Women, Leadership and Mentoring in Higher Education in Africa: Barriers and Possibilities

Endeley Margaret Nalova, PhD[1], Elisabeth N.M Ayuk-Etang, PhD[2]

[1]Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum Studies and Teaching, Faculty of Education, University of Buea, Cameroon
Email: *endeleynalova[at]yahoo.com*

[2]Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Buea – Cameroon

Abstract: *African women historically, have proved themselves to be astute managers of home and local economies, due to their triple roles, yet many higher education (HE) institutions globally and in Africa in particular perceive women as unqualified for substantive leadership positions. These institutions seem to regard leadership as a male feature in which women are not substantively represented, thus disregarding the norms of social justice. However, while there are attempts made by women to mount administrative positions, mentoring strategies to ensure sustainable development of these women and their success are limited. Thus the paper aims at contributing to the discussion on the status of women in leadership and mentoring in Higher Education in Africa, contributing factors, barriers and possibilities.*

Keywords: Women, Leadership, Higher Education, Mentoring, Barriers, Possibilities

1. Introduction

Achieving gender parity in leadership is, first and perhaps most important, not only as a matter of fairness but also as critical to sustainable development. Leadership is defined by as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007). Women from time immemorial have exhibited un-parallel ability in policy development and implementation (Fapohunda, 2011). African women historically, have proved themselves to be astute managers of home and local economies capable of playing important management roles in war and peace (Nwaoku and Efanga, 2011). Yet many higher education (HE) institutions globally and in Africa in particular perceive women as unqualified for leadership positions (Kloot, 2004).These institutions seem to regard leadership as a male feature in which women do not have a place (Still 2006). McKinney (2009) and Jamali, Sidani and Kobeisi (2008) also report this challenge when they point out that there is a glass ceiling that deters women academics and administrators to access leadership positions in higher education. This glass ceiling is described as barriers that prevent competent women from advancing in higher education (McKinney, 2009). However, more recently higher education institutions have made noticeable yet inadequate strides in ensuring that they open doors for women to join the academy, in academic and administrative positions. Yet, while institutions are improving in opening physical access for women, there are no mentoring strategies put in place by the same institutions to ensure the development of these women and their success to occupy positions of power (Morley 2005; Bishop 2006; Le Feuvre 2009). This paper aims at contributing to the discussion on the status of women in leadership and mentoring in Higher Education in Africa, contributing factors, barriers and possibilities.

2. Review of Literature

Theoretically, this discussion is situated within the framework of the social justice theory and the social capital theory. Social justice is the fair and equitable distribution of power, resources, and obligations in society to all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, age, gender, ability status, sexual orientation, and religious or spiritual background (Van den Bos 2003). The theory incorporates values of inclusion, collaboration, cooperation, equal access, and equal opportunity which are the foundation of a democratic and egalitarian society (Sue 2001). Ignoring and marginalization of social justice concerns not only affects those with unequal social, educational and professional capital but also limits the voices of allies within educational administration which is going to confront issues of inequality and injustice. Social justice is most important issue of contemporary societies, because people's actions can have an impact on other people. When women are not given equal opportunities in leadership in Higher Education institutions even when they qualify, they are not capable of influencing society significantly resulting to a limit of potentials for sustainable development. The educational milieu should have strategies and ideas towards the creation of a world that is more just (Hytten and Bettez, 2011). Gender equity in leadership in Higher Education institutions is essential for academic and social stability.

The Social capital theory contends that social relationships are resources that can lead to the development and accumulation of human capital. It suggests that individuals accrue career benefits from their relationships. The interaction between different types of social capital (men and women) can be very fruitful for determining the dynamics of knowledge creation and use (Schuller, 2006). The concept of social capital has been widely identified as an important aspect of mentoring relationships. A mentor can provide valuable connections to young leaders, as well as knowledge and information that can open doors and lead to positive outcomes. Mentoring provides support as faculty

members. It is a positive and trusting relationship where younger staff learn from the experience of older staff. There are vital relationship components of the coach and the coachee with which can lead the coachee to overcome barriers and reach the full potential of her development (Reiss, 2015).

Across higher education internationally and in South Africa, women have been reported to suffer and face huge challenges in terms of gaining access into HE. Ramphele (2008) attributes this to the ideology that men are more suited than women for academia. Moodly and Toni (2015) assert that South African Higher Education institutions have made little progress in terms of women in HE leadership. They cite Moodly's (2015) findings, stating that despite women forming the majority of the South African population, and despite the country being more than twenty years into democracy and with a focus of policies and progressive views on women as equal members of society, South African higher education institutions (HEIs) have made little progress in terms of women in HE leadership. Zulu (2003) asserts that in South Africa when it comes to employment patterns, the higher the position of responsibility, the less visible women become, and the lower the position, the more visible they are and ten years after Zulu's survey, the situation has not changed much.

In Nigeria, Omoike and Idogho (2008) found that females were under represented in departmental headship in Nigerian Universities Nwaoku and Efanga (2011) also report that women are grossly misrepresented in senior posts in education and managerial positions in other occupations. They observed that male domination of educational management is evident in Nigeria where school administration male dominated. This means that abilities and values of women are passed over, as career in school administration are driven by male sponsorship than merit and open competition.

A similar situation exists in Ghana. A report of Ghanaian Universities by Ardayfio-Schandorf, (2005) provides a picture of the participation of women in Ghanaian Universities. Her report reveals that in Ghana the percentage of women in the both teaching and administrative-management positions were increasingly low as they moved up the occupational ladder. Among the very top positions, women comprised 9.5 percent, while most universities had never had women Vice Chancellors. Asiedu, (2009). observed that there was only one woman Vice Chancellor in Ghana- at the University of Energy and Natural Resources. In the other senior management positions women comprised only 13.9% of registrars/secretaries, 1.2% of pro-vice-chancellors/pro-rectors/vice-presidents, 8.5% deans of faculties, 15.2% heads of departments, and 7.8% finance directors.

With regard to Ethiopia, women have indeed entered the universities over the past decades; progress on gender balance in academic positions and university management is however below target. Van Eerdewijk et al. (2015) observe that with respect to women in top leadership positions, the figures seem to be becoming weaker: whereas there were

three female Vice- Presidents and presidents in 2008/9, the number has gone down to zero in 2012/13.

In the Ugandan context, women remain miserably few in senior and middle leadership positions in HE institutions (Kabonesa and Kaase-Bwanga, 2014; Kagoda, 2011). Nakamanya, Bisaso, and Kimoga, (2017) observe that there is a dearth of women occupying leadership positions in universities in Uganda. Similarly, Eleraqi and Salahuddin(2018) report that the proportion of female leaders is still weak in Gulf countries compared to global averages. They cite said Khadija al-Humaid, an assistant professor at Zayed University, in the United Arab Emirates as saying that there are many challenges that prevent women from getting an advanced administrative position. Most of them are related to the society's culture that always gives leadership to men. In Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait, women are currently completely absent from the presidency of any academic institution.

Women and Mentoring in Higher Education

There is limited literature regarding the experiences, needs, success, and challenges in the area of mentoring future higher education leaders, particularly Black leaders (Commodore et al, 2012). Mentoring aims to give academic staff guidance on how to make effective use of their career within the Higher Education institution both for their own development and for their contribution to their Higher Education institution (De Janasz, & Sullivan, 2004). Without receiving training in certain skill sets, the transition for faculty members can be difficult, as successful administrators often need skills that are different from those required to be successful faculty. Although getting a doctoral degree can be helpful, doctoral programs often lack the developing skills and knowledge that presidents, need to be successful. These areas include fundraising, assessment, and accountability of student learning (Freeman and Kochan, 2012). Through mentoring, mentees learn the knowledge necessary to make decisions, form relationships, commit to tasks, and make better judgments. Mentoring provides support as faculty members, make the transition into administrative roles, such as department chairpersons, associate deans, or deans (Umpstead, Hoffman and Pehrsson (2015). Mentoring programs can also help mentees in addressing issues of professionalism as well as self-knowledge, emotional intelligence, ethics and integrity, courage, perseverance, and servant leadership (Reille and Kezar, 2010). To benefit from mentoring, mentees should be receptive to the advice and encouragement that the mentor can offer. Therefore, the relationship must be a positive and trusting one (De Janasz, & Sullivan, 2004).

Mentoring has not been effective in many universities due organisational male supremacy that continues to impede the participation of females thus affecting the creation and progression of information in universities (Abugre and Kpinpuo, 2017). Chitsamatanga, Rembe and Shumba (2018) cite research that confirms that some of the problems and intricacies that female academics encounter with regard to their career mobility are ascribed to scanty mentorship and networking in universities (Zikhali and Maphosa, 2012) and that) the trials and complications encountered by female academics are ascribed to scarcity of mentoring in

universities. As a result, this has promoted career stagnation of some female academics in favour of their career development (Shava and Ndebele, 2014). Presently there is need for an assemblage of mentors so that female academics to be mentored (Johnson and Thomas, 2012). Since Higher Education Leadership is male dominated, female leaders are bound to be mentored by men. However, Coronel, Moreno and Carraso (2010) found out that mentoring interactions concerning male and female academics is problematic as such benefits from mentoring female academics are usually insignificant.

Barriers to the Participation of Women in Higher Education Leadership

With regard to leadership, the distinctions in professional and career advancement are a natural predestined difference between men and women as a result of their genetic disposition. Men have a preference for a risky, high stakes environment that the top leadership positions have, due to their increased testosterone levels whereas women are more empathetic and relationship-oriented due to the hormone, oxytocin and are biologically created "as-natural-homemaker model. The fact that women may have to leave from their office on time to care for their children, or take time off for maternity leave is not attractive to managers, whether male or female. This forces women to choose between career and family due to the direct conflict between the resources needed to satisfy both professional and family obligations (Hoobler et al. 2011)

The challenges that women academic staff encounter include negative attitudes towards women in public roles. Strong norms that women are not capable to perform and succeed, undermine affirmative action, as they feed ideas that women are not able to achieve by themselves. In line with this line of thought Kloot (2004) explains that higher education institutions perceive women as unqualified for these positions. These institutions seem to regard leadership as a male feature in which women do not have a place (Still 2006). McKinney (2009) and Jamali, Sidani and Kobeisi (2008) also refer to this challenge when they point out that there is a glass ceiling that deters women academics and administrators to access leadership positions in higher education. This glass ceiling is described as obstacles and barriers that prevent competent women from advancing in higher education' (McKinney 2009).

Ramphele (2008) pointed out that institutional cultures were still in line with gender-based constructions, which contribute to keeping women out of academia and particularly in leadership positions. Bakuwa, & Mouton (2015) assert that there are no institutional gender policies that promote and continuously support women to take up leadership positions.

According to Barrett and Barrett (2011), the disproportionate career progression of women in the higher education profession is due to a number of factors, including how workloads are managed. Within the HE context, research plays a critical role in terms of progression, and if hampered, becomes a severe constraint. Also, Many mid-career women choose to relinquish promotion to senior leadership positions to avoid messy politics, sexists

behaviors, and/or incompatible challenges between work-life balance. This results to fewer women occupying positions in the leadership hierarchies of corporations and within the academic world (Ward & Eddy, 2013).

Women are still seen as caregivers. It's one of the oldest stereotypes, and it's still holding women back from advancing in the workplace. According to a report on college presidents, 32 percent of women presidents altered their career progression to care for a dependent, compared to 16 percent of men. The academic career ladder does not account for the reality that many women are still expected to have caregiving roles for their spouses, children, and elderly parents. These additional responsibilities and time-consuming tasks can be a drag on women's career mobility. (Bartel, 2018).

Possibilities for Mentorship and Leadership of Women in Higher Education

Higher education leadership can organize regional and national leadership development programs for mid- and senior level female administrators who have the leadership aspiration to advance into the higher ranks of higher education leadership (Eliadis, 2018). Also, initiating leadership coaching programs into its system, to help increase women's leadership aspiration and to reduce the hurdles and biases that still exist in educational organizations. Such programs can equip participants with vital coaching competencies such as meeting ethical guidelines and professional standards, trust and intimacy, active listening, powerful questioning, direct communication, creating awareness, designing actions, planning and goal setting, and managing progress and accountability. In such programmes, resource persons should share their leadership journeys and experiences so as to enable prospective leaders to know more about leadership and perhaps increasing their numbers in leadership (Nakamanya, Bisaso and Kimoga, 2017). These are vital relationship components of the coach and the coachee with which can lead the coachee to overcome barriers and reach the full potential of her development (Reiss, 2015).

Nakamanya, Bisaso and Kimoga (2017) cite gender related policies such as; the Gender Equality Policy, the Human Resource Policy, the Policy and Regulations on Sexual Harassment have also been established in countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Uganda as policies that provide a fair ground for women to compete for leadership positions with their male counterparts as reported by Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza, (2010); Muasya, (2016) and Muberekwa, Nkomo, (2016).

Organizational identification can stimulate women's leadership aspiration, which in sequence can trigger and increase women's leadership participation at the top jobs. Women with high organization identification who reach the top can serve as role models by possessing and displaying OID, which can bring more women to attain OID and thus lead them to leadership aspiration as well (Fritz & Knippenberg, 2017).

Bartel, (2018) points out that without a baseline understanding of the current situation, it's difficult to effect

any real change. Gather information and listen to female faculty members and senior leaders. Improving gender diversity requires the work of all members of a team, not just women. To that end, challenge the assumption that women automatically want to be actively involved in improving gender diversity and inclusiveness. Also it is necessary to improve career mobility options for women and establish a more family-friendly work environment. For example, avoid scheduling meetings at times that create disproportionate burdens for women with care giving roles, such as early morning or evenings.

With regard to mentoring, there should be formalized and on-going mentoring in universities so that female academics can experience career mobility. Moreover, universities should endeavour to come up with strategies to improve mentoring of their leaders under the guidance of their senior leaders or administrators. Also, female academics should be supported and guided by both male and female academics in mentoring and networking. Hence, professional support through mentoring is vital in universities (Chitsamatanga, Rembe and Shumba, 2018). Also, one of the ways that the higher education community can ensure that mentoring for the next generation of college presidents occurs is through the establishment of organized mentoring programs. Mentoring programs can assist in building both competency and confidence in mentees. Mentoring programs include association-sponsored programs, organizational programs, programs for targeted groups, and within-institution programs (Umpstead, Hoffman and Pehrsson, 2015)

3. Conclusion

African women historically, have proved themselves to be astute managers of home and local economies capable of playing important management roles. They have potentials that are underutilized when they are not given equal opportunities to leadership positions in Higher Education Institutions. Institutions need to put structures and policies which not only give women their rightful place but promote and continuously support women to take up leadership positions.

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