

Female Access to and Participation in Higher Education: Interventions and Challenges

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Girls face special constraints

The School Studies carried out in the 12 FEMSA countries 1996-2001 of Sub Saharan Africa indicate that girls face special constraints and difficulties in their learning. Consequently girls do not participate as much as boys in all subjects and the performance of those who do is worse than for boys. Science and Maths are most affected. Major causes of the observed gender differences in access and participation in all the 12 countries are:

- Poor gender relations and environment at home, community and school that reduce girls' confidence;
- Lack of time to study due to their multiple duties and responsibilities;
- High dropout rates of girls from school;
- Inappropriate and insensitive teaching and didactic approaches which do not take into account gender differences and learning needs;

- Girls' limited employment opportunities;
- Poor teaching/learning materials and facilities;
- Poor guidance and counselling services
- Poverty at home which leads to preference of boys in education
- Rote memory learning of factual knowledge especially in maths and science
- Inappropriate and irrelevant syllabuses
- Inefficient and unsuitable examinations

- The most influential factors for the under representation of females are the low participation rates in advanced courses and lower performance levels in examinations
- The widely held and deeply rooted belief that female students are inherently incapable of attaining high levels of achievement was found to be the greatest challenge. This may be internalised by policy makers, students, parents, community members, educators and female students themselves.

- All players need to develop a shared vision before they can determine their new roles and responsibilities in supporting gender equality.
- FEMSA implemented interventions for 3 years and registered remarkable achievements, e.g. in TZ
 - Developing plans drawn, implemented and monitored by all stakeholders (school, parents, community, civic and religious leaders,
 - Confidence building
 - Remedial lessons
 - Fundraising
 - Improving Pedagogy, assessment and hands on experiences – camps, orientation
 - Sensitisation

The analysis of 2000/2001 of gender mainstreaming efforts in the on-going education reforms in Tanzania and Uganda mentions some of the key challenges to gender equality in education to be the lag in domesticating international commitments into national laws, policies adapted from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), insufficient gender mainstreaming of national educational reform processes, institutional barriers to engendering the education sector and a constraining socio-cultural environment.

- E.G. in TZ (cost sharing, privatisation, retrenchment)

Rwanda efforts to mainstream gender

Useful Information

- Females constitute 52.3% of Rwanda's overall population,
- 32.13% of the homes in Rwanda are headed by women.

Rwanda committed to promote gender equality and equity, actions are:

- Put in place women promotion mechanisms
- Created Ministry for Gender and Women Promotion 1999.
- Set-up a coordination and follow-up mechanism for the Beijing Plan of Action 1997

- A National Women Council created 1996
- Since 1995, the international day for women themes are adapted this facilitates advocacy and mainstreaming gender in all activities aiming at women promotion.
- A signatory to CEDAW since 1980
- Since 2003 the Rwanda constitution calls for the setting up of a gender observatory, an independent organ whose mission will be to follow up and evaluate the use of gender indicators for sustainable development.

- Initiation of activities for women economic promotion since 1997
- Developing a plan of action for legal review and enacting non-discriminatory laws, e.g. the 1999 law on matrimonial regimes, succession and donations that recognizes and protects the equality of rights to succession and gives equal ownership to property to both male and female.

- Development of strategies for the integration of women in decision-making organs, e.g. the law provision that allocates at least 30% of positions in decision making to women
- Implementing a national gender policy approved in 2004 whose ultimate goal is gender mainstreaming in all plans, programmes, systems and Government budgets.

Achievements

Some achievements have been registered:

- Mainstreaming gender in Vision 2020.
- Mainstreaming gender in the national programme for poverty reduction
- Setting up gender focal points
- Engendering budgets
- Mainstreaming gender in decentralised administrative structures
- Increased ratios of women MPs from 12% in 1995 to 48.8% in 2003.

Constraints

Reported Major constraints to gender equality:

- Work overload;
- Weak technical capacity among women;
- Low level of education and professional qualification;
- Low capacity of access to employment and low level of income;
- Lack of resources as a result of difficulties of access to the factors and means of production, such as land;
- Low access to credit due to lack of bank guarantee.

Rwanda Initiatives to promote gender equality in Education

Some actions to promote gender equity and equality in education have registered following achievements:

- Vision 2020 education and vocational training has made impressive gains in terms of access and quality; budgetary allocations to education have been increased for that purpose.

This resulted in the increase in primary education. For example,

- Over a 4 year period 1998/99 -2002/03, GER increased from 86.4% to 109.2% (26% increase) for girls while that of boys rose from 89.5% to 111.2% (24% increase).
- For the same period, the NER rose from 69.7% to 78.9% (13% increase) for girls and from 70.2% to 77.7% (11% increase) for boys.

- Rwanda self-evaluation Beijing 2 reports that in secondary and higher education, the trend is the same.
- The report says: *“As for gender equality, the figures are generally satisfactory in both primary and secondary schools, and figures are almost the same for boys and girls, although enormous regional disparities still exist. Regarding higher education, there are still visible gender inequalities, with more men than women registered at the National University and in other institutions of higher education”*

- However we observe that females are still under represented even in primary education, albeit the gender gap closing slowly over the four year period, e.g. from 3.1% to 2% in the GER.
- How do we address the observed wide disparities in enrolment rates that are masked by national, provincial and even district aggregates? What gives rise to the disparities? Are there gender concerns?

Case studies from TZ on geographical disparities:
NER in 2000 in some selected districts:

- 94% for Kibaha (in the suburbs of Dar es Salaam)
- 87% for Ilala District (in Dar es Salaam)
- 28% Lindi Rural (Southern Tanzania, borders Mozambique, poor infrastructure, with the lowest poverty indicators based on human development index)
- 37% for Ngorongoro (Northern Tanzania, Pastoralists communities, living traditional life).

School mapping studies from 1999 and 2000 revealed large disparities *within* districts. For example in Temeke Municipal in Dar es Salaam City

- 80-90 % NER for Somangila and Kurasini wards
- 27% NER for Tandika Ward
- 15% NER for Mjimwema ward

These are not in rural areas, they are in Dar es Salaam city

In Rwanda, some HEIs are implementing programmes to promote gender equality. These include gender sensitisation programmes, counselling, lower entry qualifications for girls and empowerment programmes. For example KIST has mounted a programme whereby girls who could not be admitted due to lower attainments are given remedial courses, examined and admitted if they pass. The aim is to expand female enrolment in science and technology professions.

Reported Major constraints to attainment of UPE and egalitarian education in Rwanda

Major constraints towards achieving UPE and egalitarian education at all levels are reported to be:

- The inferior socio-cultural status of women in society especially in rural areas,
- Colonial rule, which gave girls' access to education thirty years after boys.
- Scarcity of nursery schools.

- Low rate of attendance by girls in the technical and science schools, despite existence of one high quality school for girls only (FAWE) in the capital city with limited access for girls from rural areas.
- Insufficiency and low value of scholarships;
- Sanitary installations in school establishments which are not adapted to the psychological conditions of girls are one of the causes of repeated absenteeism by girls;

- Low level of representation of women at decision-making positions in the field of education;
- Wrong application of the legal provisions protecting street children;
- Lack of information and awareness among parents on education of the girl child and on the benefits of educating her; High rate of illiteracy among women;
- Lack of proper planning regarding specific literacy programmes for women;

- Lack of support or assistance measures for child mothers and school-attending women.
- The KIST initiative to increase women S&T professionals through remediation has met with resistance. According to media reports the programme initiated only this year might be ended this year.

Interrogating gender dynamics

- What is the effect of parents' ability to finance education on gender inequities in access and participation at primary and secondary school levels and especially the reported stark disparities within regions?
- What can be learnt from the Case studies of Tanzania UPE (1974), Tanzania Primary Education Development programme (PEDP) (2001) and Secondary Education Development Programme (SEDP), Uganda UPE (1996) and Uganda Education Strategic Investment Programme (ESIP) (1998).

Some Rwanda Performance Statistics

2003/04 National examinations statistics (from the ministry of education) show the following:

- Of those who sat for the primary school leaving examinations (PSLE), 49.87% were girls and 50.13% were boys.
- The trend was similar for the lower secondary school level, where 48.75% were girls and 51.25 % were boys.
- At Advanced Secondary level, more girls (53%) than boys sat for the final examination.
- Only 28 out of 100 who sat for the PSLE attained the pass mark.
- Of every 100 passing students, 39 are girls while 61 are boys.

35.84% of those who attained the pass mark in the PSLE were admitted into government secondary schools.

For every 100 admitted into government secondary schools, 33 are girls while 67 are boys.

Here we notice already the existence of male preferential treatment and female discrimination. Even though for every 100 passing candidates 39 were girls, only 33 in every 100 admitted are girls.

For boys, while pass 61 out of 100 who passed were boys, 67 out of every 100 admitted to Government schools were boys.

While the gap in pass rates is 22%, it widens to 34% in admission to government schools.

Here we are not even talking of giving more chances to girls to compensate for the un-even play field caused by social injustices. We are talking about giving equal treatment to both genders basing on the given pass rates.

- Statistics and Rwanda Self-evaluation reports show that secondary school overall enrolment is nearly 50% girls. Could this imply that more girls are in private schools than boys. If that is the case, which girls are these? We are aware that private schools have varied quality standards depending on how costly they are in terms of fees. Could this be a creation of educational social strata based on haves and the have nots? Case study Tanzania – affirmative actions (1985), dual system of education and resulting divide. Similar trends observed in Uganda

- The Rwanda 2003/04 pass rate for the secondary advanced level was much better; stood at 74.5% of all those who sat for the examination.
- Also the margin in the pass rates for males and females was not as wide as in the case of primary school level. At secondary advanced level, 48.31% of those passing were girls and 51.69% boys.
- Out of every 100 passing candidates, 48 were girls while 52 were boys. The gap is 4%

- Only 19.1% of those who passed were admitted into government HEI. It is not clear whether these are only those who got government scholarships or whether private candidates are also included in this number. The pyramid is sharper.
- Only 8.18% of all girls who passed got admitted into government HEI while 15.16% of boys who passed got admitted.
- That is, of every 100 passing girls only 8 are admitted while for every 100 passing boys 15 are given a chance.
- The impartial treatment comes out quite clearly.

With 48% female pass rate at A 'level, why cant Rwanda attain gender parity in enrolment in government HEI? What is it that does not allow that to happen? The constraints stated above have not included challenges related to institutional level gender blindness, gender bias, and gender discrimination.

The KIST initiative to expand female access to Science and Technology professions through remediation has faced resistance. Why is this so? Is it due to budgetary constraints? What about the gender budgeting policy? Is it due to wider gender dynamics?

Quite obviously we see a case of male bias and female discrimination that calls for interrogation of the efficacy of the existing gender mainstreaming strategies.

Case study University of Dar es Salaam Pre- Entry programme (1997); Case study Makerere (1991) affirmative action of bonus points, University of Dar es Salaam (1997 lower cut-off points)

A broad understanding of gender mainstreaming is to insert gender sensitivity and gender accountability into all institutional activities. Gender mainstreaming is an understanding that there is a relationship between gendered aspects of organisations and gender-discriminatory outcomes. With respect to education institutions, for example, there is a relationship between male bias in teaching and lower expectations for female performance, and negative self-image of women students.

The question to ask is: how can institutions be made accountable to women? The ultimate goal is to routinise gender-equitable forms of social interaction and to challenge the legitimacy of forms of social organizations which discriminate against women. This represents a transformation of existing power relations in the administration, the classroom, the cafeteria, the hostel, and within the entire institution. Mainstreaming means that power in social relations is redistributed, so that women have equal access to the same resources as men.

There are two aspects:

- equal access to resources and
- redistribution of power in social relations so that women have equal access to the same resources as men

The first aspect, equal access to resources, is not highly contentious in efforts made thus far to reform the education sector along gender equity lines. Many actors (administrators and managers, academics, workers, students) agree, for example, with the need to increase female enrolment of students and to increase female recruitment among academic and administration staff.

The second aspect directly challenges male privileges, so that women can benefit equally from the same resources. Conflict of ideas/attitudes has been found towards challenging male privileges, and the underlying gender relations which sustain them. This entails sensitive analysis and action with respect to gender dynamics in all aspects of the education sector.

Most efforts to mainstream gender at the institutional level have focused on sensitisation and training strategies. This approach underestimates the role of discriminatory gender patterns in incentive systems, accountability structures, and bureaucratic procedures. The question we should ask ourselves: Why has so little changed in spite of many positive policies and strategies? A focus on institutions helps to answer that question. Here is the case where male bias leads to systematically fewer females than males admitted in government HEI.

Efforts to change institutional structures, rules, beliefs, such as those associated with gender mainstreaming, will often be met with hostility, denial of conflicting gender interests, elusiveness, and suspicion within the bureaucracy.

Empowerment-related objectives will tend to be downplayed by many stakeholders, and instead they will focus on technical matters.

Resisters to change will rationalise male dominance and use 'merit' as a basis to block affirmative action programmes.

Individual agents have a significant role in maintaining the status quo, or subverting it. On the other hand, individual agents have a significant role in supporting a new gender equity policy, or subverting it.

Case studies gender mainstreaming policy, structures and actions at MU and at UD

Thank you for listening