

Toward Gender Excellence in Higher Education in Developing Economies

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Abstract: The social and economic disadvantages faced by women, particularly in developing countries, has long prompted inquiry into gender stratification in the major socio-economic infrastructures. Higher education has increasingly become instrumental in giving women the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to gain their rightful position in society. Despite the serious attempts made by higher education institutions in formulating and implementing gender conscious policies and programs, the participation of women is far from satisfactory. Furthermore, the pace of progress in attitudinal and behavioral changes in both men and women is very slow as socio-culturally instigated impediments are still alive. The purpose of this paper is to examine the current status of gender equity in the higher education system of Botswana. Data on students and staff of the University of Botswana were collected from secondary sources and analysed using simple tabulation techniques. Some suggestions are forwarded to achieve gender excellence in higher education.

Key Words: Gender, Women, Organizational Culture, Developing Economies, Gender Excellence, Gender Equity

Introduction

Needless to say, in the majority of African countries there are culture driven assumptions that women are inferior to men and cannot be equally effective in academic and administrative responsibilities in higher education. These assumptions have resulted in the systemic devaluation of attitudes, activities, and ability attributed to and associated with women. Although studies have confirmed that any distinction between the minds of men and women are fairly traceable to the influence of the different circumstances under which they pass their lives, the belief that women are inferior to men, particularly at higher level of responsibility in Africa, is still very strong.

Botswana has achieved a remarkable growth in economy and political stability since its independence in 1966 due largely to the discovery of abundant mineral wealth. Although this has propelled the country to middle income category, Botswana still faces the problem of economic diversification, employment creation, income distribution, and poverty alleviation. The need to diversify the economy away from the mining sector calls for economic diversification, which brings additional jobs into the economy. There is chronic shortage of skilled and highly qualified workforce, particularly in the Health and Higher education sectors.

The government has long recognized the need to diversify the economy to other areas of investment by encouraging local people to engage in productive activities, and by increasing the supply of skilled and well-educated people through higher-level formal education. As more than 51 percent of the population is women, all developmental programs and policies have been targeting women. Various government and non-governmental organizations have been established to address the problems hindering the participation of women in areas where they are most wanted. The great contributions that women can do for the development of the nation is explicitly documented in both the national development plan (NDP 8, 1998/2003) and in the long-term vision of the country (Towards Prosperity For All: Vision 2016).

Today the enrollment of Girls at both primary and

secondary school level is greater than the enrollment of boys. But, at higher education level, male enrolment dominates. Not only as students but also the participation of women as teachers declines as the level of education moves from primary to secondary and then to tertiary. Thus, the participation of women especially as academics and administrators in higher education in Botswana calls for an investigation of the possible causes and the development of strategies to promote gender sensitivity in colleges and Universities.

Materials and Methods

The Problem: Although the participation of women in higher in Botswana has been improving during the past two decades, the rate of improvement has been very slow and discouraging. This could be attributed to several factors ranging from the socio-cultural settings, family, and school environment to industry, business and mass media. Some factors (such as Culture) produce gender stratification in society whereas others (such as Educational environments) act as maintenance factors. One produces and the other maintains. As this process is repeated, it strongly influences the attitude, beliefs values, and behavior of society. Higher education institutions have been dominated by male oriented norms, and way of thinking. This has long served as maintenance factor for gender stratification in colleges and universities, and discouraged women from aspiring toward and seeking position in higher institutions of learning as students, Academics and administrators.

Today, the organizational, structural and administrative situations in these institutions have changed. Discriminatory policies and regulations are abolished and replaced by gender sensitive and friendly ones. Student admission and promotion criteria are no more gender biased. Staff recruitment, employment, promotion, and development are also no more discriminatory. But, these actions and changes have not resulted in increasing the participation of women in colleges and universities. So, what should be done in addition to adopting gender-sensitive policies, regulations and procedures? This paper is based on the premise that changes in policies alone will not bring important behavioral changes

in both men and women about the roles, abilities, and place of women in higher education. The organizational culture (how people think, act, and interact in the work place) of higher institutions of learning must be changed from a traditionally male-dominated value system to a gender sensitive, open thinking revolutionary system.

The objective of this paper is, therefore, to investigate the major factors that maintain gender stratification in the higher education system of Botswana; and to find strategies to promote a gender sensitive working environment (culture) that can improve the participation of women as students, academics, and administrators in colleges and universities.

The Educational Status of Women: Since the UN designated the year 1975 as international women's year, research into gender issues has gained momentum. In fact, this issue was the major focus of research during the last 25 years. The 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women documented three worldwide trends during the current period (United Nations Report, 1995). First, the participation of women in higher education has increased considerably, both in absolute numbers and in proportion of student population. Second, despite this progress, the number of women is still far less than their male counterparts joining higher education. The other trend is that the flow of women has mostly been along channels where women were already well entrenched.

The situation of women in higher education in Africa is not different from this trend. As noted by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE, 1998), the status of women participation, especially at tertiary level is poor in Africa. Only 0.6 percent of girls of college age are enrolled in higher education compared to 3.5 percent of boys (FAWE, 1998). The participation of women in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa is still less than 30 percent (United Nations, 1995). As a result, they rarely account for more than one or two percent of top executive positions. Even in the health and education professions that are traditionally labeled as 'fit for women', most women still work at the bottom levels of the status and wage hierarchy (Ibid.).

The Educational Status of Women in Botswana: Since its independence in 1966, Botswana has given the highest attention to the development and expansion of primary and secondary education. The education of boys and girls has been given priority in the development agenda of the country. Girls have not been left behind in availing themselves of this opportunity. Girls have dominated the primary and secondary school enrollment. On average, 52 percent of the primary enrollments and 53 percent of the secondary enrolments were females in the period between 1982 and 1996 (Central Statistics Office, Education Statistics Unit, June, 1998).

However, this high level of participation of girls was not due to lack of discrimination against women (Marope, 1994 And Duncan, 1989). As Marope and Duncan argue (Ibid.) it was because of the division of labor by gender. Traditionally, boys and young men look after cattle in the cattle posts, which are far removed from villages where the schools are located. Hence, boys cannot combine cattle herding with schooling. Girls remain at home in the villages and combine their daily home chores with schooling. The migration of Botswana men to South African mines in pursuit of cash employment also aggravated the situation of boys, because younger boys had to take on more of their father's duties (Marope, 1994). Thus, the problems encountered by the boys to

attend school have opened the road to education for girls. Even though Botswana girls were very favorably placed in comparison with most sub-Saharan African countries (Duncan, 1989). there are many indicators that, in the final analysis, it was the boys who have benefitted most from the expanded education system. More than 70 percent of secondary school dropouts in the 1990's were females (Ministry of Education Report, 1999). Furthermore, one would expect the predominance of girls at primary and secondary level to lead to an increased entry of female students to colleges and the university. But, this has not occurred in Botswana. As the educational level increases from primary to secondary and to tertiary, the enrollment of female students declines. The number of female students who successfully complete their high school and enter teachers training colleges is very high. Women represent, on average, 86 percent of the candidates in teachers training colleges but they have consistently been minority in Technical -Vocational Training (Central Statistics Office, Education Statistics Unit, June 1998). Although there was a great demand among girls for technical vocational training, particularly among secondary school dropouts, continuing traditions of stereotypical conceptions and assumptions about the role of women have resulted in discouraging them from joining this traditionally "fit for men" training (Duncan, Op. Cit.).

Girls' preference for teachers training courses can be associated with social attitudes which held marriage to be the only important career for women and estimated school teaching as an imminently suitable occupation for them (Burn, 1996). As the level of education increases from primary to secondary, the number of female teachers declines. Between the years 1982 and 1996, on average, 77.5 percent of the primary school teachers were females whereas only 41.8 percent of the secondary school teachers were females (Central Statistics Office, Education Statistics Unit, June, 1998). Higher education institutions have the responsibility of overcoming the problem of gender inequalities in all aspects in the long run. They must take vital measures to make themselves ready to face the challenge of promoting gender equity and sensitivity in the process of fulfilling their mission. Today's fast changing and globalizing economic and technological environment requires critical thinking and knowledge from both men and women. To meet this challenge successfully, the traditional stereotypical assumptions about the role and position of women in colleges and universities must be changed. Gender policies and programs should be designed and implemented in such a way that influences the day-to-day activities of people within and outside higher education institutions. The underlying norms of behavior that govern the expectations and beliefs of students, teachers, and administrators must be questioned, challenged and changed.

Measures to Overcome Gender Inequities: Participation in higher education provides women the intellectual capital that has become part of the trucking system leading to prestigious and highly remunerative positions (Epstein, 1994). Thus, whenever gender disparity exists, it should be an urgent priority to remove every obstacle that hampers the active participation of women. The formulation of gender policies and programs to eliminate the social and cultural barriers that have

discouraged or even excluded women from the benefits to be derived from higher level training is the most commonly used strategy. Gender programs can indeed improve the situation of women by providing an opportunity for female students, academicians and administrators to involve in institutional transformation and cultural change. However, their implementation must aim at changing the underlying norms of behavior and value systems in the institution.

Institutional culture is the collection of underlying norms of behavior, the unwritten rules that condition the way in which people get things done and relate to each other within the institution and those outside it (Hastings, 1993). Thus, Universities and Colleges must engage in reframing their cultures at a truly fundamental level of seeing, believing, thinking and acting. It is only then that change in the underlying norms of behavior at institutional level can be translated into behavioral and attitudinal change at individual level. If gender policies and programs are directed toward this end, the future of higher education could be an era in which the very context of gender equity is seen to be cultural-a made rather than received world (Thomas Kim, 1990).

In 1991 the University Senate approved the University gender policy and programs and established a Gender Policy and Program Committee (GPPC) to implement the policy and the programs. The gender programs include (1) Gender Research, (2) Gender Education, (3) Gender in the University Curriculum, (4) Public Education, (5) Institutional Evaluation, (6) Library Development and (7) Staff Development (GPPC Annual Report, 1998).

These programs were designed as means of changing the attitudes and behavior of staff and students, both men and women. However, until the current committee took office in January 1998, they were not effectively translated into practice. The current GPPC is very active in coordinating the gender sensitization efforts of the various Faculties and Departments. But, well-established committees exist only in those faculties where the gender gap is relatively narrow-i.e., in Education, the Social Sciences and the University Library. The gender activities in the Faculties of Engineering & Technology, and Science where the gender gap is very wide are very weak. GPPC has drafted the Sexual Harassment policy, which is approved by Senate in December 1998. Many workshops and seminars were also organized by GPPC. Particularly the millennium lecture series on gender were very impressive. Given the objective of changing the traditional stereotypical conception of people in relation to women, the implementation of the gender programs in the university is not well integrated with the day-to-day activities and structure of the university.

Faculty gender committees are characterized by unclear objectives or terms of references specifically designed for them, operational directions, and lack of resources. As a result, there are no strong control-mechanisms that make them responsible and accountable for the implementation of the gender programs. There is a tendency of forming an-all women gender committee. Membership in gender committees is also characterized by apathy, lack of commitment, and sense of

responsibility.

GPPC itself lack clout and visibility. There is no clear policy statement on how GPPC fits into other University structures. The male dominated institutional structure is currently creating lack of interest on gender issues. This coupled with the women dominated Gender committees in the university has led to the trivialisation of gender issues. This indicates the political unwillingness of the university to mainstream gender in all its structures and programs.

A Conceptual Model of Factors Affecting Gender

Equity: Several research findings attribute the problem of gender disparity in education to the socialization process which takes place within the context of national culture, socio-economic and political settings (Scott, 1994; Kim, 1990 and Lie, *et al*, 1994). Particularly the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). and Cognitive Development theory (Kohlberg, 1966, 1994) have indicated that gender role differences are culturally and socio-economically constructed and not natural or innate. People become engendered during their childhood in ways that are defined as socially and culturally normative. And their differentially engendered personalities and self-concept consequently lead them to make different educational and occupational choices, which in turn result in the perpetuation of gender stratification both at higher education level and in the world of work (Bonvillain, 1996).

Fig. 1: is a conceptual model of factors that produce and perpetuate gender disparity in education. Culture, together with its various dimensions, is the primary factor that produces gender stratification in societies. Educational environment (primary, secondary, tertiary), family, the mass media, social institutions, industry, business, and so on are instrumental in perpetuating gender differences. The university curriculum, admission and promotion criteria, and the teaching-learning atmosphere, for example, promote the gender typing of subjects and occupations, because they carry with them not only academic content, but also an associated cluster of values and attitudes (Sandra Acker, 1984). The arrows in the circle with four quadrants (at the center) show the directions where resources and efforts should be mobilized to narrow the gender gap. Quadrant I, for example, show the need to influence parents because gender role differences begin in the family.

Quadrant IV is the subject of this article. It identifies the gender differential reinforcements exerted by structural, administrative and educational factors within the higher education system. Although the factors within higher education system and those outside it are interdependent (as indicated by the dotted arrows). colleges and universities must develop and adopt strategies to reduce the impact of these socio-culturally and psychologically instigated barriers.

The Survey: A descriptive survey method is used to produce this paper. As the University of Botswana is the only university in the country, it is believed to represent the higher education system of the country. The study was conducted in three steps. First the university records on staff and students as well as policy documents and

committee reports were analyzed to investigate the existence of any form of formal discrimination and gender biases. After the relevant literature was reviewed, a structured interview was conducted with 16 (10 women and 6 men) academic staff and 4 women administrative staff. The respondents were asked four major questions-why the number of women academicians and administrators is declining? What are the factors hindering the development of women in higher education? What should be done to minimize or eliminate these obstacles?

Results and Discussion

The Participation of women As Students: Higher Education Institutions in Botswana have a short history. The first university campus of Botswana enrolled its first intake of students in 1971. This campus gained full university status under the name 'University of Botswana' in 1982 and remained the only university in the country (Marope in Lie, 1994). Although the University of Botswana has considerably grown during the last 15 years, the percentage share of female students is still lagging behind. On average, 43 percent of the undergraduate fulltime students were females during the period 1982-1996 (Central Statistics Office, Education Statistics Unit, June, 1998). This number increased to 48 percent in October 1999. However, women consistently outnumbered their male counterparts in the faculties of Education, Humanities, and the Social Sciences (see the table below). However, the lowest participation is observed in the faculties of Science, Engineering and Technology. Despite the efforts made by the university in formulating gender sensitive policies and programs since 1991, the number of students joining science and technology fields has continued to decline.

Table 1: Percentage of Female Undergraduate Full-time Students by Faculties

| | 1996/97 | 1997/8 | 1998/9 | 1999/0 |
|------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
| Business | FSS* | 46 | 45 | 53 |
| Education | 55 | 54 | 54 | 57 |
| Eng.&Tech | 13 | 11 | 11 | 12 |
| Humanities | 57 | 58 | 59 | 57 |
| Science | 28 | 29 | 27 | 25 |
| Soc. Sc. | 52 | 52 | 50 | 51 |

*The data is included in the Faculty of social sciences (FSS)

Source: University of Botswana Academic Services Office, October 1999

Table 2: Percentage of Female Academic Staff by Faculty and Academic Rank in 1999/2000

| 1999/2000 | Prof. | Ass.Prof | Senior Lecturer | Lecturer | Total |
|------------|-------|----------|-----------------|----------|-------|
| Business | 0 | 0 | 25 | 15 | 16 |
| Education | 0 | 11 | 30 | 49 | 38 |
| Eng.&Tech | 0 | 0 | 5 | 12 | 13 |
| Humanities | 0 | 0 | 10 | 40 | 26 |
| Science | 0 | 6 | 10 | 24 | 17 |
| Soc. Sc. | 0 | 0 | 19 | 28 | 20 |
| Total | 0 | 4 | 18 | 31 | 23 |

Source: Academic Staffing Office, University of Botswana, October 1999

The average participation rate in the faculties of Science, Engineering and Technology during the past four years

has been only 27 and 11 percent, respectively. This shows the existence of socio-cultural, attitudinal and psychological barriers that have led men and women to believe that science and technology are not appropriate for women.

The Participation of Women As Academicians:

Several studies indicated that women generally have more tendencies to join teaching profession than Engineering and Science (Gaskell Jane, 1992; Katamarina Kowland, 1996. and Sandra Aker, 1994). However, as the educational level increases from primary to secondary and universities, the number of women teachers decreases. The percentage of female teachers at primary level was on average 76 percent Central Statistical Office, Education Statistics Unit, June 1998). But, this fig. dropped to 43 percent at secondary school level (Ibid.), and 23 percent at university level (Table1). Gender gap can be seen as having horizontal dimension and vertical dimension. The former deals with differences in field of studies while the later is about differences in rank, salary, and power among male and female staff members (Lie, 1994). As shown in Table 2, the overall tendency of women academicians is to predominate in the traditional fields like Education, Humanities, and the Social Sciences. Their participation in science and technology related area is very low. Only 13 percent of the academic staff of Engineering and Technology faculty, and 17 percent of that of Science Faculty are women. However, 38 percent of the academic staff of Faculty of Education and 26 percent of that the faculty of humanities were women. In addition, only 14 percent of the research fellows at the Directorate for Research Development and only 22 percent of the computer specialists in the University at the beginning of 1999/2000. academic year were women (Academic Staffing Office, October 1999).

The vertical dimension is also very wide. Women are well under represented in higher academic ranks. They constitute only 4 percent of the Associate and full professorial positions, 18 percent of the senior lecturer positions, and 31 percent of the lowest rank-the lecturer position. The social system within higher education is hierarchically organized. Promotion within the hierarchy is based on the accumulation of academic capital, primarily research productivity, teaching effectiveness and seniority, all of which require a major commitment of time and effort and an insider's insight into the rules of the academic game. All these conditions are fraught with difficulties for many academic women (Lie S.S., et al., Op. Cit.).

The Participation of Women As Administrators:

A Chancellor who is the president of the country formally heads the University. The highest academic officer who is actually in charge of the university is the Vice chancellor. There are two types of decision-making structures in most universities--the Academic and administration. Unequal distribution of resources, formal rank and power are found currently in both wings of the university. The Governing body of the University is the Council, which has the ultimate responsibility for overall development and sustenance of the university. Its membership includes leading fig. from the community at large as well as senior personnel from within the university (University of Botswana Calendar, 1999/2000). But, 85 percent of the Council members are males. Next to the council in the university hierarchy is

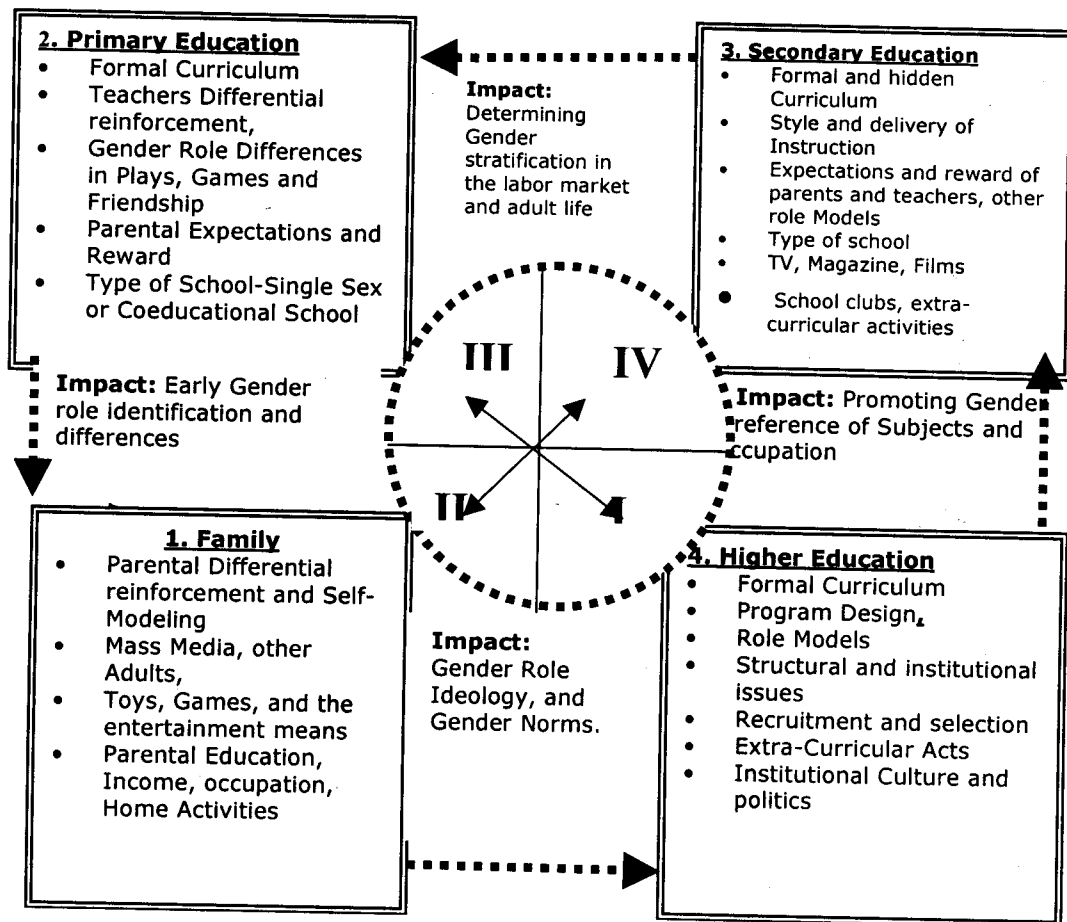


Fig. 1: A Conceptual Model of Factors Influencing Gender Stratification in Education and the Labor Market. Formulated by Z.t. Temtime. *The Dotted Arrows Refer to the Influence of Each Category on the Other and over Time.

the Senate, which is the chief academic authority of the university. Again, the majority of members of the university Senate are males. This could be partially attributed to the fact that except for representatives of students and faculty and for Heads of departments, senate membership is based on academic seniority. As Batswana women are latecomers to University teaching, they lack the necessary experience and research output to be considered for membership in the Council and Senate.

Having a woman vice chancellor can indeed influence not only the attitude of women but also that of men who dominate both the academic and administrative leadership positions. All the Deputy Vice Chancellors and Deputy Deans are men. Only one of the Academic Deans and one of the Directors are women. Males head almost all the Academic Departments. The fact that more women are found in the administration of the university library than in the finance and business administration indicate that women still prefer to join those fields that are traditionally labeled as "fit for women". To sum up, males occupy the most prestigious and high pay leadership positions in the university. The participation of women in leadership positions at the professional level is

even lower than that at the administrative level. But, a point is in order at this juncture. What are the actions taken by the university to improve the participation of women as students, academics, and administrators?

Concluding Remarks

Although the gender gap between men and women in terms of access to the university is narrow (especially in sub-Saharan Africa Standard) the pace of progress toward equity is very slow. Currently the major problem is the increase in the horizontal dimension of the gender gap. The number of female students joining the Faculties of Engineering & Technology, and Science is declining, while the number of those joining the Faculties of Education and Humanities is increasing.

With respect to teaching, as the level of education goes up from Primary to Secondary and University, the number of female teachers goes down. The participation of women as teachers in the university is very low (23%). Out of this, most are found in the Faculties of Education, Humanities and the Social Sciences. Only few women are found in the Faculties of Engineering & Technology, and Science.

The vertical dimension of the gender gap between male

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and female academics is also wide. As the academic rank increases, the number of women academics declines. Most of the women academics are found in the lowest academic rank. The participation of women in the University Governance is not different from this. Most women are found in the lowest administrative positions. As the administrative level goes up the number of women decreases. Generally, it can be concluded that there is an increasing trend in both the vertical and horizontal dimension of the gender gap in the University of Botswana.

The University has formal gender policy and programs and Gender Policy and Program Committee since 1991. However, there are no adequate evidences showing the commitment of the university to implement the programs until the current committee took office in 1998. This committee takes several important steps since 1998. However, the general activities of both the university wide gender committee and the faculty gender committee were not directed toward the development of gender sensitive organizational culture due to the following reasons. First, there is structural problem. The university wide is not clearly recognized in the university structure. Although there is a supportive female vice chancellor, the male dominated structure of the university is creating lack of interest on gender issues among staff members. Secondly, the membership in gender committees is dominated by women and is characterized by apathy, lack of commitment and sense of responsibilities. Third, the political unwillingness of the university to address gender issues is evidenced by the failure to mainstream gender issues into the overall structure and programs of the university. This has led to the trivialisation of gender issues. As Thomas Kim (1990) argues higher education does not actively discriminate against women, rather, through an acceptance of particular values and beliefs, it makes it difficult for women to succeed. These values and beliefs are based on the traditional stereotypical conceptions and assumptions about the place of women in higher education. As men dominated the history of higher education, the administrative and academic culture that has been transmitted to the current generation of students and staff is gender biased. Fourth, the Faculty Gender Committees are not well organized except in the faculties of Education and the Social Sciences. They do not have clearly stated objectives or terms of references, resources etc. There are no control mechanisms set to make the various sections of the university to be accountable for the effective implementation of gender programs:

It is maintained that gender policies and programs are used as means to change the academic and administrative culture of the university. They are not end by themselves. Institutional cultural changes require the implementation of gender policies and programs to be implemented at the grass-root level. Even at this level, the implementation must be integrated with the day-to-day academic and administrative activities of the university.

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