



# **Universities, the ramifications of science systems and women's leadership of science systems in Africa**

## **Interim progress report 1**

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## **Synthesis**

The project (Universities, the ramifications of science systems and women's leadership of science systems in Africa) 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 core research question addressed by this project is: How do the gendered dynamics of leadership structures and development processes shape the prospect of women's leadership of higher education and science systems in Africa? It ultimately seeks to institutionalise a leadership development program for women in administrative and academic pipelines in the target institutions and facilitate the development of a visible network of women leaders engaged in collaborative vision and problem solving in African universities.

The project is divided into three 12-month phases, labelled as Year 1, 2 and 3 in the workplan. This progress report covers the first six months of Year 1 which involves laying the foundational work for project execution. The activities include convening the ALC working group, forming/finalizing research teams for each case study university, and conducting the mapping study. As such, the initial six months of the project have been mainly administrative to facilitate convening the main research team and initiating the project. The ALC team has agreed on the modalities of engaging the university representatives and other critical members of the project implementation team. This period has been largely inward-looking, and we expect to incorporate external members (university liaisons and research assistants) from July 2021. Other activities earmarked for the remaining part of Year 1 are a series of consultative and methodology meetings with key stakeholders in the higher education space (government ministries, national higher education oversight commissions, university management and others), and the development of the leadership training program informed by the findings of the mapping study.

## **The Research Problem**

Is there a nexus between the crisis in higher education institutions in Africa and the lack of gender diversity in the leadership structures? Will having women included in the leadership of science systems in universities in Africa lead to different outcomes, including mitigating crisis? Extant research reveals that while the number of women advancing to leadership positions in higher education has been rising over the years, gender imbalance in the sector is still a global challenge and progress toward equity and equality has been slow and uneven. Studies on women leadership in tertiary institutions show that leadership communities of practice produce and reproduce hegemonic masculinities shaping gendered power relations in these institutions. 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 exposed several weaknesses in science systems in education and broader society, including inequalities between actors in universities, knowledge hierarchies and gendered inequalities in access to leadership opportunities. The

pandemic also reveals opportunities for change in the face of the permanent shifts that have taken place in our world. The COVID-19 period is therefore a critical moment to intervene and effect changes (through targeted interventions) towards strengthening higher education for stronger science systems in Africa, through a deliberate focus on women and leadership.

Universities' social contract with the societies that support them is that they will make them stronger and more successful including playing a role in challenging the structural biases and barriers that create unequal life chances for marginalized groups in society. By sustaining systems that reinforce gender and other inequalities or failing to tackle barriers to women's leadership, universities invariably undermine society's development. Conversely, universities' success in tackling inequality within their own institutions will in turn enrich and positively transform the broader society.

At the core of this proposal is the gendered inequality in the leadership of higher education institutions in African countries. This problem is underpinned by three inter-linked but distinct diagnoses; first is that women face structural and cultural barriers to leadership in science systems, including within the African university. This parallels the realities in other sectors of society and on which significant literature exists. The second is the dominant, yet skewed approach to and understanding of leadership from the perspective of position-based power, as opposed to leadership as a process and tool of transformation. The focus on people occupying formal positions limits the imagination and potential of where and how women can exercise influence and impact change. The third is the neglect of investment and attention paid by the university ecosystem to official pathways to leadership and other channels of influence, particularly for women.

The project is still guided by the following objectives and research questions:

**a. Project objectives**

Project overall goal

- To build new knowledge that leads to a significant increase in women's leadership with a vision of transforming African university systems; with an institutionalized framework for inclusive leadership development; and a recognizable cohort of aspiring women leaders in the select African universities

Specific objectives

1. To generate context-specific knowledge that contributes to a more robust understanding of existing leadership capacity building and learning opportunities for women leaders in universities with a view to strengthening science systems in Africa;
2. To institutionalize a leadership development program for women on administrative and academic pipelines in select African universities; and
3. To facilitate the development of a visible network (cohort) of women leaders engaged in collaborative visioning and problem solving in African universities.

## b. Research Questions

### Core question

- How do the gendered dynamics of leadership structures and leadership development processes shape the prospect of women's leadership of higher education institutions in Africa?

### Operational Questions

1. How is the underpinning logic of leadership and leadership development in higher education systems in Africa gendered?
2. 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?
3. What channels of influence exist for leader emergence outside of the formal leadership progression pathways, which privilege men and women alike?

## Project implementation and management

### a. Project scope and objectives

The project scope and objectives have not changed thus far. The project will be implemented in the four universities in the selected countries. We will work with partners from the universities and other oversight bodies in the respective countries.

For the period between December 2020 and May 2021, the initial project workplan had outlined three key activities, the progress of which is reported in the following table:

	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Status/Reason(s)</b>	<b>Way forward</b>
1.	Fully constituted Working Group with roles and Responsibilities (December 2020)	-The Working Group Members have already been identified as the roles and responsibilities documented -The project country leads are engaging with the university liaisons to formalize engagement processes	-Consolidate the final ALC Working group member list after finalizing and receiving the names of the official institutional liaisons from the partner universities
2.	Stakeholder Analysis Exercise (January-February 2021)	-This exercise is yet to commence pending the official engagement of the university liaisons	-This exercise will commence as soon as university liaisons have been brought on board
3.	Mapping study (March-August 2021)	-The exercise will kick-off after the upcoming methodology workshop	-Continue with the planning for the methodology workshop in July 2021 where the methodology issues will be clarified and finalized

The ALC project team members convened four times for the: planning meeting (December 2020), project inception meeting (February 2021), and two other meetings in April 2021 to lay the groundwork for the project. The team has managed to constitute the working group and prepared the roles and responsibilities for each of the members. The country-leads are engaging with the universities to complete formalisation of the engagement process of the university liaisons. The team is currently preparing for a methodology workshop where the university liaisons and the research assistants will be inducted into the project and where the proposed methodology will be reviewed in light of the prevailing situation at the time. The process of recruiting project research assistants from the ALC alumni and research network is underway. A call for applications has been prepared and the selection process in place.

With regard to administrative issues, the project team prepared critical project documentation to guide the implementation process and this includes:

- The working groups roles and responsibilities document;
- The country leads terms of reference;
- University liaisons' terms of reference;
- Research assistants' selection criteria and terms of reference;
- The project ethics protocol (to be finalized in the methodology workshop);
- Project information sheets (for field work);
- Respondent consent form (for field work); and
- Research permit renewal.

#### **b. Methodology**

The project had proposed to use mixed methodologies using primary (qualitative and quantitative approaches) and secondary data in a bid to address the research questions and objectives. The ALC Working Group members are preparing for the methodology workshop (July 2021) to revisit the proposed methodology and make changes where necessary.

#### **c. Project Schedule and estimate to completion**

The project initial project activities have suffered a delay mainly due to the current COVID-19 situation which has affected the operations (abrupt closures) in the targeted institutions of higher learning. Internally, some of the project team members were also away on sick leave due to the pandemic. Further, administrative processes to be followed in engaging the institutional liaisons have taken longer than anticipated but the project country leads are firming up agreements with identified partners and liaisons. It is expected that by the end of June 2021, the university focal points will have be on board. Regardless of this delay, the project implementation plan remains on schedule and will be completed within the 36-month period. Once the university liaisons are fully inducted, research and other activities will begin, the team will confirm activities that can be performed simultaneously and those to which additional time can be allocated to ensure the project is implemented according to schedule.

### **Research findings**

In the course of refining methodology and approach as the ALC project team was finalised, one of the discussions that the team spent a great deal of time on was defining and differentiating the concept and accompanying ideas of *science systems*. The team took time to interrogate the extent to which *science systems* refers only to the natural sciences and therefore a focus on women and leadership in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) or if science systems refers to all sciences including the human and social sciences (including the arts). The team concluded that *science systems* refers to all sciences and as such adopted an approach to the research that considers all sciences.

### **Project outputs and dissemination**

These will be reported at a later date and after the full methodology workshop to be held in July 2021.

### **Impact**

A full treatment of project output will be reported on in the next report. Much of the impact to date has been internal and as a result of debates on certain concepts and understandings of terms, terminology and existing nomenclature around many of the subject areas.

### **Recommendations**

So far the project administration from the IDRC side has been smooth and there are no recommendations. The ALC team only has one request which is for sharing of any documents on the IDRC's definition/ understanding of science systems.



