

Report of the Parallel Session on Gender Mainstreaming in African Higher Education at the Conference of Rectors, Vice Chancellors and Presidents of African Universities (COREVIP), which held in Tripoli Libya, October 21-25, 2007

A parallel session on Mainstreaming Gender in Higher Education in Africa held on October 24, 2007 at the COREVIP. The session began with a presentation by Prof. Luhanga, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salam, (UDSM), Tanzania. He presented a paper documenting the UDSM experience in mainstreaming gender in the university. The notable features were the institutional will in establishing and sustaining the initiative, the use of existing national and international legal frameworks as a platform, the identification of allies within and outside the university, the use of important aspects of the university's social and academic culture and the extensive sensitization of faculty, students, administrative staff on gender issues.

The key features of the UDSM gender-mainstreaming programme were

- The introduction of the one point scheme, an affirmative action scheme to increase female students' access,
- The pre- entry Science remedial programme for female students,
- The female undergraduate scholarship scheme funded by Carnegie Corporation, and
- The Postgraduate scholarship, which incorporated an affirmative action for females.

The key achievements were

- A significant increase in female student enrolment, especially in the sciences and Engineering,
- Formation of a critical mass of female and male staff who are gender sensitive,
- Formulation of a Gender Policy and Anti Sexual harassment Policy,
- a significant increase in the number of females in decision making units among staff and students,
- Formation of gender clubs and
- General improvement in the overall institutional climate of the university.

There were still a number of challenges:

- Mainstreaming gender into the curriculum
- Changing the organisational culture which is still male dominated
- Gender budgeting
- Inadequate cohort of female science students to draw on from secondary students to achieve the university's target of 50/50 female/ male student ratio.

The discussion after his presentation focused on the experience in various African countries where the situation is reversed, for example in Sudan where female students constitute 60 % of the student population. The war situation and the male brain drain to the Gulf States accounted for this situation. A similar experience was recorded in the Southeastern States of Nigeria where there is sharp decrease in the number of male students in secondary and tertiary institutions. The conclusion was that various socio economic and political factors account for the changing demographics in higher education in Africa.

Part II

The second part of the session featured the presentation of the Toolkit prepared by the Association of African Universities/ and the Working Group on Higher Education for Mainstreaming Gender in African Universities. This was done by Prof, Abiola Odejide, Coordinator of the project in Nigeria. She gave the background of the project in Nigeria – the critiquing of the toolkit and the first trialing in Nigeria in September 2006 at the University of Ibadan. Eighteen Nigerian universities and the National Universities Commission participated in the Train the trainers' workshop. There was a deliberate decision to train female and male academics, administrators and policy makers in order to ensure its acceptance by all segments of the university.

Subsequently, three down streaming workshops were held in the University of Ibadan for administrators, health workers; security, academic staff and student support Unit Follow up visits have been paid to three participating universities in different geographical locations in Nigeria, These visits also served as advocacy to participating institutions as meetings were held with the principal officers, women's groups and professional groups. In addition, many of the participating universities have sent in gender-disaggregated data of their universities, which contain a greater variety than those routinely required by the National Universities Commission.

The feedback on the Action Plans of the participating institutions has been generally positive, consisting of reports to the management of Institutions. However, there was some degree of anxiety about funding for follow up work but the coordinators had shown creativity in sourcing for funds from University management, state governments and NGOs, in identifying allies within and outside the university community and in working with surrounding institutions of higher education

A demonstration of the toolkit followed with explanations on the rationale, expected outcomes, contents, structure and method of presentation. Two modules were used for the demonstration, Module 1 Basic Concepts of Gender, and Module 9 Gender Disaggregated data.

The participants discussed issues arising from the presentation such as the importance of utilizing current issues within the community, and the existing national and international legal frameworks. The core issue was how to ensure the sustainability of the programme by institutionalizing it. Participants also emphasized the need to recognize that changes in institutional cultures take considerable time since we are dealing with attitude change. They commended the steady progress being made in the Nigerian project and the AAU's attention to this critical but often-ignored aspect of the lives of institutions.

A report of the parallel session was given at the COREVIP plenary on October 25, 2007.