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The Rising Demand for Higher Education: The Case of Women's University in Africa

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Abstract

Higher education worldwide is undergoing a continuous process of transformation and differentiation as new challenges emerge in the macro socio-economic and political environment. Not only have existing institutions expanded their curricula to offer a wider range of courses, but new types of institutions have been established to cater for groups which have not been able to access higher education and training in the existing colleges and universities.

Introduction

Higher education in Africa today is characterised by a contradiction of a rising social demand against a background of diminishing public funding. The rising demand for higher education has attracted the participation of private providers, both profit-making and non-profit-making. In Zimbabwe, while the University of Zimbabwe was the only one operating at the attainment of political independence in 1980, 14 additional universities have since been established. This article is a story of how a much younger institution is fairing in the rich academic environment that was pioneered by the University of Zimbabwe (UZ).

Background and overview of the Women's University in Africa

The Women's University in Africa (WUA) is a private institution founded by two prominent Zimbabwean women, Professor Hope Cynthia Sadza and Dr Fay King Chung. It was established in 2002 and granted a Charter by the government of Zimbabwe in 2004. Its eventual main campus is in Marondera, 80km South East of Harare. It is currently operating from its second campus in Harare at two sites; in Mt Pleasant and 188 Sam Nujoma Street in Avondale. The university seeks to enhance women's capacity through the provision of higher education, which enables them to fulfil political, economic, social and leadership roles. It considers the empowerment of women to be absolutely critical for sustainable economic growth and improved democratic governance. WUA is the only women's university in the region that is directly tackling the problem of women's access to university education. Its enrolment of 85% women and 15% men, the majority of whom are over 25 years of age, is proving to be better than traditional approaches of affirmative action. Maintaining the 50:50 ratio as advocated through the SADC Protocol on Education and Training may not effectively address the historical and culturally engrained gender imbalances.

The university has grown from an initial enrolment of 145 students in 2002, to over 2900 currently, will grow to approximately 3500 by the end of 2015 and will continue to grow at an average rate of approximately 600 per annum until it reaches its optimum size of approximately 8000 under six faculties covering both humanities and natural sciences by 2020. From its initial output of 137 graduates in 2005, it has since produced 3937 graduates, 75% of whom are women. The university remains resolute in its quest to reach its optimum growth while maintaining quality provision of services to clients and stakeholders. This development focus covered in the current Strategic Plan

2012-2015 is guided by the motto that the university adopted in 2011: "Growth with Quality". It is important that as it embarks on this expansion drive, the university re-examines its guiding philosophy and continuously align it with its mandate of championing the empowerment of women through the provision of quality higher education.

In the current Strategic Plan 2012 to 2015, WUA strives to attain several strategic objectives that are derived from the objects stated in the university Charter and take cognisance of the ever-changing needs of society. The new programmes and faculties introduced will therefore continue to take into account current and projected developmental needs and benchmarked against international best-practices. In this regard, the university works in close liaison with: the Zimbabwe Vice Chancellors Association (ZUVCA), the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE), the Southern Africa Regional Universities Association (SARUA), the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the International Universities Association (IUA) to whom it is fully subscribed. The Founder and Vice Chancellor of the Women's University in Africa is the current Chairperson of ZUVCA.

The fundamental guiding strategic statements of the university

The university operations are guided by the following fundamental strategic statements:

2.1   Vision

To be the best university in Africa in the promotion of gender equity in tertiary education

2.2   Mission Statement

Providing quality tuition, research and service to the community to empower students, particularly women for leadership and developmental roles

2.3   Strategic Goal

To empower African women through quality research and teaching thereby enabling their full participation in all sectors of the economy for the development of Africa

2.4   Objects of the University

The main objects of the university as enunciated in the University Charter, Statutory Instrument 130 of 2004, Proclamation 4 of 2004 are:

2.4.1   to provide and promote research with emphasis on agriculture, information technology, science, management and leadership, and any other field in which the university may from time to time be engaged in;

2.4.2   to provide gender sensitive and socially responsible education and training in an environment of principled inquiry, tolerance and equity;

2.4.3   to address the gender disparity in higher education in Africa;

2.4.4   to educate women and galvanise their endeavours and leadership qualities so that they can offer quality services based on the ethical value systems within their communities;

2.4.5   to provide opportunities of research and development in areas of vital concern to women in Africa;

2.4.6   to encourage co-operative interdisciplinary teaching and research of established academic women in the areas identified in order to harness their innovative capacity;

2.4.7   to open up permanent network to academic women on a global scale, which would strengthen the existing academic structures and enrich the contents of their disciplines;

2.4.8   to link the education of women to poverty reduction in Africa;

2.4.9   to promote peace, human rights and democracy through educated, caring and responsible women open to other cultures and respectful of human

dignity and differences;

2.4.10 to increase the quantity and quality of human resources and development for the betterment of the Continent of Africa;

2.4.11 to increase and create quality and relevant science and technology learning;

2.4.12 to increase women's involvement in decision making;

2.4.13 to teach students to strive for mental excellence in the pursuit of knowledge.

2.5   Strategic Objectives

In line with these Objects, the following strategic objectives guide the Women's University in Africa (WUA):

2.5.1   To increase access and provide knowledge and skills that enable African women to create knowledge and be innovative in the development of their communities, countries and the continent;

2.5.2   To create an educational environment where communities and other stakeholders identify with WUA as the ideal place for research, learning and knowledge sharing;

2.5.3   To enhance the capability of WUA to attain its optimum growth with quality research, teaching and community service.

2.6   Guiding Principles

The principles on which the Women's University in Africa's Strategic and Vision Plan (2012-2015) whose theme is "Growth With Quality" encompass gender equity, good corporate governance, respect of individual rights, and environmental consciousness, and sustainable development.

2.7   Core Values

At the heart of this plan are core values that guide activities, govern priorities, and influence the strategic allocation of resources. WUA values represent the soul of the university. The following values guide the university decisions:

2.7.1   Gender-Sensitive, Equity and Diversity;

2.7.2   Academic Freedom;

2.7.3   Creativity and Innovation;

2.7.4   Integrity and Honesty;

2.7.5   Social Responsibility; and

2.7.6   Transparency and Accountability.

Enrolment trends since inception

The university has already expanded more than twenty times since its inception in 2002 and is poised to reach its planned optimum size of approximately 8000 students by 2020. Table 1 shows the growth of the university by more than twenty-fold since 2002. It is apparent that while the university policy is to have 85% women and 15% men, this ratio has not yet been achieved. The main reason is the failure by women to pay fees and take up their places. The problem is therefore an under-enrolment of women rather than over-enrolment of men. Strategies that include sourcing scholarships and grants to increase the quota for women enrolled in the university are being prioritised to ensure the ratio complies with the gender policy by 2020

Table 1

Enrolment Trend since Inception

YEAR	FEMALE	%	MALE	%	TOTAL	Annual % Change
2002	124	85	21	15	145	100
2003	280	73	104	27	384	164.83
2004	355	73.5	128	26.5	483	25.78
2005	689	73.4	249	26.6	938	93.37
2006	871	75	289	25	1160	23.67
2007	1,118	70.7	463	29.3	1,581	36.29
2008	1,032	70.1	423	29.9	1,45 5	-7.97
2009	1,121	75.5	363	24.5	1,484	1.99
2010	1,146	74.2	397	26.8	1,543	3.98
2011	1,366	75	463	25	1,829	18.54
2012	1,837	75	615	25	2,452	34.06
2013	2,093	74	743	26	2,836	15.66
2014	2,219	75	741	25	2,960	4.37
2015	2,261	75	742	25	3,003	1.45

A total of 34 15 students have graduated from the university since inception, comprising of 2524 females and 891 males as illustrated inTable 2.

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Table 2

Students Who Have Graduated Since Inception

YEAR	FEMALE	%	MALE	%	TOTAL
2005	128	93.4	9	6.6	137
2006	123	89.8	14	10.2	137
2007	71	53.8	61	46.2	132
2008	232	70.3	98	29.7	330
2009	258	78.4	71	21.6	329
2010	311	77.0	93	23.0	404
2011	333	70.3	141	29.7	474
2012	377	74.1	132	25.9	509
2013	510	76.8	154	23.2	664
2014	594	72.4	227	27.6	821
Grand Total	2937	74.6	1000	25.4	3937

Programmes offered

WUA offers a wide variety of innovatively designed products and services to meet the ever growing demand in tertiary education and research consultancy and responsive to the national and international development needs. The products and services range from; undergraduate certificates and diplomas, undergraduate degree programmes, post graduate certificates and diplomas to post graduate degree programmes, research, conferences, workshops and seminars tailored to meet the needs of organizations, and outreach programmes. The outreach programme is further being enhanced through the 'taking the university to the people' programme that is being piloted through the Faculty of Agriculture.

The first enrolment of students at WUA was in September 2002 with four faculties as shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3

Programmes Offered at Inception in 2002

	FACULTY	DEGREE PROGRAMME
1	Faculty of Agriculture	BSc (Hons) in Agriculture
2	Faculty of Reproductive Health & Family Sciences	Bsc (Hons) in Reproductive Health & Family Sciences
3	Faculty of Management, Studies Entrepreneurial Development Studies and Information Technology	Bsc Management & Entrepreneurial Advanced Diploma in IT, Office Administration, and Management
4	Faculty of Social Sciences and Gender Development Studies	BSc (Hons) in Psychology & BSc (Hons) in Sociology

Current Programmes

The Faculty of Reproductive Health and Family Sciences was temporarily discontinued and will be reintroduced during the current planning period. Consultations have already been conducted through a needs assessment to ensure the programmes offered meet the expectations of all stakeholders. The programmes will have either a clinical or a non-clinical bias, and will mainly target health practitioners already in the field.

Table 4

Programmes Currently on Offer

1	AGRICULTURE
1.1	B.Sc. Agriculture Honours Degree in Agribusiness Management
1.2	B.Sc. Agriculture Honours Degree in Animal Science
1.3	B.Sc. Agriculture Honours Degree in Horticulture
1.4	Diploma in Environmental Management
2	MANAGEMENT, ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

2.1   Bsc Honours in Management and Entrepreneurial Development Studies specialising in Banking and Finance;

2.2   BSc Honours in Management and Entrepreneurial Development Studies specialising in Management and Marketing;

2.3   BSc Honours in Purchasing and Supply Chain Management;

2.4   BSc Honours in Human Resource Management;

2.5   Bachelor's Honours degree in Accounting Science

2.6   BSc Honours in Information Systems;

2.7   Executive Diploma in Management;

2.8   Master of Business Administration;

3   SOCIAL SCIENCES AND GENDER DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

3.1   B Ed in Early Childhood Development (In-Service);

3.2   BSc Honours in Psychology;

3.3   BSc Honours in Sociology;

3.4   BSc Honours in Community Development;

3.5   BSc Honours in Women's and Gender Studies;

3.6   Master of Science in Development Studies;

3.7   Post graduate Diploma in Child Sensitive Social Policies;

3.8   Post graduate Diploma in Social Work;

3.9   Diploma in Social Work; and

3.10   Certificate in Social Work.

4.2   Proposed Programmes

4.2.1   Faculty of Agriculture

New Degree Programmes to be introduced in 2015 in Agriculture are:

4.2.1.1 BSc Agriculture Honours Degree in Meat Science and Dairy Technology;

4.2.1.2 BSc Agriculture Honours in Agricultural Education and Extension; and

4.2.1.3 BSc Agriculture Honours in Integrated Environmental Management.

4.2.2   Faculty of Management, Entrepreneurial Development Studies and Information Technology

4.2.2.1 BSc Honours in Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management;

4.2.2.2 BSc Honours in Operations Research and Supply Chain Management;

4.2.2.3 BSc Honours in Computer Science;

4.2.2.4 BSc Honours in Economics; and

4.2.2.5 Masters in Public Administration.

4.2.3   Faculty of Social Sciences and Gender Development Studies

4.2.3.1 B.Ed. in Early Childhood Development (Pre-Service);

4.2.3.2 BSc Honours in Social Work;

4.2.3.3 BSc Honours in Midwifery;

4.2.3.4 MEd in Early Childhood Development;

4.2.3.5 MSc in Child Sensitive Social Policies; and

4.2.3.6 M Phil in Child Sensitive Social Policies.

4.3   Proposed Faculties

At least eighteen new degree programmes have been developed and are in the process of being approved before they can be offered starting from September 2012 and February 2013. The university intends to increase the number of Faculties from the current three to eight by 2015. The new ones to be introduced include Faculties, Centres, Institutes and Schools in the following disciplines:

4.3.1   Reproductive Health and Family Sciences;

4.3.2   Gender, Child Rights and Legal Studies; and

4.3.3   Engineering; Sciences and Technology;

5   Gender Centre and Gender Mainstreaming

The university is establishing a Gender Centre, which will be the focal point of all is programmes through gender mainstreaming. While the Centre will offer some of its own programmes in gender development studies, its main function is to service all academic departments in gender mainstreaming. Besides academic programmes, research and outreach programmes that focus on gender equity, other key features of the Centre will include a gender literature resource and database, a gender museum and artefacts collection, and a gender conference centre.

6   Research Activities

6.1   The Research Board

6.1.1   Overview

The Research Board of the Women's University in Africa comprises ex-officio and elected/appointed representatives of academic staff and PhD holders in the university. The Research Board reports to the Pro Vice Chancellor and the Research Committee of the University Council. The Research Board plays a catalytic role in the generation of new knowledge and innovation through research and publications. This is a central pillar of the university's strategic contribution towards the production of highly knowledgeable and skilled manpower which is gender sensitive, locally relevant and globally competitive.

6.1.2 Mandate

The core function of the Research Board is to enhance the quality of scholarship through research and elevate the reputation of the university through a number of activities that include the following:

6.1.2.1 Management of research activities, that is, the appraisal of faculty research proposals and disbursement of resources supporting research;

6.1.2.2 The creation and management of a research database;

6.1.2.3 Facilitating the development of faculty capacity to carry out research and to attract funds;

6.1.2.4 Mobilising funds for supporting research and innovation;

6.1.2.5 Exhibiting annually at the Research and Intellectual Expo-Science and Technology (RIE-SET) Week and at the bi-annual Zimbabwe International Research Symposium;

6.1.2.6 Disseminating research outputs through the annual publication of the Research Bulletin and the forthcoming quarterly publication of The African Journal of Women and Gender in Development.

6.2 Policy on Intellectual Property Rights, Consultancy and Other Income Generating Activities

6.2.1 The Council of the Women's University in Africa approved the Policy on Intellectual Property Rights, Consultancy and Other Income Generating

Activities at its meeting in March 2014.

6.2.2   Three draft agreements were submitted in October 2014 for consideration and approval by the University Council. These are the:

6.2.2.1 Secrecy and Non-Disclosure Agreement;

6.2.2.2 Service Agreement; and

6.2.2.3 Visitor Participation Agreement.

6.2.3   The three agreements will enable the implementation of the Policy on Intellectual Property Rights, Consultancy and Other Income Generating Activities.

6.3   Research articles published and a training manual

6.3.1   Research articles have been published in various refereed journals encompassing the fields of:

6.3.1.1 Animal Science,

6.3.1.2 Horticulture,

6.3.1.3 Early Childhood Development,

6.3.1.4 Secondary Education,

6.3.1.5 Open Distance Learning in Higher Education,

6.3.1.6 Urban Development,

6.3.1.7 The Built Industry,

6.3.1.8 Sociology of the Family, and

6.3.1.9 Women and Information and Communication Technology.

6.3.2   A capacity building training manual on Child Rights was developed for use in workshops with Parliamentarians in Zimbabwe.

6.3.3   The Research Board published a Research Bulletin which was exhibited and distributed at the 2014 Research and Intellectual Expo-Science and Technology (RIE-SET) Week during 3-6 September.

6.4   The African Journal of Women and Gender in Development

6.4.1   The Research Board facilitated the design of the cover of WUA's

maiden Journal, namely The African Journal of Women and Gender in Development (TAJWAGID) and the selection of an Editorial Advisory Board comprising eminent local and international scholars.

6.4.2   In 2014, the Vice Chancellor appointed a six-member international Editorial Advisory Board of TAJWAGID.

6.4.3   Several articles are being reviewed for publication in TAJWAGID.

6.5   PhD Research in Progress

As of October 2014, the university has ten (10) members of staff who are at different stages in their PhD studies. Nine (9) members of academic staff are registered with universities in South Africa and one (1) is registered with the University of Zimbabwe.

6.6   Symposia, Conferences and Workshops

6.6.1   Academic staff took part in and presented papers at various symposia, conferences and workshops in Zimbabwe, South Africa and United States of America to name but a few countries.

6.6.2   In February 2014, Women's University in Africa (WUA) hosted an International Conference on Child Sensitive Social Policies which attracted researchers and practitioners from Eastern and Southern Africa.

6.6.3   Between the 30th and 1st of August 2014, WUA's Child Sensitive Social Policies Programme, with support from UNICEF Zimbabwe and the Ministry of Health and Child Care, ran a capacity building workshop on Child Rights for 38 Parliamentarians at Troutbeck Inn in Nyanga, Zimbabwe.

6.6.4   During 3-6 September 2014, WUA exhibited at the Research and Intellectual Expo-Science and Technology (RIE-SET) Week held at the University of Zimbabwe.

7   Information and Communication Technology Facilities

The university is currently running at an internet bandwidth of 27Mbps. Internet services are provided to both staff and students and there is wireless

connectivity capability at the 3 university campuses in Harare, Marondera and Bulawayo. Computer laboratory services are provided at the university's campuses for practical ICT lessons. These are furnished with high standard computers and they all have access to the internet. The laboratories are also available for use by students who do not have personal laptops. The university is working on the development of an E-learning system which will allow lectures and lecture content being delivered online. Plans to setup an Open and Distance electronic Learning (ODeL) centre are also underway. This will see the university growing its base through leveraging of ICTs. Because 'Growth with quality' is the key strategy of the university, Turnitin software (anti-plagiarism software) is in place to ensure that the work produced by the students is of the highest quality. The software checks uploaded work for similarities with other documents that have been previously published. The university has invested in an information management system, Navision. The system whose main purpose is to improve the operational efficiencies of the university has facilitated the integration of the finances, student admissions process, examinations processing and further expansion is in the pipeline to include the management of library services. Lastly but not least, the university runs a website which is used for information dissemination to stakeholders.

Library resources

Library overview

The Women's University in Africa library is at the centre of intellectual life on campus. It is an indispensable partner in study, teaching, and research. The library is a modern information portal where patrons obtain assistance with their research and technical support, as well as make use of the reference collection and modern technology resources that provide access to online research materials. There are over 63 computer workstations, a quiet study floor and hot spots around the library for high speed Internet connectivity. Given its unique role in the life of the university, the library is truly universal on campus as the heart of the institution.

The library's collections encompass a rich and varied universe of printed volumes, and digital resources. The university library houses above 11 000 print volumes, over 14milliom e-documents, over 14million electronic journal articles and an Institutional Repository with more than 2 500 dissertations and thesis and 1 527 past examination papers.

Special collections and archives

The library's Special Collections and Archives collects and preserves rare historical materials on Gender and Women's Collection.

Competitive environment of the higher education sector

From only one university at the attainment of political independence, there are 15 universities in Zimbabwe and these include 10 state and five private. WUA is one of the five private universities and, like all the other local universities WUA is a member of the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE), whose main responsibility is to set quality standards and carry out assessments for

accreditation of all degree-awarding institutions in the country. WUA aims at providing the diverse citizens of Zimbabwe and Africa the benefits of high quality, accessible and future-oriented higher education.

Besides the 15 universities registered in Zimbabwe, an increasing number of foreign institutions have come to compete for students in the country. Also, there is a growing number of on-line courses and programmes being offered from all over the world. This has resulted in a highly competitive environment. However, WUA is one of the fast growing universities in the country and is making frantic efforts to ensure its 'Growth with Quality' theme propels it to its optimum growth by 2020. The university also has the advantage that its students are mainly mature professionals who, upon completing their degree programmes would have almost instant impact on the society since they would already be in the job market. The unique gender mix and age of its students, flexible timetabling, and focus on mature women gives WUA another competitive advantage. Due to the huge demand for places, the university enrols students twice a year.

In the persistent hush economic environment, it has become necessary for universities to adopt survival strategies and become economically viable. Even public institutions have come to the realisation that dependence on central government funding is no longer feasible and should develop self-sustaining strategies.

Concluding remarks
The university growth trajectory is demand-driven, guided by the national development plans such as the current Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (Zim Asset) and international trends. While

unemployment is high and continues to rise, there is also a skill gap at high professional and technological levels throughout the public and private sectors of the economy. In its Human Resources Development Plan for the period 1996 -2000, the Ministry of Higher Education and Technology noted the findings of the National Manpower Survey of 1995 (Ministry of Higher Education, 1997). According to the Survey, if the country was to respond to the new economic demands, it would need to develop human resources in new areas of specialisation that include; Computer Technicians and Systems Analysts, Financial Management, Accounting, Sales, Marketing, Quality Control, Public Relations, Customer Care, Electronics, Machining, Motor Mechanics, Pneumatics, Drilling, Rigging, Specialised Nursing, Business Development and Management as well as Hospitality and Tourism. In spite of the massive expansion of tertiary education and training that has taken place since the attainment of political independence, the demand for higher-level training is still far in excess of the current training capacity. The shortage of university graduates in specific areas of specialisation is particularly noticeable.

As the only university that existed in the country up to the 1990s, the University of Zimbabwe could not cope with the demand for places and the diversity of the fields needed to meet the national human resource requirements. It could not offer the whole range of programmes needed to provide a varied human resource base that would enable the country to boost and sustain its economy. Even the large numbers of Zimbabweans who trained abroad could not meet the national demand for personnel in many critical areas of the economy. The massive growth of the higher education sector through establishment of the new universities, both public and private was therefore inevitable. The Women's University in Africa continues to play its role by contributing to human resources development under its niche that focuses on addressing gender disparity by empowering women.