

## Module 4

# Mainstreaming Gender in the Curriculum



## **Module 4**

### **Mainstreaming Gender in the Curriculum**

#### **Expected Outcomes**

1. Better understanding of the key role of the curriculum as a transformation tool in terms of both human rights and development.
2. Increased ability to bring about curricular transformation.
3. Exploration of processes for incorporating gender into productive disciplines.
4. Achievement of greater level of gender justice and human rights through the curriculum.

#### **Introduction: What Is the Curriculum?**

The curriculum deals with the actual content of education. It deals with the methodologies and processes by which learning takes place. It deals not only with the facts and figures, but also with the culture and values of the society. Teaching and learning take place within a context of a conceptualisation of the society, its values, its direction and its role in the world as a whole. The curriculum can re-enforce the status quo or it can question the status quo. It involves the “hidden curriculum”, which incorporates the often unspoken but nevertheless important messages which are transmitted within the higher education establishment.

A higher education establishment deals with subjects linked to productive manufacture, such as engineering disciplines, architecture, construction, metalwork and woodwork. Industrial production is dealt with in universities, technical colleges and polytechnics, whether this deals with tractor manufacture and repair, or with the manufacture of computer chips. The curriculum includes agriculture, which prepares graduates for feeding the nation, as well as producing key export products. More recently, agricultural research has included the growing of oil plants, which can be utilised as fuel.

The disciplines dealing with actual production are highly related to human rights, culture and equity. Architecture and construction, for example, are related to building for whom, and at what cost. Building very expensive and showy buildings, which may end up as white elephants are different from building attractive, high quality but low cost housing for workers. The assumption is that the poor live in ugly houses that do not deserve an architect's creative, high quality attention. Similarly, emphasis on growing cash crops such as cotton, tobacco, may be different from emphasis on growing food crops such as sorghum and wheat.

Higher education plays an important role in defining the society, its characteristics and its future. This is done through its research, development, education and training programmes. A society may conceive of itself as inefficient and incompetent one hears people say, “Well, this is Africa”, when there is corruption, when things don't work,

when people don't come on time. Oppression of women and support for polygamy and even promiscuity may be defended on the grounds that "This is our culture".

The "hidden curriculum" deals with the unspoken curriculum. On many campuses, getting drunk may be seen as an expression of power and freedom, and may be commonly practised by otherwise powerless youths. The baiting and sexual harassment of women students may be seen as an expression of manhood. Its worse expression may be in rape, where the hidden curriculum says that woman who says "no" really means "yes". There is a common misunderstanding between young men and young women regarding what it means to be a "boy friend" or a "girl friend". When a young woman agrees to be a "girl friend", this can be interpreted as meaning she has agreed to sex by the man, whereas for the girl, this means a special basically non-sexual friendship.<sup>1</sup> The hidden curriculum may also say that a woman who has chosen a career, such as a career as a lecturer, is misbehaving against societal mores, and deserves to be harassed.

#### Activity 4A

Select a faculty with which you are familiar. List on one side the factual and technical skills being imparted, and on the other side, the values and attitudes being inculcated.

#### Defining Reality

Higher education is one of the important institutions responsible for re-thinking and re-defining reality. As such, it is a key to change. One of the changes that need to be addressed is that of gender. Research and development are primary sources of knowledge, and higher education is responsible for creating new knowledge as well as new values and attitudes. Higher education institutions can play a very important role in mapping out the possible future directions that Africa can take, whilst taking into consideration the historical context. What is very striking today is the superficiality of knowledge about African gender and development realities. There has been inadequate in-depth research and development in both areas, with decision making being based on no research, or on surveys done by outside agencies.

Africa's inherited reality is characterised by two strands, that of traditional societies, often based on feudal values and structures, where the roles open to women may be severely circumscribed; and that of colonial society, which provides a further complication of women's roles. Religious values may further define women's roles, both positively and negatively. Traditional religion gave a special role to holy women and women healers, who defined the values of society. This is evident in Zimbabwean history where Ambuya Nehanda played the defining role of opposing colonization in the 1890s. In some countries, the experience of the liberation struggle opened up the society to new definitions of the role of women, again some positive and others negative. Women have also played important roles in church groups and in workers' movements, such as the trade unions.

In the area of human rights, with special focus on women's rights as outlined in various

<sup>1</sup> Based on focus group discussion with teenage members of GBEM clubs in Lesotho in 2005.

documents such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), there is urgent need to research African reality through the prism of human rights and good governance. This in-depth exploration of reality can lead to curriculum reform at all levels, but in particular, at tertiary education level.

### **Gender as a Key to Economic Development**

Gender is today readily recognized as a key to development in areas such as health, hygiene, population planning, nutrition, education and other areas of social development. Better educated mothers are known to have lower child mortality, lower number of births, better nourished and better educated children. There has been less emphasis on the issue of gender in areas related to production, such as agriculture, industrialization, engineering, science, technology, banking and management. These are important areas for development, and involve not only technical areas, but also areas of governance, law, values and attitudes. An example is that of agriculture: 70-80% of agriculturalists in Africa are women, yet there is little focus on research, development, full time training and extension work for women agriculturalists. In addition, in many countries women are not allowed to own land or to open independent bank accounts. The laws and regulations regarding ownership and banking may be as important for improved agricultural productivity as the more technical aspects of fertilizer use and irrigation. Makerere Faculty of Agriculture has been in the forefront of incorporating gender into its curriculum programme, and provides an excellent model of how it can be done.

#### **Box 4A**

##### **Transformation of the Agriculture Curriculum at Makerere University**

The Agriculture Faculty has pioneered the integration of gender into its curriculum as part of the Makerere Five-Year Strategic Plan (2002-2007). About 80% of Uganda's agriculturalists are women, yet women do not own land and have little access to extension services. Implementation of the gender mainstreaming programme was done in four phases including sensitisation of executive and academic staff of the Faculty on gender issues, integrating gender into the Faculty curriculum, review of the gendered curriculum by stakeholders, gender skills training for academic staff, piloting the gendered curriculum and acquisition of more training materials, with local gender case studies.

Many African countries have been undertaking poverty reduction programmes, in collaboration with the World Bank, the United Nations and bilateral donors. Gender is necessarily a key aspect of this transformation. The poor and the vulnerable are predominantly women, and strategies for poverty reduction which do not take into account the main players are likely to be flawed from the inception stage.

Another key area requiring a gender perspective is that of women in the formal economy

workforce. They constitute a significant part of the sector, and participate in trade union activity. As participants in industrial production and development, and as trade unionists, their role is important, and needs to be explored through research as well as integrated into the curriculum of relevant disciplines, such as macro and microeconomics and labour economics.

Finally research, development, education and training provide the tools for transformation. If education is not to provide an endless and unreflective repetition of past history, it will need to base the transformation on new curricula founded on original research and development, rather than on repetition of the clichés of the past.

### **Gender as a Key to Social Development**

Gender is recognized as a key to many forms of social development: studies have already shown that the education of women leads to lower child mortality, better nutrition for the family, and higher levels of education for the children. The Ouagadougou Declaration on the Education of Girls (1993)<sup>2</sup> acknowledged that girls' education “contributes to improved quality of life and enhances national development through

- increased economic production rates;
- improved hygiene and nutritional practices;
- reduced child and maternal mortality rate;
- reduced fertility rate.”

### **Gender within a Human Rights Perspective**

The atrocities committed during the Second World War brought about a new consciousness on the need to emphasize human rights, such as in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and subsequent elaboration of this declaration in terms of prisoners' rights, children's rights, and women's rights. It is essential to examine the existing curricula in terms of how far they incorporate human rights into the teaching and learning.

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<sup>2</sup> The Declaration was adopted by the Pan-African Conference on the Education of Girls held in Burkina Faso. It has been accepted as policy by a large number of African countries.

**Box 4B**

**CONVENTION ON ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION  
AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)**

**Article 5      SEX ROLES AND STEREOTYPING**

State Parties shall take all appropriate measures:

- (a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women;
- (b) To ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases.

**Article 10      EQUAL RIGHTS IN EDUCATION**

- (a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas. . . .
- (b) Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;
- (c) The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging co-education and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and schools programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods;
- (d) The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;
- (e) The same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women;
- (f) The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely;
- (g) The same opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;
- (H) Access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.

Elimination of all stereotypes in education and textbooks.<sup>3</sup>

Gender within human rights perspective can be examined at many levels, in terms of the Constitution of the country, in terms of the legal framework for property ownership, in terms of the family, and in terms of the individual.

<sup>3</sup> CEDAW, [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm).

### Activity 4B

Examine a course outline you are familiar with, utilizing some of the criteria set out under CEDAW. Are gender issues addressed? Are there gender stereotypes? Is it gender-blind, and how does gender-blindness affect the teaching and learning positively and negatively?

### Gender Images and Language within the Curriculum

Unless the issue of gender is openly addressed, gender prejudice may unconsciously seep into the curriculum. Much work has been done at primary and secondary school levels to examine gender images in textbooks, and there have been numerous examples of gender stereotyping such as doctors always being depicted as men and nurses as women, active and productive roles being depicted as male roles,<sup>4</sup> and supportive and passive roles being depicted as women's roles. A similar exercise has not taken place in tertiary education. This may be a useful process to undertake for tertiary level curricula. The sensitisation of academic staff to the gender dimensions of teaching and learning is an important first step towards the transformation of the curriculum, including content, methodologies and processes. In the experience of the Makerere Faculty of Agriculture, which has already embarked on the gender transformation of the teaching and learning curriculum, this is an essential initial step.

Important issues to keep in mind in the engendering of the curriculum is the need to have on the one hand dedicated professionals who will carry through the reform, and on the other hand, the institutionalisation of the reform within the organization itself, in the form of statutory requirements, financial support, technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation, rewards and penalties.

### Activity 4C

1. What political support is there in your establishment for engendering the curriculum?
2. What technical support is there?
3. What financial support?
4. Will transformation of the curriculum be rewarded in some way, such as for promotion or for an academic recognition?
5. Who are the dedicated champions of curricular reform along gender lines in your organization? How can you get more support within your organization?<sup>3</sup>. What financial support?

### The Hidden Curriculum

Every organization has a “hidden curriculum”. This may include the following positive and negative hidden curricula in a tertiary education institution:

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<sup>4</sup> FAWE has sponsored a number of studies on gender bias in school textbooks.

- Doing well academically is not as important as doing well in sports, because sports develop leadership, whereas academic learning develops only the brain.
- Extra-mural activities such as clubs are important ways of developing leadership and managerial skills, and are more important than academic marks.
- University and college are opportunities for finding your future husband or wife: if you miss this opportunity you may be left on the shelf.
- If you refuse to have sex with your boyfriend, he will desert you, so it is better to agree (for women).
- Some male lecturers demand sex from you: if you don't agree they will fail you (for women).
- Women are divided into two groups: pure and faithful women whom you can marry, and loose women whom you can play around with. You can find out which group she belongs to by trying to have sex with every woman you date (for men).
- Alcohol, especially excessive drinking, is a sign that you are a man. A woman who drinks on the other hand is obviously immoral and promiscuous (for men).
- Dressing well is a sign that you have made it. Dressing badly shows that you belong to the lower classes. Dress is the most important symbol of status.
- A motor car is a sign of prestige and power: going out with a man who possesses a motor enhances your prestige.<sup>5</sup>
- Men need to get sexual experience as soon as they leave school, and they can get this through prostitutes or by propositioning women students. Lack of sexual experience shows you are not a man (for men).
- You should be a virgin on marriage. If you are not, you must nevertheless pretend, else you will never get married (for women).
- Men can indulge in student politics because it shows they are men; women should not be allowed to compete in student politics. Women who dare to compete or even to attend political meetings must be sexually harassed.
- Defiance of authority is good for men, but not for women. A man who defies authority shows he's a leader and a man. A woman who defies authority is a misfit.
- Women are to blame if they fall pregnant. If they didn't want to fall pregnant they should have taken the right precautions (for men).
- Men are sexually exploitative (for women).

It is interesting to note that much of the hidden curricula are related to sex, which is generally a taboo subject which cannot be discussed openly. Sexual ethics and values are important areas, which are not dealt with in the formal curriculum, and may be haphazardly dealt within the informal curriculum.

#### Activity 4D

Give five examples of the hidden curriculum in your institution.

<sup>5</sup> I once had a driver who used to utilize the Ministry Mercedes Benz to date women in the evenings. Apparently this was a good strategy.

## Curricular Methodologies and Priorities

Curriculum change can be a difficult and time consuming enterprise. In the case of the Makerere University Agriculture Faculty, the transformation began very quickly, but the whole process is timed to take five years. Some changes can take place immediately, but long term and in-depth work may require a longer period. Some steps in curricular transformation can include the following:

- Gender sensitisation workshops for academic staff can begin a process of curriculum transformation.
- More participative teaching methodologies which will give equal opportunities for women students to participate more actively, such as tutorial sessions run by women students, research projects related to gender issues in each faculty and department.
- Research and development into gender aspects of various academic disciplines. For example, problems, challenges and technologies of women farmers; challenges faced by reproductive health workers; challenges faced by women doctors. This research and development can become the materials to be used for curriculum reform based on the African reality.
- Utilization of distance education and mass media to strengthen higher education. This can be advantageous for girls and women, by providing greater flexibility to married women with young children who can thus do parts of their courses through distance education. Distance education modalities can also improve the quality of education in Africa's crowded lecture rooms.
- A similar course to what you envisage may already have been developed elsewhere in Africa or in the world. It is useful to obtain materials on such reforms, and adapt them to suit your situation. Partnerships with institutions in other parts of the world may be an excellent way of beginning your curricular reform.
- Providing African case studies and African research.
- Establish a Gender Studies Department/Unit/Institute so that technical know how is available on the spot. Gender studies is essential in African societies. Politicians and policy-makers frequently display a politically correct concern with gender inequality only to flounder when it comes to implementing change. Lack of expertise and information is often cited as major obstacles to overcoming discrimination and its consequences. Development industry has acknowledged the importance of gender at all stages of the development process and there is demonstrated need for a deeper understanding of the specifics of gender in African contexts and societies in order to avoid relying on inappropriate expertise that is not based on in-depth research and development.

Technical and vocational training programmes are traditionally male dominated areas, with females clustering around secretarial courses. There is need for research into each of these disciplines to investigate whether it is possible to improve both the curriculum and the teaching/learning processes so that women are not excluded. Bridging courses and career guidance for high school girls may be appropriate interventions. Some of the resistance may be due to sheer prejudice, whereas on the other hand, high school curricular choices may hamper others from entering these fields.

Vocational and technical training needs to be more closely linked to employment needs, with periods of internship within their industries. Such internship periods can also be used to investigate how to make the training women-friendly.

### **Institutional Support for Curriculum Transformation**

The curricular transformation at Makerere University, probably one of the most advanced and most successful in Africa, received a number of institutional supports which makes it easier for faculties and departments which decide to transform their curricula to do so. The support system includes the following:

- Political support through the Vice Chancellor, University Council and Senior Management, who were the first to be sensitised to gender issues;
- A few dedicated staff who were committed to the transformation, and were able to initiate and carry through the reform over a prolonged period;
- Technical support through the Institute for Gender Studies at the University, which was able to provide technical expertise on demand;
- An administrative support system through the Gender Mainstreaming Division of the Academic Registrar's Office;
- Financial support both from the University and from key donors. Resistance to gender studies has rested on logistical and financial matters as well as dominating cultural beliefs.

#### **Activity 4E**

1. What institutional support systems are there in your establishment?
2. How would you set up new support systems or strengthen old support systems?
3. What donor agencies could support curriculum transformation?
4. Link up with other departments/faculties in your country so that you can do some of the reform collectively. This will provide you with a larger base of qualified and dedicated personnel, and enable you to dialogue and share experiences.

### **Innovative Approaches to Curriculum Development**

Tertiary education today has the exciting possibility of utilizing an array of methodologies, which were not open a decade or two ago. Most prominent of these is the utilization of distance education and information and communications technologies (ICTs). At a time when African higher education establishments, universities in particular, are over-crowded, with over-flowing lecture rooms, a brain drain of lecturers to the West, and over-worked lecturers, the new technologies offer useful and stimulating methodologies that can help to improve the quality of education. The new methodologies offer the challenge of providing an enriched curriculum on gender as it relates to different disciplines. Institutions across the

continent have the opportunity to work jointly on such programmes. As some institutions, like Makerere University, have already done substantive work on gender mainstreaming, these experiences can be usefully shared with the whole continent.

Technologies which can be utilized include:

- Television and videos;
- DVDs;
- Internet;
- CD ROMs which can be utilized to download useful web sites for students who do not have access to internet;
- Computer games used for educational purposes.

Distance education offers a breakthrough for education, in particular for gender education. The sharing of courses, such as those offered by the Open University of the United Kingdom, can lead to a vast improvement of the quality of education, whilst at the same time opening up higher education to more students.

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