

Best Practices in Gender Mainstreaming in the Academia: Lessons from African Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: *Gender equity in higher education has been faced with continued resistance over the years in Africa resulting from the extension of the patriarchal nature of the society. This has impacted negatively on the composition of human resources in academic. Female staff are fewer than males and mostly occupy lower grades while the male counterpart take possession of the top level positions and constitute the decision making organ. Gender mainstreaming has been adopted as a strategy for promoting gender equality in higher education in Africa. Although it is still in infancy stage with new emerging issues, gender equality must be entrenched into the structures and system of higher education to enhance its sustainability.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Mothers, who educate the whole world, are not considered educators;

Women Who nurse and treat are not considered Healers.

Women who do sixty per cent of agricultural work are not considered Farmers. (Bhasin, 1993:18)

Gender disparities has been an important subject of discuss in the various societal organizations. Inequalities exist in numerous forms and are prevalent in the home, school and in the community. This is reflected in interactions between males and females, where the female is viewed as lower in status as compared to the male. On many occasions credit is given to men over women where there is an overwhelming achievement of new discovery that are of great benefit to the human race. Women are rarely found to have performed similar feats either in the past or at present, yet human intelligence is the same in both sexes, but with different capabilities that can be leveraged for a wholesome development. Numerous International, regional and national instruments such as conventions, declarations, platforms, action plans, resolutions and agreements particularly the convention on the Elimination of all forms of Gender Discriminations (CEDAW), the Beijing Plan of action and the Millennium Development Goal 3 have been formulated to promote gender equality through adoption of measures and strategies for eliminating all forms of discrimination against women in all sectors towards sustainable human and community development in partnering countries .

Akinsanya&Onah(2012) noted that gender mainstreaming emerged as a key strategy for entrenching equity in gender relations following the acceptance and domestication of the international treaties in many African Nations. Gender mainstreaming which was translated into national policies, strategies, programmes and plans became a process for assessing the implications of legislation, programmes and activities on men and women's concerns and experiences as well as seeking to address inequalities in women's and men's roles in society and their needs in development intervention. This has necessitated changes to policies, institutional cultures, resource allocation and design of intervention for promoting gender equality. UNIFEM (1995) described gender equality as a discussion around the possibility of effecting changes in societal structures, systems and mechanisms which contribute to maintaining the unequal power relationships between women and men and a space to reach a better balance in male and female values and priorities.

Discuss around gender equality in academia has attracted a considerable number of studies about the causes and consequences of women's under-representation particularly in science and technology (Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, and Uzzi, 2000; European Commission Research Directorate-General, 2000; Fielding, Glover, and Smeaton, 1997; Greenwood, 2000; Rose, 1998). The position of women in academics in Africa reflects a general trend where women continue to be under represented in high status and rewarding positions. In many Africa institutions of higher education, gender issues are regarded with fear and trepidation. Gender advocates are stigmatized and viewed as promoting westernized, un-African and donor-inspired agenda. These attitudes especially from the male counterpart is often masked with ignorance about gender issues and influence of existing gender biases and stereotype in the society are being internalized and acted out in higher education context. This paper focuses extent of gender equality and participation in academia and highlights best practices in mainstreaming gender equality in African Higher Educational institutions

2. EMERGING GENDER ISSUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Academic field has been described as largely impenetrable and that principles, which have traditionally organized the academy, have excluded women (Wanda, 2005). Even where they exist, women staff tends to be concentrated in lower grades or less secure posts and hardly holding positions of responsibility. Several studies (Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, & Uzzi, 2000, Assié-Lumumba, 2007.) have alluded to the existing gender gaps in the higher education institutions and its spiral effect on human development and technological advancement. For instance, data from the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) spanning the Commonwealth illustrate that of the overall gender distribution of academic staff above senior lecturer level, 25.3% were women compared to 74.7% men in 2006 (Singh, 2008). Statistics also convey that only 9.8% of executive heads were women in Commonwealth Higher Education Institutions in the same year 2006. When comparing this to the statistics for the year 2000, it shows that this is only an increase of 0.8 percent. Furthermore, the personal narratives and experiences of many women academics convey the gender bias and discrimination faced by them at their workplaces (Morley, 2006). Aside from which, university workplaces still do not account for the Gender-specific needs of both women and men academics, administrators or students (such as crèches or mechanisms to combat sexual harassment in managing universities. A review of studies across the world by Stiver, Barnes and Harding (1994), reported that gender gap in the university were found to have two dimensions status and power differentials among faculties and administrators; student subject and career choices bringing about an under representation of women at high level positions.

The proportions of women who are able to secure academic positions are largely dependent on their enrolment and completion of higher education. Older institutions and the some of the recent ones in Africa did not adopt any policies on gender equity until recently. This might be because the Europeans who were instrumental to the establishment of the institutions at that time had not adopted any gender-equality policies in access, output, and outcome in their own countries (Assié-Lumumba, 2007; Gaidzanwa, 2007; Meena, 2007; Odora-Hoppers, 2007). Following this tradition set at the inception of higher education in Africa, University education has generally favoured the male populations due to the prevailing cultural and social attitudes in society and the subsequent policies and practices whose explanatory factors are patriarchal. There are social values that were inherited from colonial policies and that have persisted in Africa even when major changes have taken place in former colonial countries that transferred such values (Mlama, 1998). The interaction of such values with cultural factors and gender-blind policies leads to the persistent gender imbalance in higher education throughout Africa.

In Zimbabwe, Gaidzanwa (2007) noted that the University is an unfriendly and overtly gender-based hostile environment for both female students and staff members. Indicators of the unwelcoming atmosphere of the higher education identified by Mlama (1998) is characterized by its 'maleness', sexual harassment, some shortcomings of the lecturers, especially where poor preparation and lack of awareness make it practically impossible for female students to benefit fully from their learning experience; especially glaring in hitherto male-dominated subjects, in which the few enrolled female students have to endure loneliness and lack of support from fellow female students. In Rwanda, Rubagiza (2010) documented the proportion of academic staff of the two largest institution of higher learning, The National University of Rwanda (NUR) and

Kigali Institute of Science and Technology (KIST) as 21 percent females to 79 percent males and 16 percent females to 84 percent males respectively in 2004 (Ministry of Education Rwanda). This under representation of women in academic positions reinforces evidence of entrenched male dominance, gender based violence, abuse of human rights and consequently a gender biased society.

Pereira (2002) noted that although University system tends to be spoken of in gender neutral terms, the effects of their workings are far from gender neutral. In Nigeria, The first female staff was employed in the year of Nigeria's independence, 1960 in the Department of History at University of Ibadan (Akinsanya, 2012) and thirty-six year after the first female staff was employed, Abiola (2003) reported that the proportions of female academic staff recruited in Nigerian Universities in 1996/97 was 9.2% in Social Sciences; 12.8 % in Sciences, 14.7 % in Arts and 22.2 % in Education. Similarly, Okebukola (2002) reported that in 2001/2002 sessions, the total number of Nigerian University teachers was 20,124 out of which, 3174 (15.7%) are females while 17,040 (84.3%) are males. Moreover, there were a total of 2,442 professors in the Nigerian University system. This makes up 12.1% of the total population of all the academic staff. Also Female full professors make up very low percentage of the professorial college (6.9% only). In the same vein, the distribution of students in Science and Technology reflected the same pattern of male overrepresentation as shown by the 1996 National Universities Commission (NUC) data. Data on student enrolment in Nigerian universities in the Sciences shows only 31.7% were women (NUC, 1996). However, the corresponding proportions in Social Sciences and Arts were 37.6 % and 44.6 % respectively (Pereira, 2002). Available data show glaringly that academic positions is clearly dominated by men and effort at inducing changes continues to meet with resistance and resentment in addition to gendered typed inhibitions such as childbearing and rearing, cooking and domestic household chores that are major concerns of women irrespective of their choice of career. Alele-Williams (1992) and FME,(2006) adduced role conflicts between the work place and the home based on religious beliefs and the cultural dependency of woman on their husbands as reasons for the low female participation among the academic staff of tertiary institutions.

3. BEST PRACTICES IN POLICY AND PROGRAM INTERVENTION WITH POTENTIAL FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Education by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on 14 December 1960 signaled current trend to mainstream gender in higher education in Africa. Article 10 of CEDAW specifically stipulated that 'parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to promote rights on a basis of equality of men and women' (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa,1995). This sets the stage for a systematic alignment of African discourses officially on global positions for gender equality in 1963. The creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 propelled African countries to sign a number of major binding agreements including the historic AfricanBanjul Charter on Human and People's Rights adopted on 27th June, 1981, and enforced on 21st October, 1986. At the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action set goals for gender equity, development and global peace and adopted gender mainstreaming as the preferred strategy for women empowerment.

Advancement and empowerment of women was proposed to be achieved through the twelve critical areas highlighted in the Platform of Action (POA). As stated in Article 4 of the convention that overcoming the obstacles to women's access to higher education is an urgent priority in the renewal process for ensuring an equitable and non-discriminatory system of higher education based on the principle of merit, the World Conference on Higher Education in 1997 indicated commitment to implement the internationally agreed goals in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women and to eliminate of all forms of gender stereotyping in higher education. Efforts at consolidating women's participation at all levels in which they are under-represented and to enhance their active involvement in decision making was motivated by the global drive towards the attainment of two key Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of universal primary

education; gender equality and women's empowerment through promotion of gender equality at all levels of education; including the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. Singh (2002) pointed out that: "In order for universities to be leaders and role models for democracy, the practice of politics of inclusion that forges democratic principles is essential".

If gender is regarded as one of the tenets of development, then mainstreaming gender in universities becomes an important matter that requires urgent attention, as it goes beyond effecting social justice and equity. It is equally a potent means for an exponential increase of the much needed capacity in national development. Over the past decade, African higher education institutions, Universities in particular, have been very keen to mainstream gender into their core functions of teaching, learning, research and administration systems. Emerging themes include the international policy drivers for gender equity, representation of women in senior academic and management posts; access as a redistributive measure, gender violence, organizational culture, micro-politics and the gendered division of labour in academia that provided the platform for Gender mainstreaming.

Interventions in many African Higher Education Institutions were largely driven by International resources. Of important note is the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Key intervention in gender mainstreaming in Universities were hinged on Women's Access to Higher Education, Gender Equity in Staff Development and Curriculum Transformation. Gender initiatives include the establishment of a Women and Documentation Centre providing a forum for research, advocacy and documentation of women's issues in collaboration with other private and non-governmental organizations. University curricula experienced transformation through engendering and staff development support were provided to increase women's access to capacity development that can be reflected in quality of researches and publication by women, enhanced curriculum delivery and mentorship. Academic support in the form of scholarship opportunity was created for female students to improve their chance for completing their career in record time. Although gender courses have been introduced into various faculties and departments, these efforts have usually been ad hoc and based on the commitment of individual Lecturers, Deans, and Vice-chancellors. All these efforts have culminated into a concerted, well-synchronized policy and plan for integrating gender into the university as a whole.

A review of gender mainstreaming experience in five Universities in Africa: University of Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania; University of Cape Town, South Africa; Makerere University, Uganda; University of Ibadan, Nigeria; and the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, reported that gender has a significant impact on academic and professional identity formation. Institutional life in these universities is a highly gendered experience. Gendered power relations symbolically and materially construct and regulate women's everyday experiences of higher education. Similar gendered experience about women's unequal status, as students and staff are common among the five countries despite their different socio-economic and national policy contexts.

A range of good practices to promote gender equity, including effective national implementation strategies for gender equity, for instance, the international networks for the Association of Commonwealth Universities programme on women in management and organizational gender revealed effective institutional responses to discrimination in Uganda and Tanzania staff development programmes for women in South Africa and Uganda, Women's Studies courses in Sri Lanka and organizational research on equity and access. Feminist activities and groups inside and outside the university play a major part in driving change. The change is particularly effective when there are partnerships between gender organizations in wider civil society and feminist interventions within the university. Affirmative action is equally opening up new opportunities for women. All the countries are signatory to major international policy developments for promoting gender equity such as CEDAW and gender is explicitly on the national policy agenda in South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania and Nigeria.

The review revealed that strategies essential to the promotion of gender equity in higher education are: awareness creation within the Universities, advocacy, Management commitment, capacity development, strategic planning, accountability, monitoring, evaluation, professional development and dissemination. Interventions including access schemes, pre-entry courses,

outreach programmes and community links are helping to increase access of women to higher education to remove the wide gender gaps particularly in the science and technology. Uganda and Tanzania reported some success in gender mainstreaming in the curriculum but with limited expertise and few opportunity for sharing the good practices. The content and pedagogy of Women's Studies and Gender Studies courses that are inclusive, interactive and that balance teacher and student input have been found to facilitate women's participation, empowerment and provision of transferable study and analytical skills. In terms of staff development, women-only professional development programmes and gender sensitization courses are found to be helpful in empowering the participants. Networking and mentoring, seminars and conferences (Local and international) helps women's professional development and academic identity. Within the higher education institutions certain enablers have been found to promote gender equality such as new constituencies in mass higher education, internationalism, policy development and implementation, and forging links with the community to leverage on community resources and assets.

4. RECOMMENDATION FOR POLICY ACTION IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING

- Management should undertake gender audits to determine gender gaps and effect on development
- Use identified gaps to develop a policy and an implementation plan for the institution.
- Higher education institutions need to mainstream gender into their strategic plans towards promoting and sustaining gender equity.
- Performance indicators should be developed to determine progress and success in gender equity in the institution with leadership provided by the management;
- Affirmative action programmes that include attention to student and staff matters should be developed and regularly reviewed to ascertain impact and effectiveness;
- Different structures/intersections of inequality need to be taken into account e.g. access schemes for women should include consideration of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds and disability;
- Learning environments need to be made safe for women via material measures e.g. lighting, campus security; by strict policy frameworks e.g. grievance procedures for sexual harassment; by pastoral services e.g. counseling and welfare and via the curriculum and pedagogy e.g. challenging discriminatory attitudes and behaviour;
- Gendermainstreaming should relate to governance as well as to curriculum. Decision-making for a need to include women members and consideration of gender issues;
- Equality policies need to be accompanied by action plans and grievance procedures, with sanctions against discriminatory behaviours.

5. CONCLUSION

Women participation in academic position is still low particularly in Africa Higher Education Institutions. This review revealed imbalances in the gender composition in academia, the process which began from the low enrolment of females in higher education particularly in Science and Technology and continue to manifest in level of participation as teaching staff, appointment in management positions and participation in top level decision making. Best practices in gender mainstreaming interventions from across African institutions has proven that achievement of even development and advancement in academia require provision of access, equal opportunity, capacity development and skills based support for female students and staff are non negotiable.

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