girls were married by this age in 1995, compared with only 35% in 2011. Girls are also remaining longer in school across all six countries, with good progress seen in Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Uganda, where attendance had been lowest in their base years. Attendance in Uganda has more than doubled for girls aged 18 and above.



#### Marriage for young women is associated with lower education and literacy rates and lower chances of occupying a white-collar job.

In all countries included in the study, very few married women go to school. Data for Uganda, for example, show that 24.5% of unmarried 19-year-old women were attending school, compared with only 0.4% of their married peers, and this pattern is true in all countries. Husbands are generally

older than their wives and few 19-year-old men are married. In almost all countries, married women are significantly less likely to hold a better quality job.

#### Having young children at home decreases young women's educational and employment outcomes.

The presence of young children in households appears to reduce the likelihood of a young woman receiving a good education and thus a high quality job, irrespective of whether the children are the respondent's own offspring or those of another female house member. Researchers found a mild negative association between young children in the household and having a white-collar job, and a strong negative correlation with passing a literacy test and staying on in school to secondary level. This likely reflects the burden of care placed on women and girls for both their own offspring and siblings. Researchers found a mild negative association between young children in the household and having a white-collar job and a strong negative correlation with passing a literacy test and staying on in school to secondary level.



## POLICY LESSONS

While research highlighted some important demographic factors associated with literacy, higher education, and better employment, further study is needed to confirm that these links are causal. Nonetheless, findings provide some preliminary evidence to suggest:

### **Further measures are needed to close the gender gap and keep girls in school longer.**

While the improvements in educational attainment levels and the reduction of the gender gap are positive achievements, many young people, particularly young women, still do not complete secondary school. This is associated with poorer work outcomes and often earlier marriage or childbirth. Creating opportunities for young married women or young mothers to continue their education is essential to enhance prospects for better livelihoods. This may include a range of incentives, as well as reducing barriers to girls' school attendance.

### **Reducing the burden of care may improve education and employment outcomes for women.**

The evidence that women's educational and job prospects are diminished by the presence of young children in the home suggests efforts are needed to reduce the burden of care. This might include better access to daycare and encouraging new norms that see more equitable sharing of domestic duties within households.

### **Young people need quality education, geared to labour markets.**

Higher levels of education could potentially enable young women to obtain better jobs and may influence women to choose to marry later. But if the available education is seen to be of poor quality or irrelevant to job prospects, or if young people perceive there may be no jobs available when they graduate, many may choose early marriage and/or early entry into the labour market.

### **Education alone is insufficient to improve employment.**

The lag between improvements in educational outcomes and youth moving into quality jobs highlights that more education alone is not the solution. Governments need to also consider a range of measures to create better employment opportunities for young people. Offering companies incentives to hire more youth may be one avenue, but a broader approach, aimed at creating the right macroeconomic conditions to generate more jobs, is equally important.

*This brief presents findings and policy lessons identified in a paper prepared by the University of Nairobi, the University of Sussex, and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, through the GrOW initiative. See Mariara, Jane, Andy McKay, Andy Newell, and Cinzia Rienzo. 2017. "The changing path to adulthood for girls in six African countries from the 1990s to the 2010s: An analysis based on the Demographic and Health Surveys."*

*Brief produced by Andy McKay, Mary O' Neill, Alejandra Vargas and Martha Melesse. Opinions stated in this brief and the paper it draws from, are those of authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the GrOW program partners.*



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