



**Brainstorming Session on “Universities, the
Ramifications of Science Systems and Women’s
Leadership of Higher Education Institutions”**

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Workshop Report

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Introduction:

Gender inequality remains a pervasive issue in contemporary society, particularly in the realm of leadership. Higher education institutions of Kenya grapple to conform with Kenya's constitution requirement of one-third gender rule where women's leadership positions are non-negotiable. While strides have been made to promote women's leadership roles, significant disparities still exist. For instance, leadership training programmes have emerged as pivotal tools in addressing this imbalance by equipping women with the necessary skills, knowledge, and confidence to assume leadership positions.

In response to the above, the African Leadership Centre (ALC)-Kings College London, engaged in a three-year project funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) that sought to establish the status of women's leadership in science systems and higher education in Africa. One of the activities of this project was a brainstorming Workshop session on *“Universities, the Ramifications of Science Systems and Women's Leadership of Higher Education Institutions.”* The workshop began with the participants acknowledging the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within higher education institutions despite their significant contributions and qualifications. The workshop brought together women from diverse backgrounds in academic, non-academic and administrative positions. Participants engaged in interactive sessions to discuss the systemic barriers and cultural norms that hinder women's progress in leadership and suggested possible training programs that would benefit women's leadership at Maseno University, Kenya.

The brainstorming session had the following broader aims that guided the discussion:

- i. 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:**
- ii. To find out possibilities to institutionalize a leadership development program for women on administrative and academic pipelines in African universities (Maseno University).**

- iii. To explore how to facilitate the development of a visible network (cohort) of women leaders engaged in collaborative visioning and problem-solving in African universities (Maseno University).**

Discussion

- A. 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*

There are plenty opportunities that benefit women in Maseno University. These opportunities are general to all genders but also specific to women:

The university pays professional fees for the staff, such as medical bills. By signing Memorandum of Understanding in various projects the university allows women to participate in projects for capacity building. Tuition waivers, allow women to attend different kinds of training. There are policies and issues of gender that are channelled through the gender mainstreaming office in Maseno. However, while there are opportunities, there is lack of capacity building in terms of what gender policies constitute.

The existence of a gender office in Maseno has been propelling various trainings on gender mainstreaming, such as periodic HIV and AIDS awareness workshops, and staff peer trainings among other trainings targeting both teaching and non-teaching staff members in the university

Organizational culture plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of individuals within higher education institutions. In our discussion we interrogated contributions of institutional culture to aspiring for or against leadership positions in higher education institutions. In promoting gender equality and diversity, examining how organizational culture impacts women's aspirations to assume leadership positions in academia is crucial. Discussion with women in higher education from Maseno University delved into the organizational cultures that encourage and discourage women from aspiring to leadership roles in higher education institutions. There was varying opinion from the participants. It emerged that there were both positive and negative organizational cultures.

Encouraging Organizational Culture(s)

There exist positive organizational culture and these are anchored in the university human resource policy. Women have the opportunity to serve in leadership positions by merit. Women deans are in various faculties, heads of departments and even deputy vice-chancellors. Therefore, gender-neutral policies and practices are implemented through fair promotion and hiring processes, equitable compensation, and an inclusive environment that encourages women to aim for leadership roles in Maseno.

Moreover, gender-neutral policies and practices promote inclusivity and diversity in terms of leadership teams. Maseno University values and champions diversity in leadership positions, encouraging women to aspire to leadership roles. This shows that when women see female representation at leadership levels, it sends a powerful message that their contributions are valued and that they can succeed in similar positions.

Mentorship and supportive networks as a positive organizational culture fostered opportunities for women create an environment that nurtures their leadership potential. The aspiring women leaders from Maseno university argued that when women have access to mentors and support systems within the institution, they are more inclined to pursue leadership roles. There also existed negative organizational cultures that discouraged women from aspiring for leadership positions in higher education.

Despite women having some leadership roles, male dominance exists in some leadership positions. When women do not see themselves represented at the top levels of higher learning institutions, they may perceive leadership positions as unattainable or unwelcoming and thus feel discouraged from going for such positions. Moreover, sometimes decision-making in a male-dominated space becomes difficult even for women in 'top' leadership positions. The male questions their authorities, this makes women leaders feel intimidated. Thus, stereotypical gender biases perpetuated in higher education institutional culture can hinder women's aspirations for leadership. In the discussion, women suggested that, if women are consistently assigned

administrative or support roles rather than being considered for senior leadership positions such as the vice-chancellor's position, then it sends a message that they are not perceived as suitable leaders.

Multiple roles versus lack of work-life balance support existent in the higher education institutions also emerged as a negative organizational culture that hindered women from aspiring for leadership positions. There exist no adequate institutional support for work-life balance and childcare which discourages women from pursuing leadership roles. Women thus perceived that assuming a leadership position would be detrimental to their personal and family life, thus feeling less inclined to aspire to such roles. Moreover, too much pressure that comes with leadership responsibilities, made women shy away from leadership positions in higher education institutions.

While advancing gender equality and supporting women's leadership, it is essential to address the structural barriers that hinder women's access to leadership opportunities within higher learning institutions in Kenya. Despite progress in educational attainment, women continue to face numerous obstacles in pursuing and attaining leadership positions in these institutions.

For instance, at Maseno University, women encounter challenges accessing resources and networking opportunities essential for leadership development. They often have limited access to mentorship, research funding, and professional networks, hindering their ability to build the necessary skills and visibility for leadership positions. Additionally, the burden of family and caregiving responsibilities disproportionately falls on women, impacting their ability to dedicate time and effort towards pursuing leadership roles. Inadequate support for work-life balance and childcare facilities further restricts their career advancement opportunities.

Systemic challenges based on institutional policies and practices inadvertently perpetuate gender disparities, such as biased recruitment and promotion processes, unequal pay, and limited opportunities for career progression, creating barriers for women aspiring to leadership roles within higher learning institutions. Thus, to eliminate or minimize the barriers, the discussants suggested the following:

Promotion of Gender-Responsive Leadership Training:- Support initiatives that provide specialized leadership training programs for women in academia. These programs should address the unique barriers women face and equip them with the skills and knowledge to navigate institutional leadership roles effectively. Moreover, such training will re-socialize women as able leaders who can also lead in male-dominated spaces.

Recruitment and promotion policies should be gender-neutral: Higher learning institutions should be encouraged to review and revise their recruitment and promotion policies to ensure fairness and gender neutrality. Such revision should include various actors and women to ensure that the selection processes are transparent, job descriptions are gender-inclusive, and have mechanisms to address unconscious bias in the recruitment process.

Encourage Mentorship and Networking Opportunities: Maseno University should also invest and promote mentorship programs and networking initiatives connecting women with established academic leaders. A pool of supportive networks and mentor-mentee relationships can facilitate professional growth and create pathways for women to access leadership opportunities at Maseno University.

Advocacy for Family-Friendly Policies: Since there is weak implementation of family-friendly policies, the women participants felt that there is need for a stronger advocacy for the implementation of family-friendly policies. Advocacy should include issues such as parental leave for both genders, flexible work arrangements, and affordable childcare services within Maseno as one of the higher learning institutions in Kenya. There was a consensus that such advocacy could possibly alleviate the burden of caregiving responsibilities and enable women to pursue leadership positions without compromising and putting too much pressure on their personal lives.

The university should strengthen timely data collection, update and monitoring: The participants noted that Maseno University should have mechanisms for timely data collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data on leadership representation, career progression, and salary differentials. Such mechanisms can lead to progress

and accountability, which can drive institutional changes and support evidence-based advocacy for gender equality in leadership.

There exist both community and institutional cultural barriers that hinder women from leadership positions in higher learning institutions like Maseno. Gender stereotyping resulting from patriarchal lenses results in the labelling of women as lesser beings. Gender stereotyping was commonly mentioned as one of the community and institutional barriers that discourage women from leadership in higher education institutions. Discussions from the workshop with women re-affirmed that despite the efforts to promote equality in higher education institutions in Kenya, stereotypes and preconceived notions about women's capabilities still exist, and this often led to their marginalization in higher education institutions. Women are frequently perceived as less capable or lacking the necessary leadership qualities, hindering their advancement prospects within university settings. These deeply ingrained biases are often perpetuated by male and female colleagues, creating a challenging environment for women seeking leadership positions.

Moreover, gender roles are also dictated by cultural norms. Some of the norms can limit women's opportunities for leadership in academia. In many societies, women are still expected to prioritize family and domestic responsibilities over professional pursuits. This can pose a significant obstacle for women aspiring to roles in university leadership, as the demands of these positions are often perceived as conflicting with societal expectations regarding women's traditional roles.

Furthermore, cultural norms surrounding assertiveness and confidence also impact women's ability to access leadership opportunities. The participants indicated that women are often penalized for behaviour that is perceived as too assertive or ambitious, while men are rewarded for similar traits. This double standard can dissuade women from pursuing leadership roles or cause them to adopt less assertive behaviour, hindering their potential for advancement. Additionally, the lack of female role models and mentors in leadership positions within universities can contribute to the perpetuation of cultural barriers. Without visible examples of women succeeding in leadership roles, aspiring female leaders may face difficulties envisioning

themselves in similar positions and building the necessary networks to support their career advancement.

Women participants mentioned that:

Addressing these cultural barriers requires a multifaceted approach that challenges stereotypes and biases, promotes work-life balance, provides mentorship and support, and fosters an inclusive and supportive organizational culture. To overcome gender bias, academic institutions must actively work to dismantle discriminatory practices and promote diversity and inclusion. This involves implementing fair and transparent selection processes for leadership positions, training on unconscious bias, and creating opportunities for women to develop leadership skills and showcase their capabilities. In addition, efforts to promote work-life balance and accommodate family responsibilities can help alleviate the conflicts between traditional gender roles and professional advancement. Implementing policies such as flexible working arrangements, parental leave, and childcare support can create a more supportive environment for women to pursue leadership roles without sacrificing their personal and family commitments.

Therefore, creating mentorship and sponsorship programs can help address the lack of female role models and mentors in leadership positions. Pairing aspiring female leaders with successful women in leadership roles can provide guidance, support, and valuable networking opportunities, ultimately strengthening the pipeline of women leaders within academic institutions.

Lastly, fostering an inclusive and supportive organizational culture is critical for breaking cultural barriers. This involves promoting a work environment that values diversity, equity, and inclusion and actively challenging gender stereotypes and biases. Creating opportunities for open dialogue and sharing experiences can help raise awareness of the challenges women face in accessing leadership opportunities and facilitate the implementation of effective strategies to address these barriers.

In a nutshell, addressing cultural barriers women face in accessing leadership opportunities in university settings is essential for creating a more equitable and inclusive academic environment. By challenging gender biases, promoting work-life balance, providing mentorship and support, and fostering a supportive organizational culture, academic institutions can work towards creating a level playing field for

women to pursue and attain leadership roles, ultimately contributing to advancing gender equality in higher education.

B. Institutionalization of a leadership development program for women on administrative and academic pipelines in African universities.

There was a unanimous response that there is a need for institutionalization of leadership development programs for women on administrative and academic pipelines in African universities. The workshop explored the importance of leadership training programmes in enhancing women's leadership roles in higher education institutions, organizational dynamics, their impact on personal development, and career advancement.

Participants expressed that there is a need to have a university Personal Development Leadership Training (PDLT) programme that would catalyze personal development and, in the long run, empower women to cultivate essential leadership qualities. These programs provide a platform for self-reflection, fostering a deep understanding of one's strengths, weaknesses, and leadership style.

Additionally, the participants mentioned that PDLT workshops should primarily aim at, coaching women on critical thinking and creativity beyond leadership and mentorship. Women gain insights into effective communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution, honing their leadership acumen. As a result, participants emerge with heightened self-awareness, confidence, and resilience, enabling them to navigate the complexities of leadership roles with poise and determination.

The participants argued that the PDLT could lead to their professional advancement. Moreover, with strategic leadership skills and knowledge, PDLT programmes will equip women to break through glass ceilings and assume senior positions within organizations. The participants also noted that the leadership training will foster networking opportunities, enabling women to connect with influential figures and build valuable relationships. This, in turn, enhances their visibility and access to career-advancing prospects, ultimately propelling them into leadership roles.

Consequently, leadership training serves as a catalyst for breaking down systemic barriers and fostering greater diversity in leadership.

Organizational Dynamics: The impact of leadership training programmes extends beyond individual development, profoundly influencing organizational dynamics. Empowering women in leadership enhances diversity within organizational hierarchies, fostering innovation, and inclusivity. Women bring unique perspectives and insights that enrich decision-making processes, leading to more robust and creative solutions. Furthermore, diverse leadership teams are more reflective of the wider workforce, engendering a culture of respect and equality. As a result, organizations benefit from improved employee morale, productivity, and retention, attributable to the inclusive leadership cultivated through training programmes.

Barriers and Solutions: While leadership training programmes hold immense potential in advancing women's leadership roles, barriers persist. These include implicit biases, limited access to training opportunities, and systemic discrimination. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, involving proactive measures to eliminate gender-based obstacles and provide equitable access to leadership training. Organizations must prioritize investment in leadership development for women, actively promote diversity in recruitment and leadership succession, and mitigate unconscious biases through inclusive policies and practices.

There is a need for continuous and periodic training. The participants unanimously agreed that academic staff promoted to higher offices must be trained to carry themselves in administrative positions. Such training would tremendously benefit the women in leadership positions in higher education institutions and would improve their public and private life spheres. However, the participants noted that men need to be included in different kinds of training to prepare them to receive and work together with women leaders

Benefits of continuous and periodic training would include:

- Improved quality of leadership styles

- Leads to an understanding of various personalities and expectations
- Being able to be Creative beyond role and responsibilities
- Enhance critical thinking to enable women to unlearn things that will not help them and learn things that will help them
- Enable women to balance between the multiple roles.
- Capacity building and strengthen the existing leadership roles
- Empower women in management
- Decision-making and having a people' centred skills
- Encourage desirable leadership roles and improve self-esteem
- Create a creative and technological woman leader

Moreover, the institutionalization of leadership development programmes for women in administrative and academic pipelines must be anchored in Kenya's constitution.

The relevance of institutionalization of such programmes include:

- Would encourage contexts-specific needs.
- Domestication of Leadership Development programs.
- This would promote the number of women in leadership positions.
- Expose women to role models...from such trainings.
- Coaching and mentorship in those programmes to allow women to be conversant with language use, know dress codes, etiquette etc
- Creating a safe space for learning.
- Hub for skilled manpower.
- Promote access to such programmes.
- Promote collegiality. Where people realize that all of us are 'human beings'
- Differentiating office matters and family/social matters.
- Certified pieces of training will prove merit, thus pushing for confidence, and sustainability in harnessing women's talent over time.
- Contribute to influence issues without authority.
- Give women a voice.
- Embrace cultural change.
- Build on industry-based practice.
- Reworking existing programmes on leadership.

- Help prepare women for leadership roles.
- Ward off societal discrimination.

The discussion also revolved around what needed to be included in training in the leadership development programme. This aimed to find out the specific needs of women and aspiring women leaders. It emerged that the package for the leadership development program training needs to cover broad areas ranging from Legal and policy issues, leadership and ethics, and organizational culture.

Specific items that may constitute the leadership training programmes include:

- Stress management and mental health issues
- Work-life balance and managing family affairs as a leader
- Time management and academic progress and upward mobility despite being a woman in a leadership position
- Need for certification after these trainings
- Training on how to effectively delegate duties as a leader
- Communication, mediation, negotiation, and public speaking skills
- Human resource
- Effective mentorship and networking
- People with disabilities and leadership

The likely outcomes of the leadership training programme for women and aspiring women leaders and contributions of such training programmes to women leadership of higher education institutions include:

- Increased no of women in leadership positions. For instance, more women will be engaged, apply more leadership skills and challenge male chauvinistic styles.
- Improving efficiency.
- Promoting a conducive working environment.
- Would make women more informed and empowered.
- Contribute to acceptability in various positions for instance, having a woman as a vice-chancellor.
- Lead to change of perception, attitude, new way of doing things
- Optimization of organizational goals and outputs.

- Need re-skilling knowledge they have, professional training.
- Provide psychosocial support.
- Provide safe spaces for children, especially for breastfeeding women leaders.
- Contribute to mental health and well-being
- Lead to exposure, networks and links to mentors.
- Women would be able to speak with well-grounded knowledge.
- Reduced fallacies regarding women and leadership.
- Institutions will rework its structures to accommodate women leaders.
- Certification and awarding after such programmes will be an added advantage to women aspiring for leadership positions.
- Universities in Africa will work with a sustainable institution including both genders.

C. To facilitate the development of a visible network (cohort) of women leaders engaged in collaborative visioning and problem-solving in African universities.

The participants discussed the strategies that would be effective in identifying and engaging women leaders from diverse academic/non-academic disciplines and backgrounds.

Strategies to Identify Women Leaders

- Volunteering as an identification criterion.
- Appraisal reports can expose leadership loopholes to be filled
- Headhunting from different departments.
- Appointment and interviewing those identified.
- Based on work experience.
- Networking and Mentorship.
- Empowering staff to self-organize who can be their leader.
- Involvement of the people. (Proposals floated to staff members then get feedback).

How to engage Women leaders

- Workshop seminar and training.
- Mentorship and sponsorship.
- Encouraging to emulate role models.

- Apprenticeship and Induction to Leadership.
- Creation of a supportive culture.
- Delegation of roles and responsibilities.
- Trainings and feedback.
- Setting realistic targets for the identified leaders.
- Providing leadership programmes undertaken by the leaders.
- Possibilities of making it easier for external potential leaders to access possible policy documents to have a holistic picture of what is expected of them.

Following the deliberations on strategies to identify and how to engage women leaders, the participants suggested possible effective methods for sustaining the momentum and engagement of women leaders in higher education within the collaborative networks over the long term. The following were suggested:

- Creating and maintaining a Collaborative Network with structured agreements echoing global instruments such as:- the United Nations Human Rights (UNHR), The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and UN Women, among others.
- Continuous staff involvement in policy crafting and review for smooth implementation and sustainability.
- Recognition and rewards to the women Leaders.
- Continuous training and education to nurture and capacity-build women leaders.
- Institutionalization of leadership training.
- Exchange program with other African institutions.
- Facilitation of programs by external funders.
- Monitoring and evaluation.
- Continuous Research.
- Benchmarking on best practices in other African institutions.
- Structured systems for the automatic flow of leadership system.
- Having a pool of mentors. This ensures succession planning for good leadership.
- Recognition and reward systems for women leaders.

Conclusion and the way forward

Several speakers shared their experiences and highlighted the importance of mentorship, networking, and advocacy for creating a conducive environment for women leaders. It was noted that women face unique challenges in balancing leadership roles with family responsibilities, and strategies for addressing this were discussed.

Recommendations and Way Forward:

The workshop concluded with a call to action for institutional leaders to prioritize gender equality and create policies supporting women's advancement in leadership roles. Mentorship programs, leadership training, and networking opportunities were highlighted as essential tools for nurturing the next generation of female leaders. However, it was proposed that ongoing support and follow-up programs should be established to monitor the progress of women leaders and provide continuous learning opportunities. A commitment to creating an inclusive and diverse leadership team within higher education institutions was emphasized as a critical step towards sustainable change.

Participants also expressed the need for collaborative efforts between government agencies, academic institutions, and civil society organizations to address the barriers faced by women in leadership roles. The importance of advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns to promote gender equality within the education sector was underscored. The workshop provided a platform for women leaders in higher education institutions to share experiences, build networks, and develop strategies for overcoming the barriers to leadership. Moving forward, it will be essential to harness the momentum generated by the workshop and translate the discussions into tangible actions that promote gender equality and empower women to take on leadership roles in the educational sector. Women also argued that institutionalized leadership training programs should include men to receive women leaders. Moreover, collaboration, leadership training programs, mentorship, benchmarking, continuous research, and recognition of women leaders were highlighted as some of the possible avenues to facilitate the development of a visible network (cohort) of women leaders engaged in collaborative visioning and problem-solving in African Universities such as Maseno.

Appendix I: Discussion Guide

i: 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 of strengthening science systems in Africa

- What are the existing capacity building and learning opportunities available to women within your institution?
- Does the organizational culture of your institution encourage women to aspire to leadership positions?
- What are some of the structural barriers faced by women in accessing leadership opportunities within your institution?
- What are some of the cultural barriers faced by women in accessing leadership opportunities within your institution?

ii: To institutionalize a leadership development program for women on administrative and academic pipelines in select African universities.

- Do you think a leadership training programme is important in enhancing women leadership roles? Give reasons for your answer
- Should a leadership development programme for women in administrative and academic pipelines be institutionalized in African universities? Explain your answer
- What do you think needs to be included as part of training in the leadership development programme?/ What are the needs of women and aspiring women leaders?
- What are the likely outcomes of the leadership training programme for women and aspiring women leaders?/How would the women leadership programme contribute to women leadership of higher education institutions?

iii. To facilitate the development of a visible network (cohort) of women leaders engaged in collaborative visioning and problem-solving in African universities.

- What strategies do you think would be effective in identifying and engaging women leaders from diverse academic/non-academic disciplines and backgrounds?
- What types of mentorship and support systems do you believe would be beneficial for women leaders within the network in higher education?
- What do you believe would be the most effective methods for sustaining the momentum and engagement of women leaders in higher education within the collaborative networks over the long term?
- How might the collaborative networks leverage existing initiatives or partnerships to strengthen its impact and reach within the African university community?