Gender Equality in the Staff Composition of Higher Learning Institutions in Uganda: Gaps and Possibilities with Specific Reference to Uganda Martyrs University

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Abstract · This paper analyses gender equality in the composition of Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) staff—as of the close of 2008. The analysis focuses on the University's policy and its implications for gender equality; the composition of the University's staff by gender; and explanation of the possible reasons underlying the gender setting in the University. The paper employs Turner (1986)'s typology of equality in analysing equality. This is backed by social interactions approaches, which serve as the theoretical framework. Data were collected through informal interviews with staff of the University; observation; and analysis of the UMU Personnel Handbook 2008/2009 and the UMU Staff List as of 2008. The findings were that contrary to stereotypical exemptions of women from high positions in society, women occupy key positions in the University's structure. Notwithstanding, representation of women in top management is far less than that of men and the composition of some job categories in the University's establishment is indicative of the gender stereotyping typical of the Ugandan society. Like many institutions of higher education in Uganda, the University has no gender policy but mainly runs on an equal opportunities policy. Recommendations towards the resolution of these gaps are made.

Keywords · Gender · Higher education · Institutional management

***Parité de Genre dans la Composition du Personnel des Institutions d'Enseignement Supérieur : Trous et Possibilités avec Référence Particulière à l'Université de Martyrs de l'Ouganda · Résumé ·** Cet article analyse la parité de genre dans la composition du personnel de l'Université de Martyrs de l'Ouganda (UMO), par la fin de l'an 2008. L'analyse s'articule sur la législation de l'Université relative à la parité du genre et ses implications ; la composition du personnel de l'Université en genre ; et l'explication de possible raisons élaborant le statut quo du genre dans l'Université. Cet article emploie la méthode de Turner (1986) concernant la typologie de parité dans l'analyse de la parité. Cette dernière est soutenue par d'autres approches d'interaction sociales, qui servent de cadre théorétique. Les données ont été collectées par le biais d'interviews informelles avec le personnel d'UMO ; observation ; et analyse du Guide du Personnel d'UMO 2008/2009 et la liste du personnel d'UMO de l'an 2008. Les résultats ont montré que contrairement aux exemptions stéréotypées concernant les femmes à occuper des positions élévées dans la société, les femmes ici à UMO occupent des positions clé au sein de la structure de l'Université. Néanmoins, la représentation de femmes dans le comite d'administration est de moins inferieure à celle des hommes et la composition de quelques catégories d'emploi au sein de l'Université est indicatrice du genre stéréotypé, typique à la société Ougandaise. Comme beaucoup d'autres institutions d'enseignement supérieur en Ouganda, l'Université n'a pas de législation relative au genre, mais généralement elle opère avec une législation sur d'égales*

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opportunités. L'article enfin fait des recommandations dans le but de couvrir ces trous. **Mots Clé** · *Genre* · *Enseignement supérieur* · *gestion institutionnelle*

Introduction

Equality is one of the key sustainability issues as sustainability is grounded in the idea that equality means that everyone who lives on the planet–and everyone who will live on it in the future–deserves access to opportunities and productive resources without unjustified discrimination. We recognise the fact that, given the traditional gender setting in Uganda, it would be hard for institutions to address some gender issues in a short time span. But UMU being a sustainability-conscious institution (at least in its mission and curriculum) would be expected to reflect sustainability not only in its pedagogy but also in its institutional set up and staff composition in particular. It is supposed to be an exemplary educator so as to demonstrate the feasibility of what it advocates for and its belief in what it teaches.

The conceptual scope of this paper is: staff recruitment, policy implications on gender equality, and composition of staff by gender while the time scope will mainly be 2008 so as to analyse the situation as by the time of the study. The data on which this report is grounded was collected through informal interviews with ten staff (five male, five female) at UMU, observation, and by documentary analysis (the key documents for analysis being the Personnel Handbook 2008-2009 and the UMU Staff List 2008). Besides the methodological strengths of the adopted approach, I deemed these to be the best methods in providing objective data on the subject. In the discussion, the work environment will also be put into consideration. The Social Interaction approaches will constitute my theoretical framework, that is, the lens through which I will analyse the issues to do with gender equality in UMU. After the conclusion, I will provide some recommendations on what should be done to address gender equality gaps that I will have identified in my analysis.

Definition of Gender Equality

Views about the meaning and constitution of gender[2] equality greatly vary. In this report, I will derive my definition from Turner's (1986) typology of equality and my understanding of gender. In his analysis, he explains equality to fall into four types: *ontological equality, equality of opportunity, equality of condition,* and *equality of outcome/result.*

I will synthetically adopt equality of opportunity, equality of condition, and equality of outcome/result in my analysis. Turner takes equality of opportunity to mean that "access to important social institutions should be open to all on universalistic grounds, especially by achievement and talent… not on ascribed standards of age, sex or wealth" (1986, p35). With regard to gender, this would apply under circumstances where both male and female are not impeded by any other factors in access to opportunities. Equality of opportunity therefore presupposes equality of condition where all the competitors in a given situation face the same circumstances. Where the circumstances faced are not the same between the two genders, it would require measures/policies that may be positively discriminative so as to compensate for the significant inequalities to be addressed. The resulting type of equality would be equality of outcome/result. It is along the three above definitive lines that I will assess gender equality in my analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Several gender theorists have tried to explain the factors informing the gender differentials that exist in society. These explanations include reasons as to why some forms of gender inequality happen in society and why they take the form they take. Though apparently no single theoretical explanation has so far been able to exhaustively account for the inequalities in society, I shall mainly rely on the social interaction approaches in analyzing gender equality in the composition of

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[2] Moser (1993) defines gender as a set of roles which communicate to other people that feminine or masculine. This set of particular behaviours – which embraces our appearance, dress, attitudes, personalities, work both within and outside the household, sexuality, family commitments, workplace relations, and so on – together make our 'gender roles'.

UMU staff. I adopt these explanations because they illustratively help explain why some things happen the way they do with regard to gender. This offers a strong springboard for critical analysis.

Social Interaction approaches focus on the processes and practices that maintain women's subordination, on how women come to acquire attributes that make them unsuitable or inappropriate for certain social positions and economic activities (Kwesiga 2002). In these approaches, it is argued that maleness and femaleness are not biological givens but rather the results of a long historical process. These approaches hold that the way boys and girls are raised at home, taught in school and their encounters in wider society are important in explaining gender inequalities throughout life. Social and cultural conventions and practices are also said to explain why certain sexes commonly play some given roles. The approaches recommend that opportunities be increased, discrimination counteracted, and stereotyping abandoned.

Consideration of Gender Equality among UMU Staff

As noted earlier, the scope of this report is limited to the aspect of gender equality in staff composition. In approaching this analysis, I will look at the gender provisions in the policy of UMU, the composition of UMU staff by gender, the percentages by gender at various levels/strata in the university, and the possible factors explaining the dominance of any given gender at any of the levels of the staff strata.

Gender Policy in UMU

UMU's mission statement asserts that "the university is committed to promoting justice, respect and solidarity, human rights, *equality* [italics mine] … both in its own community and in society in general" (Uganda Martyrs University 2008: p3). It is added that the university implements its policy of non-discrimination on the grounds of race, tribe, sex, social status, or disability.

Whereas it is commendable that the university's policy stands up for equality and against discrimination based on sex, it can be noted that this policy is gender-blind. It recognises no distinction between sexes (Kabeer 1992) under the assumption that the two sexes face the same circumstances with regard to opportunities and other workplace conditions. In the words of NAWO (1993), such policy is not gender-aware[3]. As Kabeer observes, such a policy would be unfair as it makes assumptions which lead to biases in favour of existing gender relations. Equality also involves the Aristotelian justice of treating un-equals unequally as implied in equality of outcome/result so as to level the playing field. Gender-awareness would require UMU to as well have a gender policy that would look into the existing gender inequalities if it is to realise gender equality.

I consider the gender-blind policy in UMU to be unfair because, through the informal interviews, I observed in agreement with Tuyizere (2007) that female lecturers face additional challenges of caring for their families, which challenges do not allow them to compete favourably with their male colleagues for promotion. For academic staff to be promoted, one must have acquired given academic qualifications required to move to the next level, met a given number of publications and offered some degree of service to the university. Two female lecturers informed me that as women they take longer to be promoted because they have less time for research, writing, and further studies compared to their male colleagues. As shall be seen in the next section, women thus remain in lower academic ranks as their unique challenges are not catered for in policy.

Such gender-blind policy also becomes inappropriate when one considers the fact that the fraction of female members of staff, especially in the teaching category is too small (figures given in next section). In such a scenario, equality would call for affirmative action in favour of women so as to bridge the gap. But recruitment apparently continues to be gender-blind hence perpetuating the existing inequalities.

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[3] Gender-aware is one that recognizes the existence of gender-specific needs and constraints of each or both categories and treats the different genders respectively.

The Composition of UMU Staff by Gender

The general Staff List (2008) acquired from the Human Resource Office is not disaggregated by sex. Of course, in an 'equal opportunities' approach to staffing, disaggregation by sex would be unnecessary. But, as illustrated earlier, it is an unjust case where un-equals (in work-related challenges at least) are treated equally. This serves to further illustrate the gender-blindness evident in staff management.

The University Management Committee[4], which is responsible for making several of the internal decisions, is comprised of five men (83%) and one woman (17%). This is in agreement with the general observation that "there is an increasing number of women reaching middle management levels [such as the three female faculty deans out of eight in UMU] but there appears to be a "glass ceiling" between these and senior positions" (NAWO 1993, p.3). However, NAWO observed no correlation between the proportion of women in decision-making positions and the development of gender-aware policies and practices. From their study, out of nine organisations with more than 60% women at officer/manager level only two had gender policies while five had equal opportunities policies. But still, as noticed in Makerere University[5], the male dominance in the top decision-making positions risks promoting the views and interests of the office bearers, the men (Gender Mainstreaming Division 2007, p31). This as well partly helps to explain why the policy of UMU continues to be predominantly gender-blind.

Among the teaching staff, the gap between male and female staff still stands wide. Of the total 115 teaching staff, 82 (71%) are male while only 33 (29%) are female. It may not be that women are discriminated against in the process of recruitment but that there are no positively discriminative measures put in place to recruit more women than men so as to narrow the numeral gap. It is also because the factors particularly affecting women as a worker group in the university remain unaddressed. For example, UMU being a rural-based university, the majority of its teaching staff commute from Kampala (84km from UMU). The university bus which they use comes to the university in the morning and goes back in the evening arriving in Kampala at around 6:30pm. This does not favour breastfeeding members of staff hence some choose to give up on their jobs (or may endanger their jobs by resorting to absenteeism) so as to be able to care for their babies. A breastfeeding colleague confided in me that several times she has to go back home earlier by public means to breastfeed her baby, which is becoming too costly for her. Such factors may be complicated to address but they certainly affect gender equality in UMU.

The above example is not helped by UMU's policy by which women are only offered 45 days paid maternity leave (Uganda Martyrs University 2008). They can only be given an additional 45 days on the recommendation of a registered medical doctor. A heavily pregnant teaching assistant in one of the university departments informed me that she was required to continue reporting for duty until she delivers, only then would her leave commence! For such reasons some staff find it hard to work under such circumstances hence opting out.

Another conspicuous observation is that, of the 33 female teaching staff, only three are PhDs while of the 82 males, 13 are PhDs. This means that female teaching staff comprise 19% of the total PhDs in UMU while their male counterparts constitute 81%. As earlier stated, unlike the males, women have a couple of domestic roles such as child bearing and raising that tend to make them postpone their studies and limit their involvement in rigorous research (Gender Mainstreaming Division 2007). This as well has a bearing on their promotion to higher levels and, by extension, their income.

The distribution of staff in UMU also reflects gender stereotypes[6]. The administrative ranks whose duties are mainly secretarial/ clerical are dominated by females. Of the total 18 administrators in UMU, three (17%) are males while 15 (83%) are female. In the Department of

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[4] The University Management is comprised of the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Human Resource Manager, and Chief Finance Officer.

[5] Makerere University is Uganda's flagship public university.

[6] Gender stereotyping refers assigning roles, characteristics, tasks and responsibilities to a particular gender on the basis of preconceived prejudices.

Security Services, all the 22 staff are men. The same trend is found in the Estates Department (containing the engineer, estates officers, masons, carpenter, electricians, plumber, painter, brick layer, and the water source cleaner) where all staff are men. Among the cleaners, seven (70%) are females while three (30%) are males and in the library, five of the six staff are female.

Beliefs of stereotypical nature about the attributes of men and women are far-flung and widely shared. As observed by Doger et al (1995), such beliefs have proved resistant to change while prohibitive to gender equality. Under such stereotypes, men and women are thought to differ both in terms of achievement-oriented traits and in terms of social – and service – oriented traits (Bakan 1966). Thus, men are characterized as aggressive, forceful, independent, and decisive, whereas women are characterised as kind, helpful, sympathetic, and concerned about others. As explained by the social interaction approaches, each of the sexes is thus raised in accordance with the above stereotypes which would later determine the jobs for each of the sexes.

The stereotypes attributed to women thus suit them for administrative, reception and librarian jobs (Takyiwaa 1998) where they will have to receive people with a caring smile, keep records neatly, and obediently take duty orders from their bosses. This discrimination is sometimes blessed with the myth that women have a special facility for boring, low-paying, and repetitive work (Nduhukire-Owa-Mataze 2002). Men, who are characterised as aggressive, forceful, strong, independent, and decisive are then fit to occupy key decision-making positions like in Management and other positions that require aggressiveness and strength such as security and estates. Since this arrangement reflects or/and carries forward what is practiced in the wider society in Uganda, it may be reflected in UMU's staff composition unconsciously as it is taken to be the normal way to go. It is for this reason that regular institutional gender analysis/auditing is quite important as will be advanced in the recommendations of this paper.

It is also noticeable that, as a result of their low status in most sections of the Ugandan community (Tuyizere 2007; Waliggo 2002), the activities which women perform tend to be valued less than men's; and in turn, women's low status is perpetuated through the low value placed on their activities (March et al 1999, p19). The highest positions dominated by men are also the most paying while the middle and lower positions where women are mostly found pay less. As indicated in the Social Interaction approach, the socialisation process reinforces this unequal set up which then ends up being integrated into most of the social institutions.

In the Catering Department, the females are 18 while males are 19. But even in this apparently numerically gender-balanced department, to an extent, the division of work reflects some stereotypical gender roles in Uganda's society. The peeling of bananas (for cooking) is exclusively done by women while the actual cooking is mainly done by men. In most cultures in Uganda, it is the woman's role to peel and cook food. In UMU, since cooking food for such a big number of students requires a lot of physical energy, men have taken on the role while women retain the peeling bit. Different cultures attach certain roles to women and others to men, some roles are served by both. In itself, this practice may not be considered a threat to gender equality but this allocation of gender roles becomes a sustainability issue if it harbours oppressive motives and unjust practices.

However, I may not blame UMU for fostering inequality by only recruiting women for the peeling jobs because, given widespread restriction of peeling to women in Ugandan society, it would be hard to get men that can peel. Moreover, a man doing peeling work would be laughed at as 'womanish'. It thus has to be a progressive achievement for men to get into the peeling work in UMU and Ugandan society at large, just as they are progressively getting into cooking.

Recommendations

Basing on the above findings and analysis, this section entails suggestions on what should be done to achieve sustainable gender equality in UMU.

- There is need for creating gender awareness among UMU staff. Creation of such awareness will be vital in demonstrating the need for gender-aware decision-making and

policy. It will also enhance UMU staff's position to question gender inequalities in policy and practice. The awareness creation should be done annually through seminars by the gender experts that UMU already has.

- As noticed in the analysis, an equal opportunities policy is not favourable for ensuring gender equality in UMU. There is therefore need for a gender policy in UMU through which some of the highlighted inequalities can be addressed. A committee should be put in place by the university Management to source among staff for ideas on which to base to draft the gender policy. Such policy should not only be drafted but also followed strictly so as not to remain on paper.

- Several of the gender inequalities in UMU pass unnoticed because of lack of 'gender auditing'[7] exercises. It would thus be of significance to carry out annual gender audits so as to establish UMU's actual situation as far as gender equality is concerned. Together with this, the staff data should always be disaggregated by gender so as to render easier the auditing process. This task should be taken on by the Human Resources office.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have made an analysis on equality in the composition of staff in UMU in which I analytically explored: gender equality in the university policy and the composition of staff by gender. I employed the Social Interactions approach for my theoretical framework and made significant conceptual use of Turner's (1986) typologies of equality. I highlighted the gender inequalities springing from UMU's adoption of an equal opportunities approach to equality. Such inequalities include the very low representation of women at the Management level, in the lecturing ranks, Estates and security Department, and stereotypical women dominance in administrative and librarian services.

In order to address the issues of inequality raised in the report, I recommended that; gender awareness be created among staff in UMU, a gender policy be put in place and strictly followed, and gender auditing be carried out annually.

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[7] The exercise of assessing the position of an institution or community with regard to the treatment of its women and men on the basis of their gender. This would involve establishing the numeral representation and types of jobs done by the men and women, their respective remunerations, and the existence plus constitution of gender-related policy.

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