

Efforts and Challenges in Achieving Gender and Cultural Equity and Inclusivity in Public Universities in Kenya

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Abstract: *Inclusive education involves the transformation of schools and other centres of learning to cater for all learners regardless of gender, ethnic and linguistic origin, residence settings (rural or urban), HIV status, disability, difficulties in learning and age. Inclusive education aims at eliminating exclusion or favoritism that arise out of negative attitudes on differences in economic status, social class, race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexual orientation, religion and ability. From a policy perspective, inclusive education means taking a holistic approach to education reform and thus changing the way the educational system tackles exclusion. Without such measures, many countries will not achieve the Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015, alongside other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This paper will explore the efforts and challenges in achieving gender and cultural equity and inclusivity in public universities in Kenya. The research adopted descriptive survey and case study designs in order to enable the researcher to carry out an in-depth study of gender equity interventions in selected universities. The sample consisted of two public universities in Kenya, Moi and Egerton. In each university two (2) faculties/ schools were selected using stratified random sampling. From each of the school two (2) lecturers and 10 students, 5 males and 5 women were selected to take part in the study. The total sample was thus 96 respondents. Findings from related studies illustrate persistent gender discrimination related to educational attainment and learning, and gender-based violence in public universities. Kenya has experienced phenomenal achievements in gender parity in education, although these achievements have not resulted in gender equity in public universities.*

Keywords: Gender equity, cultural equity, inclusivity, public universities, Kenya

1. Introduction

UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (1998b) declaration and action plan on higher education in Africa underscored the need for international organizations, African states and higher education institutions to develop policies geared towards promoting the participation of women in higher education in Africa (UNESCO 1998b). However, a meeting of higher education partners organized in 2003 to assess the progress made in the African region since the UNESCO 1998 conference revealed that there had not been any significant improvement in the participation of women in higher education (UNESCO 2003).

Despite the international campaigns for gender equality and equity in higher education, studies conducted in several countries continue to show that women are underrepresented in universities as students, staff and managers. The participation of women in higher education as students has been found to be uneven across national, disciplinary and institutional boundaries in both developed and developing countries (UNESCO, 2003)

International research on gender equity in higher education management shows that men dominate leadership and management of universities (Singh, 2008). Studies done in Kenya (Kamau 2001, Karega, 2001, and Onsongo 2002, 2005, 2011), Nigeria (Odejide 2003) points to the dismal numbers of women in universities as students, academics and managers. The studies on gender equity in higher education management show that women do not occupy positions that can enable them to influence the policies and

direction of their institutions, both at the departmental and at institutional levels (Singh 2002).

Although the government of Kenya recognizes the importance of providing equal opportunities for all its citizens, Kenya is ranked among the ten most unequal countries in the world and the most unequal in the Eastern Africa region (Karega, 2001). Gender disparities are reflected in the education sector as well. There is inequity during admission and in the courses in which women are enrolled. Analysis of students' enrolment in four selected public universities confirmed that women are not enrolled in courses like science and especially engineering (Onsongo, 2011). Disparities are also reflected in the recruitment and promotion of academic and management staff in the university with women forming a small percentage in all cases.

There have been attempts by individual universities to incorporate women's issues in their programmes. Some of the attempts at enhancing gender equality (United Nations, 2000) include establishing gender centres, affirmative action and enhancing women's participation in science related subjects. Most of these attempts have been financed by donor funding (Morley, 2006): or Non-Governmental Organization such as the African Forum for Women Educationists (FAWE) and the Association of African Universities (AAU). It is against this background that this study examines the efforts and challenges experienced by selected universities in their quest for gender and cultural equity.

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This study investigates the efforts and challenges in achieving gender and cultural equity and inclusivity in public universities in Kenya. The main objective of this study was to examine the interventions that have been put in place to enhance gender equity in the selected public universities in Kenya and their sustainability.

2. Methodology

The research adopted descriptive survey and case study designs in order to enable the researcher to carry out an in-depth study of gender equity interventions in selected universities. The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data. The quantitative methods were used to scrutinize the existing datasets relating to the participation of women and men in the selected universities as students and staff.

2.1 Sampling Techniques

The sample consisted of two public universities in Kenya. The universities were purposively sampled. These universities are Moi and Egerton. In each university two (2) faculties/ schools were selected using stratified random sampling. From each of the school two (2) lecturers and 10 students, 5 males and 5 women were selected to take part in the study. The total sample was thus 96 respondents.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected using questionnaires and structured non-participant observation schedules (for observing gender relations in the classrooms, meeting and training sessions). Data obtained from documents and observations was analyzed through a process of content analysis and

organized into themes. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts of the men and women enrolled in various programmes was used to show the gender inequities in the selected universities.

3. Results and Discussion

The students surveyed were asked whether there were programmes in their universities/departments that were geared towards supporting female students generally, making the university environment conducive to female students and the university curriculum. A majority of the students 60% surveyed in this study indicated that there were no specific programmes in their universities, faculties and departments geared towards attracting female students to university education. However some of the academic staff and manager interviewed 30% mentioned that the admission of female students with a lower cut off point as an intervention that is geared towards increasing female students' access to university education. A good number of the interviewed university managers 56% did not see the need of having other gender equity intervention measures considered the lower cut of points as enough. One male manager raised a number of questions when asked for his opinion regarding gender equity interventions. The views held by this manager suggest that some university manager perceive gender equity interventions as favors being extending to women. Most managers 67% who supported the cut-off points method of intervention as a corrective measure for past injustices; it compensated for the inhibiting factors affecting female participation at the lower levels of education.

A critical feminist policy analysis of the effect of the lower cut-off points for female students on increasing female access to university education revealed that it was not having any great impact on female students' access to university; female enrolment to public universities increased by only 300 students. Nevertheless, thousands of students qualify for university education in Kenya. Most of them miss out because of the limited places in the seven public universities. For example, in 2006 admissions to public universities only candidates who scored an average of 70 marks in 2005 KCSE were admitted to public universities. The cut off points went up to 69 while in the previous year it was 67. Female students were admitted by a point less (68) but they needed to have scored between 68 and 70 marks in at least seven subjects. Only 10,211 students of the 260,665 who sat the exams in 2005 were admitted to public universities. At least 68,030 qualified for admission having obtained grade C+ and above (University Admission 2005 candidates Daily Nation Tuesday June 20, 2006)

Another intervention that was considered by some students, academic staff and managers geared towards enhancing gender equity was the establishment of gender department/ centres or institutes. Document analysis and interviews with the directors of some of the gender centers sought to find out the history, objectives and core activities of these centres/ institutes. After analyzing the documents of the gender centres/institutes in the selected universities (Kenyatta University, Moi University and Maseno University) the gender centre at Egerton University was found to be the

most active. The history of the institute and some of its activities were studied further through observation, documents analysis and interviews with participants and are summarized in this section. The Institute for Women, Gender and Development Studies (IWG&DS) was conceived in 1991, initially as a female student initiative to address the issues that interfered with them in pursuit of their academic excellence on campus. It was named the Centre for Women Studies and Gender Analysis.

Data regarding the role the university plays in providing a supportive environment was collected from the students. The views of the students did not suggest any formal arrangements by the university geared towards making the university environment safe or adequate for the students. There was no accommodation facilities set aside at the campus for female students with families or those who got pregnant. At the time of this study, the university was not providing accommodation for student mothers but in most cases they were required to vacate the university premises when they were eight months pregnant. The next best option was to live in rented rooms in the university neighborhood. Some of the accommodation facilities did not have clean water and electricity.

Students were first asked to indicate whether there were courses in their departments, faculties and universities that address gender issues. A majority (66.4%) of them said that there were no such courses at their department, faculty or university. Those who indicated that there were gender related courses were asked to list them. Some of the courses listed at the departmental level by some studies included: Gender studies, gender and community development, law and society. Most of the listed courses were said to be in the faculty/school of Arts and Social Sciences.

A document analysis of the university programmes/calendar also revealed that very few courses being offered in the selected universities dealt with gender issues and gender related courses were, in most cases, located in those departments that traditionally attract female students. Again most courses at Kenyatta University were optional.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

There are no limited interventions geared towards increasing female students' access to university education in general and to specific departments and faculties. The lowering of entry points for girls applied at the admissions level has increased their enrolment.

There has been a move to incorporate gender issues in the selected universities through the setting up of gender centre or institutes. Apart from the institute at Egerton University gender centers were had not fully launched their activities. These interventions were geared towards making students especially female students cope with the many challenges they were facing in a hostile university and social environment. Apart from the existing interventions, this study encourages more and more moves that promote gender issues, equity and participation.

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