

Research Application Summary
Gender dimensions in higher Education Institutions in East Africa

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Abstract

The need for increasing women representation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has become a global concern. Universities in Africa have been compelled to develop, sustain and nurture both men and women who are capable of generating knowledge and competencies that will lead Africa into a new era. This paper reviews literature on enrollments and staffing in Africa universities with particular focus on Uganda and Kenya. The review concludes that low enrollment of female students in HEIs are still widespread in Africa Universities especially at undergraduate level which translates to low output of female PhD graduates in HEIs. Also there is relatively low representation of women in leadership positions which is affecting the decision making processes hence retarding development processes. Furthermore, women are still concentrated at lower levels of academic ranks compared to their male counter parts. To increase women participation there is need for gender responsive policies and strategies, such as affirmative action and innovative women-focused recruitment and staff development. This can be boosted through establishing networks and alliances with national and international organizations and supporting mentorship and gender mainstreaming in African universities.

Keywords: African universities, enrollment, female, gender mainstreaming, staffing

Résumé

The need for increasing women representation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has become a global concern. Universities in Africa have been compelled to develop, sustain and nurture both men and women who are capable of generating knowledge and competencies that will lead Africa into a new era. This paper reviews literature on enrollments and staffing in Africa universities with particular focus on Uganda and Kenya. The review concludes that low enrollment of female students in HEIs are still widespread in Africa Universities especially at undergraduate level which translates to low output of female PhD graduates in HEIs. Also there is relatively low representation of women in leadership positions which is affecting the decision making processes hence retarding development processes. Furthermore, women are still concentrated at lower levels of academic ranks compared to their male counter parts. To increase women participation there is need for gender responsive policies and strategies, such as affirmative action and innovative women-focused recruitment and staff development. This can be boosted through establishing networks and alliances with national and international organizations and supporting mentorship and gender mainstreaming in African universities.

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Introduction

The education of girls and women in society is crucial for achievement of sustainable development for any country. Women participation in higher education has been widely acknowledged for contribution to development of many countries. Access to higher education especially in science and technology reduces the gender gap in the labour market. Science education can also increase social welfare by enabling gender voices and participation in public social forums which is currently weak (Elu, 2018). Higher education increases the competitive advantage of global economies through capacity building and enhancing uptake of modern technologies. However women continue to be under-represented at all levels of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and this has been perpetuated by gender inequality and limited leadership roles in Higher Education Institutions. This calls for more holistic approaches that promote gender equality in the higher education institutions (FAWE, 2015) to enhance the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 (Elu, 2018; Aki, 2019) in African countries. Gender inequality is considered a key factor contributing to marginalization of women (FAWE, 2011). An increase in the quantity of education and employment of women broadens the pool of talents, increases the income of women, and promotes GDP growth. Further still, gender inequality in education reduces the average amount of human capital in a society and, therefore, harms economic growth (Cabeza-García *et al.*, 2018). This therefore calls for urgent research initiatives on higher education geared towards gender perspective to produce responsive and relevant policy in Africa.

In Africa, relatively low numbers of women gain access to higher education. For example, in Sub-Saharan Africa, only 33 percent of women, compared to men enroll in higher education. This proportion is heavily clustered in the areas of medical care and teaching professionals. They are very under presented in the areas of science and technology (Beintema and Marcantonio, 2010; Katjavivi, 2000). As of 2016, only 113, 210 (45%) female students compared to 140,833 (55%) male students enrolled in HEI in Uganda (see Table 1) (National Council of Higher Education, 2018). Women are important components in the development processes and as such strategies for their integration in the development processes becomes apparent and needs to be urgently formulated. This is due to their contribution in agricultural activities as well as in decision making processes.

Table 1. Enrollment in Higher Education Institutions by gender in 2015/16 in Uganda

Category	Enrollment by Gender				Total
	Male	%	Female	%	
Universities & Colleges	99,760	56	79,307	44	179067
Other Degree awarding institutions	3,255	42	4,506	58	7761
Technical Colleges	4,338	81	1015	19	5553
Teachers Colleges	5,483	64	3,140	36	8623
Commerce/Business	13,632	49	14,300	51	27932
Management/Social Development	2,782	45	3,430	55	6212
Health	4,446	55	3,706	45	8152
Agriculture/Fisheries/Forestry	1,689	69	765	31	2454
Theology	1,965	79	520	21	2485
Art & Design	198	56	157	44	355
Media	1365	62	850	38	2215
Hotels & Tourism	355	36	624	64	979
Meteorology & Land Management	463	67	223	33	686
Law Development	833	62	504	38	1337
Aviation	107	85	19	15	126
Cooperatives	162	53	144	47	306
Totals	140,833	55	113,210	45	254043

Source: National Council for Higher Education (2018)

During the 1970s and 1980s gender mainstreaming gained interest amongst international agencies and governments as a new strategy aimed at bringing women's concerns into the centre stage of rural development (Razvi and Miller, 1995; Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009). A number of initiatives have since been implemented to bring women at the center stage of development processes including the African Union's Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Millennium Development Goal 3 (MDG 3) (FAWE, 2009). Despite these initiatives, marginalization of women, their limited participation in academics and leadership positions continue to be a key bottleneck to development (Figure 1). A study in Ethiopia to examine the number of women academicians in academic and administrative positions in three public universities in Ethiopia, revealed that women were grossly underrepresented in senior academic ranks and administrative positions in the universities (Abebe, 2013; Parker, 2015; Ramli *et al.*, 2016; Smith and Slate, 2018). A similar trend is observed in several other countries such as in Kenya (Table 2). This justifies the need for strategies that strengthen leadership issues especially in African universities. This will invariably translate into improvements in technology generation and dissemination by addressing gender inequality in academics.

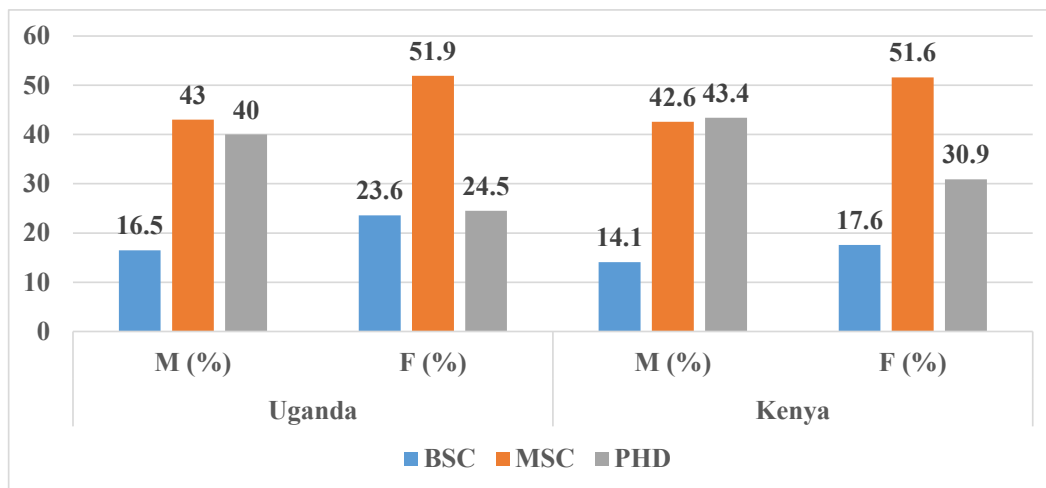


Figure 1. Total male and female researchers in Uganda and Kenya (ASTI, 2016)

Gender inequity in academia has long been the subject of extensive research. Research findings show that women are underrepresented in the academic hierarchy of higher education positions. Studies also show that there are a disproportionate low numbers of women in administrative positions in universities. For example, a study showed that of the 39.6% of the women in Turkish Universities, only 16.4% held administrative positions. This is true even in countries which have had strong legislative provisions against gender discrimination in both employment and education (Abebe, 2013).

In Malaysia the number of women professors (16.9%) is found to be higher compared to in other developed countries like Canada (14.5%), New Zealand (11.7%), Australia (10.9%), United Kingdom (11.2%), Australia (10.9%) and Singapore (6.6%). Even though the percentage of women professors in Malaysia is slightly higher, this percentage is still considered less in academic areas (Ramli *et al.*, 2016). In Sub Saharan Africa, South Africa is the leading country in combating issues of gender inequality registering 45 % of women graduates (Hayward, 2012). In 2002 only seven Commonwealth countries had over 20 per cent women academic staff at senior lecturer level and above in their universities. By 2005 most African universities registered 90% men in senior management positions.

Table 2. Gender Diversity in Academic Staff in Public Chartered Universities in Kenya

S/No	Public Chartered Universities	Academic Staff				
		M	F	Total	% M	% F
1	University of Nairobi	1265	482	1747	72	28
2	Moi University	620	278	898	69	31
3	Kenyatta University	638	351	989	65	35
4	Egerton University	427	163	590	72	28
5	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture & Technology	542	197	739	73	27
6	Maseno University	296	113	409	72	28
7	Masinde Muliro University of Techn	239	93	332	72	28
8	Dedan Kimathi University of Techn	111	26	137	81	19
9	Chuka University	117	54	171	68	32
10	Technical University of Kenya	270	177	447	60	40
11	Technical University of Mombasa	185	51	236	78	22
12	Pwani University	130	42	172	76	24
13	Kisii University	157	70	227	69	31
14	University of Eldoret	182	89	271	67	33
15	Masaai Mara University	97	44	141	69	31
16	JOOUST	88	29	117	75	25
17	Multimedia University of Kenya	51	28	79	65	35
18	Laikipia University	69	31	100	69	31
19	South Eastern Kenya University	95	49	144	66	34
20	Meru University	76	26	102	75	25
21	University of Kabianga	93	37	130	72	28
22	Karatina University	71	73	144	49	51
	Total	5819	2503	8322	70	30

Source: Mukhwana *et al.* (2017)

Figure 2. shows the percentage staffing in HEIs in Uganda and Kenya by educational level in 2016.

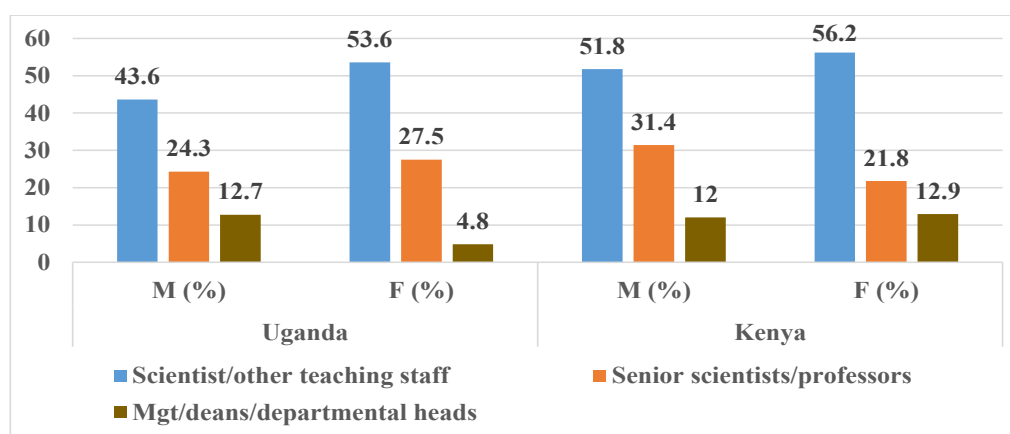


Figure 2. Distribution of total male and female researchers (% staffing) in Uganda and Kenya

From Figure 2, there were more women at lower levels of academic professional ranks in Uganda (53.6 %) and Kenya (56.2 %) compared to their male counter parts, 43.6 % in Uganda and 51.8% in Kenya. Additionally Uganda had more women staff (27.5%) as professors as compared to male counter parts (24.3 %) while Kenya had only 21.8 % of women staff as professors compared to their male counter parts (31.4 %). Figure 2 also shows that female representation in management positions is relatively low with only 4.8 % females in Uganda and 12.9 % in Kenya.

The above trends suggest that African universities lack gender-responsive policies at macro and micro levels with little focus on gender equity and equality in recruitment of staff and staff development programmes in the higher education institution. Increasing women's participation in decision making processes is important for achieving social and economic development in Africa (FAWE, 2009). Smith and Slate (2018) suggested that for women to achieve career advancement successful strategies include mentoring. They also noted that mentoring is an appropriate strategy for career advancement and those women who have mentorship relationships have more satisfaction with their career aspirations.

Conclusions and implications

Increasing women's participation in decision making processes is important for achieving social and economic development in Africa. From the review, there is low enrollment of female students in HEIs especially at undergraduate level which translates to low numbers of female PhD graduates in HEIs in East Africa and most likely in other countries in the continent. There is also relatively low representation of women in leadership positions which is affecting the decision making processes hence retarding development processes. This has implications for the human resources available for influencing decision making processes in all sectors of development. Furthermore, women are still concentrated at lower levels of academic ranks compared to their male counter parts.

Female participation is known to diminish with career advancement in S&T systems—a phenomenon known as “the leaking pipeline (Beintema and Marcantonio, 2010). Greater participation of women especially in S&T by women will provide more diverse skills, experiences, perspectives, and improved performance of HEIs in Africa. This can be achieved through implementation of gender responsive policies and strategies, such as affirmative action and innovative women-focused recruitment and staff development. Innovative strategies for promoting gender equitable recruitment, promotion and retention, especially targeting women, must be advocated for and spearheaded. This can be boosted through establishing networks and alliances with national and international organizations. Supporting mentorship and gender mainstreaming in African universities will also be a key factor in addressing development challenges in Africa.

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