



UNIVERSITIES, THE RAMIFICATIONS OF SCIENCE SYSTEMS AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP OF SCIENCE SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

PROJECT SYNOPSIS

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PROJECT SYNOPSIS

Project Duration: 36 months (December 2020 – December 2023)

Institutions/Countries: The University of Nairobi (Kenya), University of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe), University of Pretoria (South Africa)

Universities are the principal avenues for training researchers for Africa's science systems and other leadership positions and are central to the socioeconomic and political development of the continent through the production of knowledge in various disciplines including STEM subjects as well as behavioural and management sciences. However, African universities are also sites of contention, inequality and multiple forms of gendered exclusions. Furthermore, in many African universities, structural factors and organizational culture have created a glass ceiling barring women's ascendance to top leadership positions. Research reveals that the number of women advancing to leadership positions in higher education has been rising over the years, but gender imbalance in the sector is still a global challenge and progress toward equity has been slow and uneven. Moreover, despite the increase of women in universities as students and faculty, leadership in academia is a pyramidal structure with women clustered at the bottom of the pyramid.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a number of weaknesses in educational and societal systems, which include inequalities between actors in universities, knowledge hierarchies and gendered inequalities in terms of access to leadership opportunities. The pandemic has also simultaneously revealed opportunities for change in the face of the permanent shifts that have taken place in our world. This COVID-19 period is therefore a critical moment during which to intervene towards strengthening higher education for stronger science systems in Africa, through a deliberate focus on women and leadership.

This project targets four universities in East and Southern Africa: the University of Nairobi (Kenya), Makerere University (Uganda), University of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe) and the University of Pretoria (South Africa), and will work with key higher education stakeholders with a national and regional reach. The main objective of this project is to reveal what needs to change in the logic, structures and leadership development processes in higher education institutions in order to ensure equal opportunities for women in science systems in Africa. The project will in the end institutionalise a leadership development program for women in administrative and academic pipelines in the target institutions and facilitate the development of visible network of women leaders engaged in collaborative vision and problem solving in African universities.