



*Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)*

# **Popularising Gender: A Case Study of Makerere University**

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## **Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE)**

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## Popularising Gender: A case study of Makerere University

### 1. Historical background

Makerere University was established in 1922 as a Technical school offering Carpentry and later expanding to include Medical Care, Agriculture, Veterinary and Teacher Training. In 1937 the college developed into an institution of higher education and in 1949 it became a University college of the University of London. It became a college for the whole of East Africa, offering general degrees of the University of London. Uganda gained independence in 1962 and in 1963 the special relationship with the University of London ended. The degrees of the University of East Africa were offered from 1963. In 1970 Makerere became an independent university of Uganda, offering undergraduate and postgraduate courses leading to its own awards. The first women were admitted in 1945 after a lot of struggle. These were six in number and they were offered a separate curriculum consisting of English, Social Studies, History, Art and Educational studies. The first woman graduated in 1955.

The situation has evolved over the years but the legacy of under-representation of women, both as staff and students, persists. The enrollment of students is skewed in favour of males. Table 1. Shows trends in enrollment of undergraduate students since 1986.

**Table 1. Undergraduate student enrollment by sex.**

Academic Year	Male	Female	% of Females
1986/87	1192	368	23
1987/88	1330	343	21
1988/89	1266	400	24
1989/90	1281	407	24
1990/91	1547	658	30
1991/92	1400	621	30
1992/93	1312	678	32
1993/94	1381	742	34
1994/95	1974	680	26
1995/96	1558	686	30

**Source: Admissions Office in Ebila & Nakafero (1998)**

## **2. Methodologies used to address gender**

### **2.1 Establishment of a Women's Studies Department**

The idea to establish a Women's Studies Department came from a partnership between the women's movement in the country and the women members of staff at the University after the awareness and enthusiasm gained from the 1985 World Conference for Women held in Nairobi, Kenya. The idea was sold to the University administration as early as 1986 but the department did not open until 1991. The approach of focussing on women's studies has now shifted to include gender studies, in line with change of focus in the discipline. That has come about because of the general realisation that addressing women only has tended to alienate men and to create resistance.

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The programme offers women and gender studies at degree level for both masters and bachelors qualifications and it is a department in the Faculty of Social Sciences. The mission of the programme is to bring change in the socialisation of women and men through understanding their lives and encouraging development of policies and programmes that are sensitive to the fact that women's and men's lives are structured differently. Setting up the programme was quite a lengthy process requiring a multidisciplinary committee of senior academic staff who had to develop the curriculum and sort out the conceptual clarity of the kind of gender studies that Uganda wanted .

One of the challenges in developing the programme was to ensure that the course content had a good balance of local issues of gender and development, and global concepts. The balance has improved over time with adjustments that have been made as staff gained more experience in running the programme. The department enjoyed support from government and donors, regional organisations and University administration especially in the first five years. The government gave financial support to the students for their tuition and research, the donors supported academic staff to attend short courses, obtain post graduate degrees and go to conferences abroad and in the region to enhance their capacity for managing the programme. The department formed linkages with similar programmes abroad and, through exchange programmes, tuned the quality of teaching and research to internationally acceptable standards.

Making the Women's Studies Department to operate as a full department and not just a component in other departments has been central in creating awareness and interest as well as facilitating skills development in gender analysis at the University. It has also contributed towards legitimising gender studies as a serious discipline worthy of a university degree.

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*Some of the lessons learnt so far so far are:*

- The need for kick-start funding and support from important institutions in order to meet the requirements of starting and sustaining a meaningful gender programme.
- Need for adequate capacity building in terms of up-dating expertise and improving facilities.
- Awarding worthwhile qualifications increases the marketability of the programme.
- The need for strong institutional linkages with other universities.
- Over-dependence on donor funding can be a threat to the continuity of activities when funding is discontinued. The programme needs to develop capacity to mobilise resources.

## **2.2 Influencing University and National policy: Affirmative action for enrollment of girls at the University**

While Makerere University cannot solve the school level problems, it has implemented a policy of affirmative action, which was introduced by government to improve the disadvantaged position of women in education. The scheme came in response to a lot of pressure from the women's movement, the Ministry of Gender and the Department of Women and Gender Studies. This is how the scheme works:

*All girls who complete 'A' level and apply to join university are eligible for the scheme and they have to obtain minimum qualification for university entrance in order to qualify for the scheme. They are then given a 1.5 points bonus over the points they have scored through examination results.*

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The scheme has been going on since 1990. As the data in Table 1 illustrates, the results were immediately noticeable. The percentage of women getting enrolled increased from 24% in 1989 to 30% in 1990 and to 34% in 1995. The scheme has, therefore, succeeded in increasing women's numeric strengths in the student body, particularly in the faculties of Arts, Social Sciences and Education.

The affirmative action was legally endorsed in 1995 in the Uganda constitution where Article 30 states that all persons have a right to education and Article 33 Section 5 further grants women the right to affirmative action for the purpose of redressing the imbalances created by history, tradition or custom (Government of Uganda, 1995). On its own, this action does not fully address women's unequal access to university education, but it makes a significant contribution.

There is no affirmative action for post graduate courses and as expected, female enrollment is smaller than that of males. Probably as a result of affirmative action which has increased graduate women's numbers and other factors that have not yet been empirically established, there is an increase in women's numbers enrolling for post graduate studies since 1993, especially at Masters level. The main lesson learnt from initiating the affirmative action programme is the importance of networking with appropriate government departments and NGOs.

### **2.3 Interdisciplinary research**

Encouraging staff to provide gender analysis expertise on interdisciplinary research teams with other departments has been one route of improving the quality of studies being done and de-mystifying gender. An increasing number of staff from other faculties and from outside the university now

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take interest in learning gender analysis skills by attending the outreach programmes offered as short courses by the department.

## **2.4 Gender mainstreaming**

Gender mainstreaming refers to the process of institutionalising gender in the policies, structures and human resource components of the University. This is an on-going initiative of the department of gender studies to institutionalise a gender perspective throughout the university, having realised that the university does not have any policies that explicitly take into account the different needs of women and men (staff and students). Having learnt from experiences elsewhere of the importance of getting goodwill and support at the highest management level, this is the process that has been followed:

- A high level workshop was held for all members of the central executive, Deans and Directors with the aim of collectively analysing women's and men's needs in the university and developing an action plan for meeting their gender specific needs.
- Recommendations of this workshop were presented to Senate, in order to institutionalise the whole process. One of the recommendations of this workshop was that Senate should form a standing committee on gender mainstreaming
- The Senate established a committee on gender mainstreaming, with the mandate to advise Senate on modalities to mainstream gender into all functions of the institution
- The Senate Committee on gender mainstreaming realised that that the current status of gender issues in the university was not well established and commissioned a study to do a situation analysis of gender related concerns university-wide. This process has not been completed.



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Both from the setting of the gender studies department and the initiative to mainstream gender, the following lessons so far have been learnt:

- Having the goodwill and commitment of the highest level managers of the institution is essential for gender mainstreaming to be effective
- Goodwill and commitment of high level managers is better achieved through dialogue and lobbying than through '*militant*' activism
- There is need for a critical mass of committed and competent gender experts to give the process credibility and sustenance.

### **3.0 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it should always be pointed out that emphasis on promoting women's education to the highest level is promotion of national interests because it is one of the most cost effective investments towards improving standards of living and improving indicators of social development. It is, therefore, a policy issue of national interest and not just an interest of the women's movement.

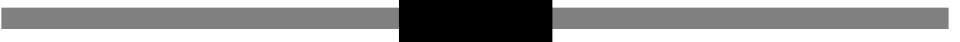
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