

Module 6

Faculty and Support Programmes



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Expected Outcomes

Support for faculty and students to develop and use gender-related programmes to improve the teaching and learning processes and environments.

Faculty and students are equipped with skills to teach and learn about gender within the institutions of higher education.

Strengthening gender-relevant activities that will generate teaching materials for use within the classroom and in outreach activities within institutions of higher learning.

Improvement of the gender climate in institutions of higher learning by training and supporting staff and students who need to understand gender issues and their relevance to academic and vocational life in institutions of higher learning.

Institutional Context

Faculty and support programs that help staff and students to understand gender issues in higher education are important in the process of making teaching and learning relevant, useful and democratic. Faculty and student training often take place within and outside Africa. Within Africa, there is limited capacity within institutions to develop and institutionalize gender issues in ways that have a positive impact on teaching and learning. The African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town and the Gender Institute of Makerere University are making headway in developing the capacity and resources for training in gender issues through the range of programs that they offer. Yet there is still great need to develop these capacities throughout the continent. It is the responsibility of management, administration and academics to develop these capacities and to institutionalize them, taking into consideration the individual contexts and constraints of higher education institutions.

In many African institutions, gender issues are treated in a cavalier manner and are often undervalued or dismissed as concerns of westernized women. While donor and partner institutions and programs increasingly incorporate gender requirements in their operations, African higher education institutions have been slow to recognize and utilize their existent competencies for the benefit of their programs. This weakens the programs and qualifications of African graduates because they are unable to understand, confront and resolve the gendered problems of poverty and underdevelopment within their populations. Within the scientific and technical areas, there is very little interest, understanding and appreciation of the relationship between gender, science, technology and development.

Faculty and student support programs are necessary to enable gender issues to be incorporated into the daily business of institutions of higher education in research, teaching and outreach activities. This has to be done in ways that have social, economic and political impacts that will in turn strengthen the demand for gender programs in higher education.

Activity 6A

“ Science has no gender.” Would you agree with this assertion? Are there some disciplines in the sciences and technology, which have no gender issues? Discuss how they can be gendered.

Problem Statement

Faculty and student support programs are critical for developing gender competence within institutions of higher education in Africa. Increasingly, it is expensive to fund training outside Africa and many academics were educated before gender issues became recognized as key areas of competence in the teaching and learning processes. Continuing gender education and training is critical for faculty in order to optimize the costs and benefits of education to men and women in higher education. African education institutions lack the capacity to acquire and develop skills and competencies to tackle the gender problems in their environments, namely, the near-exclusion of women, poor students and minorities in science and technology education and development, the reluctance of men to participate in gender education and activities and the poor development of science education for girls, women and the poor in Africa.

Context

- In African institutions of higher education, there is a climate of hostility towards the exploration and discussion of gender issues.
- There are very few women heading and managing institutions of higher education, especially in science and technology areas.
- There is a notable absence of women as students and as teachers in scientific and technological areas.
- There is virtually no recognition of gender dimensions of development outside the humanities and arts in African higher education institutions.
- There is gender violence in many institutions of higher education.
- Due to the gender relationships, politics and institutional climates in higher education, there is relatively high infection with HIV and AIDS amongst teachers and students especially in Southern Africa
- There is a dearth of relevant literature that can be used for teaching and learning on gender issues in higher education and below.
- It has proved difficult to attract and retain qualified female academics and graduates because of the hostile gender climate of the higher education arena.

Responses to the Problems

From the beginning, it is necessary for the leadership of higher education institution to take a leading role in recognizing and legitimizing gender issues and their relevance to resolving

development challenges in Africa. This can be accomplished through the following measures:

- Creating and sustaining awareness of the importance of gender in the teaching and learning environment.
- Making commitments to improve faculty and students' understanding of the gender issues in higher education.
- Providing institutional and related support programs to fund, sustain and legitimize gender concerns in higher education.

In pursuit of the measures referred to above, there will be a need for synchronization of the programs and activities in the context of a gender policy. Where there is no gender policy in existence, there might be need to conduct a small gender audit of the institution. The audit might focus on the following issues:

Teaching

Is there a unit, center or department dedicated to teaching women's and gender studies across all disciplines? Is the teaching of gender studies confined to a few departments or faculties? Which ones have no gender studies? Why?

What is the ratio of male to female academic staff at all levels, ranging from tutors, teaching assistants to professors?

What are the necessary steps for an academic to move from one grade to the next? Are these steps equally achievable by men and women? Are the guidelines clear and widely known? Is there equity in the implementation?

What is the gender content of teaching material in all departments? Does it appeal to and is it equally accessible to men and women? Does it address the needs, aspirations and contributions of men and women to society? Is the contribution of women to knowledge production in the different disciplines acknowledged /affirmed in the lecture halls in terms of content and assigned readings?

What teaching competencies exist in the area of gender? Do mechanisms and incentives exist for men and women to acquire these competencies if they do not have them?

What courses are available to students who might desire to acquire gender competencies? Is there any incentive or compulsion for teachers to develop such courses for students?

To what extent is the classroom space gendered? Who sits where? Attention must be paid to readings on seating arrangements and groupings and what they signify. Who participates more in class?

Are the classrooms and laboratories safe for women?

Is language use in the classrooms sexist? Are sexist jokes made?

What is the common mode of pedagogy, transmission or interactive? Interactive appears to be more empowering to women.

Research

What level of competence and skills do staff have to conduct gender research?

What funding exists for gender research to be undertaken within the institution?

Are there any training courses or programs that address gender issues across disciplines in institutions of higher education?

Is there any unit, center or department that is dedicated to teaching and researching gender issues in the institution?

Community

Is there any voluntary gender activism on campus by students and academic faculty? Is it supported by the institution? How?

Are there any gender-sensitive measures to support faculty and students in their community lives on and off campus? Is there a dean or officer for male and female students or are they all supposed to be catered for by one officer/dean? If these measures and activities do not exist, you need to find out why not.

Are offices in student and faculty governance accessible to men and women equally?

Does the institution host or support public debates or activities on gender issues?

Is the institution involved in any activities and initiatives in collaboration with others, in the areas of gender and teaching, learning and related activities?

Exploring the issues outlined above provided entry points for intervention to provide faculty and support programs that further the gender agenda.

What Should the Support Programs for Faculty Cover?

Support programs for faculty could cover the areas in teaching, research and community service.

In teaching, the following faculty support programs could be considered:

- Scholarships for post-graduate students and faculty to pursue courses in the areas of gender in their disciplines, particularly in science and technology.
- Provide short courses to all faculties on women's and human rights, gender awareness and gender sensitivity as part of continuing education in institutions of higher learning.

- Scholarships and support for women and men for doctoral studies in the ratios of 2:1 depending on the findings of the audit. The point is to provide support for the disadvantaged gender, taking into account their constraints such as the inability to study abroad with a young family or mid-career spouse.
- Strengthening women's and gender studies in all faculties by training focal persons who take the responsibility for pioneering and monitoring the processes of gendering disciplines, curricula and research. This activity might also boost understanding of the mechanisms by which exclusions by gender, race, class, age and ethnicity operate in institutions of higher education.
- Award prizes and other forms of recognition for individuals, departments and faculties that excel in gender research.

Research

- Fund research and publications, which popularize and inform the public on the gender agenda of the institution and its performance.
- Train academics in the packaging and publication of gender research in ways that makes it accessible to different sectors within and outside the higher education area.
- The persistent absence of gender in the curriculum of the “hard” sciences is noticeable. Academics in the sciences do not seem to know how to introduce gender into seemingly neutral disciplines like chemistry and physics.
- Raise funding and award research grants and prizes for researchers producing distinguished work on gender in specific disciplines.

Community

- Fund public debates on gender and popularize these debates by selling rights to them to television and radio stations, magazines and other media, thus raising the profile of the institution.
- Strengthen anti-violence ordinances and regulations to support academic staff in their gender work.
- Promote student and staff groups that deal with gender issues so that they can improve the teaching and learning environment and reduce gender violations in institutions of higher learning.
- Promote policy dialogue on gender between institutions of higher learning, the state and other stakeholders.

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