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Review of Impediments to Women's Representation and Participation in University Leadership

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Abstract

The paper is a review of literature on impediments to women's representation and participation in university leadership after the introduction of a number of gender sensitive policies. A number of measures have been put in place to address gender inequalities in leadership (The Sixth African Development Forum report 2008). The measures include, making use of equal opportunity legislation (EO), affirmative action and gender mainstreaming among others. This is a desk review of some measures put in place to address women leadership, women's representation and participation in leadership in universities, barriers to women leadership and ends with some recommendations. Literature reviewed has been drawn from developed and developing countries. The main barriers to women leadership that emerged from literature review include gender cultural beliefs and stereotypes; intrinsic, internal, and personal qualities, family responsibility, organizational or institutional culture. The paper recommends that women themselves should take an active role in changing their disadvantaged position by improving themselves academically and transforming their situation; there is need to monitor the implementation of gender policies in place to ensure that they address gender inequalities in leadership; women need more training and empowerment programmes in leadership for them to be confident in leadership; there is need to introduce quota systems to ensure that a certain percentage of women participates in leadership.

Background

Historically, leadership has carried the notion of masculinity and the belief that men make better leaders than women is still common today (Kiamba, 2008). Hjgaard (cited by Kiamba, 2008) mentions that societal conventions regarding gender and leadership traditionally exclude women, and top leadership is viewed as a masculine domain. The gender disparities and marginalisation of women in leadership have been a cause for concern for governments the world over. The international community has made numerous commitments to promoting gender equality and eliminating discrimination against women. Instruments put in place to address the problem include: The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Millennium Summit (2000).

Furthermore, the Beijing Platform for Action considered the inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision making at all levels as one of the critical areas of concern for the empowerment of women. It stated that women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (Women Watch, 2007)

At regional level efforts to address gender inequalities have resulted in the instituting of a number of instruments that emphasize gender equality. These include, the SADC Declaration on Gender and Equality, signed by SADC Heads of State and Governments in 1997. It commits to ensuring the equal

representation of women and men in the decision making of member states. The African Union Protocol on African Women's Rights adopted in 2003 by African Union is another measure aimed at rectifying gender inequalities between men and women in various aspects including leadership.

As a result of all these commitments, governments were expected to implement policies and programmes which would advance gender equality, including in leading positions, giving women full and equal share in economic, social, cultural, and political decision making (Women Watch, 2007). However, despite all these efforts to enhance the lives of women, research has shown that women continue to be under-represented in decision-making and leadership in several areas in both developed and developing countries (Women Watch, 2007; Lord, 2006; Bullough, 2008). Studies by Lord (2006) in Australia revealed that women continue to remain under-represented in leadership roles and the rate of change has been described as “glacially slow”. Lord explains that Australia has had in place affirmative action and equal opportunity legislation and many universities have had and continue to run women in leadership programs designed to increase the number of women in senior roles in universities. Kiamba (2008) notes that the USA, which is an advanced economy and emulated in many other ways, has not achieved gender equity in higher education. Gumbi (cited by Kiamba, 2008) reported that women held 18.7% of full professorships and only 19.8% of presidents (vice chancellors) of colleges and universities. Kiamba adds that this gender imbalance is repeated in other countries in the world including the UK.

Furthermore, in South Africa, Mathipa and Tsoka (2001) mention that the problem of very few women in leadership positions came more to the foreground after the advent of the new political dispensation. As the problem

grew more and more conspicuous, an attempt to deal with it in the form of a Commission for Gender Equality was undertaken (Mathipa & Tsoka 2001). However, Kiamba (2008) confirms that despite all these efforts the number of women in leadership is still low. In Uganda, a number of strategies have been undertaken to address gender inequalities in leadership such as putting in place the Uganda's 1995 Constitution and National Gender Policy (Kwesiga, 2002). Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza (2007) highlights that at Makerere University it was realised that the number of women in the high echelons of academia was dismally low and there was a lack of women in top management positions. Tibatemwa-Ekirikubinza (2007) goes further to mention that among the ten members of top management, only the deputy vice chancellor (Academics) and the university librarian are women: a 20% representation. This means that 80% of the top management are males.

In Zimbabwe, women's low representation in leadership positions has been confirmed by a number of studies including (Mugweni et al., 2011, Zikhali, 2009, Chabaya et al., 2009). The government has put in place the National Gender Policy and affirmative action policies to address the problem (Chabaya et al., 2009). One of the objectives of the National Gender Policy (2004:3) reads, "Create equal opportunities for women and men in decision –making in all areas and at all levels". This shows that the government is committed to empowerment of women through according them opportunities to lead.

Objectives

The paper was guided by these objectives;

1. To establish measures put in place to address the under- representation of women in leadership.
2. To find out how women are represented in leadership and decision making in universities.

3. To identify some of the barriers to women leadership in universities.
4. To come up with possible solutions or recommendations.

Representation and participation of women in university leadership

A number of studies provide insights into the representation and participation of women in University leadership (She Figures, 2009; Morley, 2012). She Figures (2009) reported that throughout the 27 countries in the European Union (EU), 13% of the institutions in the Higher Education sector were headed by women. Only 9% of universities that award PhD degrees were headed by women. The pattern of male prevalence in senior leadership positions is visible in countries with diverse policies and gender equality legislation (Morley 2012). In the UK, in 2009/2010, women were 44% of all academics. A higher proportion of staff in professional roles was male (80.9%) than female (19.1%). In the EU, She Figures (2009) noted how women's academic careers remain characterised by strong vertical segregation. Bagilhole (2006) states that despite the introduction of equal opportunities (EO) policies by many UK universities, academic staff continues to be male dominated, particularly at the higher levels and in the more prestigious universities. Bagilhole's study concluded that pre-1992 Universities in the UK prove to be sites, which are particularly resistant to the change demanded by EO policies because of special conditions of academia.

Chesterman and Ross-Smith (2006) mention that although women are still under-represented in most senior positions in Australia, there has been considerable change over the last seven years. In their study of five universities, they noted that all had a significant number and proportion of women at senior levels. A number of women had been in their positions for a sustained period of time. Figures collected by the Federal Department of Education Science and

Training show that in 1996 there were two female vice chancellors (5%); in 2004 – 11 (26%), although this has dropped from 11 to 7 (from 26% to 18%), as women have retired and been replaced by men (Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006). In 1996 there were 19 women in deputy and pro vice chancellor positions (19%); in 2004 there were 34 (26 per cent). In senior administration, there were 230 women in 1996 (26% and 473 in 2004 (39%) (Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006). The authors say that many of these women in administrative positions were concentrated in traditional “pink ghettos” such as human resources (rather than finance) and the majority of them tended to be in assistant director positions rather than those of director (Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006). Kjeldal, Rindfleish and Sheridon (2005) state that after more than two decades of EEO legislation in Australia, women are still under-represented in senior academic positions. These authors go on to mention that despite formal EEO policies having been implemented within the higher education sector in Australia since 1986, it seems the change process is slow and the status quo is entrenched. These studies demonstrate that although gender sensitive policies are in place, women are still lowly represented in leadership and that needs to be addressed.

In Africa, a study by Guramatunhu-Mudiwa (2010) on 117 universities in the SADC region revealed that 105 (89.7%) universities are led by male vice chancellors whilst 12 (10.3%) universities are led by females. In this study, South Africa had the highest number of women leading universities, that is, 6 out of 23 (26.1%) followed by Madagascar (25%); Zimbabwe (18.2%) and Tanzania (8.7%). The underrepresentation of women in higher education in Africa is alarming, as only 6% of African women participate as faculty (FAWE 2010; Mama 2008). Mama (2008, 4) conducted an extensive study of African universities and made the observation that, “no matter what the mission

statements may proclaim, universities operate in ways that sustain and reproduce unequal gender relations in both the social and the intellectual life of those inhabiting it". In South Africa data collected by HERS-SA, a non-profit research and professional development group that supports African women academics, showed that 17% of vice chancellors were women; four out of 23, with one in an acting position. Five registrars were women (22%), there were 15 female deputy vice- chancellors (21%), 21 executive directors (21%) and 42 deans (28%). In Uganda, a study carried out by Kwesiga (2002) revealed that women represent 23% of the staff base, while men account for 77%. The study highlighted that there was a larger representation of women in the lower cadres (clerks, messengers, cleaners) and a reasonable number of women in the middle cadre, but not at the top. Similarly, Gaidzanwa's (1997) combined qualitative and quantitative study on Zimbabwe reveals that women are concentrated in middle and lower level academic positions and that most of them are white. The study further revealed that women are also under-represented in important committees and as chairpersons of departments. Generally, these studies have shown that although a number of policies have been put in place to address gender inequalities in leadership, women are still under represented in leadership positions in universities.

Barriers to women representation and participation in leadership

The main barriers to women leadership that emerged from literature review include gender cultural beliefs and stereotypes; intrinsic, internal, and personal qualities, family responsibility, organizational or institutional culture.

Gender, cultural beliefs and stereotypes

Global research studies have identified cultural beliefs and stereotypes as major factors contributing to under-representation of women in leadership (Neale &

Ozkanli, 2009; Oakley, 2000). Studies by Neale and Ozkanli (2009) on organizational barriers for women in senior management in Turkish and New Zealand universities revealed that the representation of women was consistently low in management. Neale and Ozkanli (2009) state that the explanation for the disparities is that the academy is one of many patriarchal institutions fundamentally structured to serve the interests, values, lives and priorities of predominantly white men, and that the culture and values of the academy must change for women or minorities to advance and succeed. Similarly, in South Africa, studies by (Kiamba, 2008) revealed that women's access to leadership positions has been hindered by discrimination and stereotyping. Kiamba (2008) states that women are more or less persecuted for seeking an executive position. This is largely due to society's attitude toward appropriate male and female roles. Moutlana (in Kiamba, 2008) states that traditional universities in SA have co-corporate cultures whose norms and values were those of the dominant white male society. When women join such institutions as leaders, they soon realize that they are expected to conform or assimilate to the established culture. Moutlana argues that women (Black women particularly) in management are more visible, experience more hardship and feel isolated.

Similarly in Zimbabwe, studies by Mugweni et al. (2011) reveal that women leadership is affected by cultural practices and stereotypes. Society accords males leadership roles and women are viewed as followers. Chabaya et al. (2009) in their studies with female heads on factors that women teachers consider as barriers to their advancement to headship positions in Zimbabwean primary schools found that stereotyping, discrimination and gender-blind practices account for the marginalization and very low numbers of women in the leadership. Similarly, Zikhali (2009) in his studies on constraints faced by

women in accessing higher leadership and senior management positions in public, private and non-governmental organizations in Zimbabwe, found out that the constraints that mostly hinder women from accessing leadership positions were cultural practices which represent levels of power and control and in turn hinder reforms. Culture socializes males and females differently. Women are socialized into femininity whilst males are socialized into masculinity. Sadie (in Kiamba, 2008) advanced the argument that at the bottom of the constraints that women face is the patriarchal system, decision making powers are in the hands of males. Culture socializes males to be decision makers whilst females are socialized to take subservient roles and that leads to their low status.

Intrinsic, internal and personal qualities

McStravog (2006) highlights that research into women's barriers to senior positions indicates that women's lack of confidence is one of the main inhibiting factors in women's career development and the main reason why some people think that women are their own "worst enemies". In agreement, Priola (in Neale & Ozkanli, 2009) argues that women are continually judged because of their gender and, "her subject position is seen as feminine, thus soft, weak, emotional," Research has indicated that women internalize these stereotypes and may see themselves as being less deserving of rewards and promotions due to lack of confidence. This gendered stereotyping can hinder a woman's progression in the workplace hierarchy as they are overlooked in the promotions process. Women may find their own sense of identity is not easily achieved and thus they may position themselves as "Outsider on the inside" (Neale & Ozkanli, 2009).

Similarly, in Zimbabwe, the gender stereotypes were found to manifest in the form of low-self-esteem, lack of confidence (Mugweni et al., 2011). These researchers found that women are not confident enough when compared to men in taking up leadership roles. In her study, Dorsey (1989) argued that the problems females face in leadership were partially rooted in the pattern of gender socialization and belief systems. Dorsey went further to state that apart from prejudice and discrimination against women, women themselves develop lower self-esteem that may suppress their achievement motive. Mugweni et al. (2011) observed that women suffer from intrinsic, internal and personal barriers which are in most instances psychologically inherent and have to do with the person's value system and attitude. These are the so called female limitations that ingrained in the traditional and stereotype attitudes of societies about typically feminine characteristics (Van der Westhuizen in Mugweni et al., 2011).

Family responsibilities / Domestic work

Research into women barriers to senior positions at global level indicates that women are affected by family responsibilities more than men. Research conducted by (Riley, 1993) in McStravog (2006) argues that work/family conflict is frequently cited as an obstacle to female employment and promotion opportunities. Similarly, at regional level, (Mathipa and Tsoka 2001) indicate that family/ work conflict is in itself a barrier to women leadership. Kiamba (2008) mentions that leadership requires hard work, long hours and is stressful. For women, this burden is added on to their child care, home, family responsibilities, a phenomenon referred to as the "double shift" in (Sader et al. in Kiamba, 2008). In addition to issues of family responsibility that make it difficult for women to advance, cultural beliefs about the roles of men and women inhibit women's advancement to top leadership as much as it does in politics (Pandor in Kiamba 2008).

In Zimbabwe, studies by Mugweni et al. (2011) indicate that women's heavy involvement in reproductive work is seen as a barrier to better employment opportunities. Chabaya et al. (2009) in their studies in Zimbabwe with female heads of schools observed that women were not prepared to take up leadership positions away from their husbands. Mugweni et al. (2011) comment that women's perception, that their role in the family overrides all other roles, affects their advancement. Women are bound by family ties, and they normally do not want to move far away from their families.

Organizational culture

McStravog (2006) identified organizational culture as another barrier to women leadership. Organizational culture has been defined by McStravog (2006) as the realities, values, symbols and rituals held in common by members of an organization and which contribute to the creation of norms and expectations of behaviour. Organizational culture defines conduct within an organization, determines what is and is not valued and how authority is asserted. Furthermore, McStravog (2006) identified Human Resources policies and practices as a significant barrier to women's progression. A survey by Catalyst (1990) of human resource managers found that corporations were still not creating diversity initiatives or policies that effectively lessened the obstacles for women wishing to ascend through that ranks to senior management or chief executive positions (McStravog, 2006).

Similarly, research conducted by Still (1997) concluded that women feel disadvantaged compared with men in the areas of recruitment, selection, promotion and transfer conditions of service and assessment of their personal qualities (perceived as relevant to promotion decisions) (McStravog, 2006). Men in Still's research on the other hand, felt that women were given equal

opportunities to progress, and that the organizational culture was supportive of their career aspirations. On the same note, Wallin (in Chabaya et al., 2009) pointed out that the greatest cause of under-representation of women in educational management was due to sex discrimination in recruitment and promotion. Davidson and Burke (in Chabaya et al., 2009) observe that stereotypical attitudes have a negative influence on the selection, placement and promotion of women to managerial position.

Organizational culture includes all the policies and practices for recruitment, selection, promotion and retention and motivation of staff. If the organizational culture is enriching, then members make tremendous advancements in their areas of operation.

Sexual harassment

Another challenge which has been identified by research is sexual harassment. Bell et al. (nd) state that sexual harassment, a form of sex discrimination, is but one manifestation of the larger problem of employment-related discrimination against women. Sexual harassment is a persistent workplace problem for women worldwide. Numerous regions include prohibitions against sexual harassment, e.g. Canada, Israel, the United Kingdom and Australia, (Barak, 1997 in Bell et al., nd), though with varying levels of stringency and application. Researchers have empirically identified three psychological dimensions of sexual harassment that persist across international boundaries; sexual coercion, gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention (Gelfand et al. in Bell et al., nd).

Sexual harassment can be a hidden norm of organisational life (Morley 2011). For example, Kaplan's (2006) study in Israel noted the absence of professional training to manage sexual harassment on MBA degree students. In Africa,

sexual harassment and sexual violence are also endemic problems affecting female students at all educational levels, including women faculty and staff (Ampofo, 2004).

Supervision by men

Another barrier which researchers noted is that most women work under men. Bell et al. (nd) commented that in the lower status positions that women occupy are considerably more likely to be supervised or managed by men than by women which increases the risk that they will be harassed by their male supervisors. Zikhali (2009) in his studies in Zimbabwe realized that in most organizations, most female's work under male leadership and he commented that this traditional organizational culture needs to be deconstructed and reversed in order to achieve gender equality. Similarly, Mugweni et al. (2011) in their studies in Zimbabwe noted there are more men in appointment boards whose decisions dominate and want to maintain the status quo, Men dominate in leadership positions while women play a subservient role in most areas of endeavour (Dorsey 1989). Growe and Montgomery (in Kiamba, 2008) say that compared to men, women receive little or no encouragement to seek leadership positions. Furthermore, Chabaya et al. (2009) in their studies observed that women are not getting the necessary support from their families and from the education system itself. In that study some participants claimed that women were discriminated against and kept from promotion by the education system just because they were women.

Literature has revealed barriers to women leadership such as cultural practices and gender stereotypes, organisational cultural, family attachment, low self-esteem, sexual harassment among others. Unless these challenges are addressed they pose as serious impediments to gender equality.

Recommendations

This paper comes up with the following recommendations for promotion of female leadership;

- Women themselves should take an active role in changing their disadvantaged position by improving themselves academically and transforming their situation.
- There is need to monitor the implementation of gender policies in place to ensure that they address gender inequalities in leadership.
- Women need more training and empowerment programmes in leadership for them to be confident in leadership.
- Scholarship funds specifically for women should be put in place to enable them to pursue further studies and attain higher qualifications needed in leadership.
- There is need to introduce quota systems to ensure that a certain percentage of women participates in leadership.

Conclusion

Literature reviewed has shown that although a number of policies have been put in place to address gender inequalities in leadership, women remain lowly represented in university leadership. The males play a dominant role in leadership because of the predominant position accorded to them by society through culture. Studies have revealed a larger representation of women in the lower levels as clerks, messengers and cleaners and a reasonable number of women in the middle level but not at the top. Research studies have revealed that a number of factors contribute to under-representation of women in leadership. These factors include: cultural beliefs and stereotypes; intrinsic, internal and personal qualities; family/ work conflict; organizational culture; sexual harassment, supervision by men among others. These factors are an

impediment to women leadership. Furthermore, studies have shown that women are over-burdened with reproductive work and that affects their career advancement and progression. Women, because of socialization, take reproductive work as their responsibility hence they devote much of their time to it unlike men who view their core business as the one in the public sector. It is therefore important for all interested parties to focus on how females can participate in leadership and decision-making. Unless these challenges are addressed, women continue to be marginalized in leadership.

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