

The Gender and Financing Dimensions of Higher Education in Africa: A case study in the Zambian context

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Abstract

There is a sequential link between the financing of female higher education, human capital formation and human development. There is need for the adoption of a committed, sustained and proactive strategy to promote female higher education and finance is the key. The University of Zambia has for long been running its programs and activities with a level of gender insensitivity bordering on gender blindness. Some positive steps have been taken recently by the University management to redress this situation. But a lot more still remains to be done in terms of developing and promoting gender-responsive budgets, gender-sensitive leadership, gender-monitoring institutions and gender-empathetic mindsets.

Keywords: gender, financing, higher education, Africa, University of Zambia

INTRODUCTION

One of the points made by Joseph Stiglitz in the speech that he delivered in Helsinki in 1998 was that a prerequisite for development was a shift in priority from primary education to tertiary or university education but with a focus on science and engineering and not so much on liberal arts as was witnessed in much of Africa. Stiglitz also warned that university education would cause an immediate increase in inequality because the direct beneficiaries would almost always be better than the average. And, we may add, if a significant majority of the beneficiaries of higher education are male, as has been the case in Africa over a protracted period of time to date, the implications in terms of chronic and gross gender-based disparities are obvious.

The rapid rise of the East Asian economies exemplifies the link between higher education investments, gender and growth. Unremitting and significant investments in all levels of education – primary, secondary and tertiary – have been one of the most important contributors to growth and development of East Asia. Seshamani (2006) has brought out three factors in respect of the education strategies pursued in East Asia. *One*, East Asia is one of the regions with the highest level of gender equality in education. *Two*, attention was paid not only to the achievement of 100% enrolment rates, but also to improving the quality of education. *Three*, emphasis was placed on science and technical education.

However, with the advent of the knowledge-based economy in the new millennium, universities, especially in Africa, find themselves confronted with a host of challenges. As Olukoshi and Zeleza (2004)

summarize them, the question is: “how to balance autonomy and viability, expansion and excellence, equity and efficiency, access and quality, authority and accountability, representation and responsibility, diversification and differentiation, internationalization and indigenization, global presence/visibility and local anchorage, academic freedom and professional ethics, privatization and the public purpose, teaching and research, community service/social responsibility and consultancy, diversity and uniformity, the preservation of local knowledge systems and the adoption of global knowledge systems, knowledge production and knowledge dissemination, the knowledge economy and the knowledge society?” (p. 3). A little reflection over the above-mentioned challenging balancing acts will reveal two key variables that underlie most of them as a common denominator. These are gender and finance. Gender disparities of various kinds and the shortage of funds for education, especially higher education, that are available to fiscally-constrained governments of developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), create a significant opportunity cost in terms of lost growth and unutilized development potential.

Ironically, many of these challenges have also been created or accentuated with the advent of private institutions of higher learning that have begun to mushroom in SSA countries. While providing to some extent expanded opportunities of access to potential seekers of higher education who may have been deprived of access in state-run/supported institutions, their blatantly commercial motive has accentuated issues notably of quality, equity, and excellence. While public universities are financially

affordable to those who do not receive state bursaries, access is limited by the limited number of seats these universities can offer. On the other hand, private universities serve to bridge the shortfall in the supply of seats, but access is limited by the relatively less affordable fees that they charge. And since poverty in SSA countries is prominently feminized, affordability is a bigger problem for potential female, as opposed to male, seekers of higher education. The influx of private universities could, therefore, tend to widen rather than narrow gender disparities.¹

The Gender Issue in Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Otunga and Ojwang (2004) found that as of 1999, in Africa’s private and public universities, more than 90% of their staff, 80% of their teachers and 75% of their students were men. The situation may not be uniform across universities in all the countries, but the disparities are ubiquitous and significant. In the University of Dar es Salaam, for instance, female student enrolment rose only fractionally from 22.2% in 1979/80 to 23.8% in 2000/01. In 2000/01, female students constituted 2% in Engineering and 6% in Science while the percentages were 46 in Library and 89 in Nursing (a clear-cut case of gender disparity in the reverse!). As regards staff, 5 out of 45 professors, 9 out of 78 Associate Professors, 14 out of 176 Senior Lecturers, 20 out of 189 lecturers and 9 out of 94 Assistant Lecturers were female.

(Nawe, 2003). Onokola and Onwura (2001), analyzing student enrolment in some of the major universities of Nigeria, concluded that there was no gender equity in student enrolment. Men dominated the technical courses which are most likely to lead to positions of power and high income. Women were little represented in scientific and technical courses like engineering and veterinary medicine. The authors further concluded that since vice chancellors of Nigerian universities were male, they were not even aware that gender equity was an important issue for the universities.

The above are not isolated instances of gender disparity but typical of a more pervasive phenomenon in SSA universities. African women have the lowest enrolment rates in the world in science and technology education at all levels. They have low rates of access to ICT (Information and communication Technology)-related education in particular. (Derbyshire, 2003). It is noteworthy that gender disparities become more pronounced not only

¹ There are a few instances where private universities have served to promote gender parity. For example, in Kenya, in 2000, female students constituted 52.5 percent of the students enrolled in four private universities. However, it should also be noted that the reason for this is the heavy emphasis on arts and social science programs for which there is a considerable pool of female secondary school leavers with the right qualifications. Parents, too, feel these institutions provide safe and enabling learning environments for their daughters. (Brown, 2001, Bunyi, 2003).

as one moves up the education ladder from primary to secondary to university education, but within universities, too, the disparities increase as one moves from undergraduate to post-graduate programs. Tettey (2009) shows how postgraduate enrolments in African universities in general are dominated by males. In the University of Ghana, for instance, in 2008, females made up 33% of postgraduate enrolments. Gender disparities characterize not only student enrolments, but also the distribution of academic staff especially in professorial positions. The following table extracted from Bunyi (2003), although somewhat dated, serves to highlight the issue.

Table 1: Percentage of female academics by rank, 1998

Country	Professor	Associate Professor	Senior Lecturer	Lecturer
Ghana	10	5.3	7.3	10.1
Kenya	0	0	12.7	12.3
Lesotho	0	0	16.7	26.8
Mauritius	5	11.8	22	40.2
Nigeria	0	9.5	12.6	17.4
Sierra Leone	8	0	33.3	17.5
South Africa	0	13.9	24.8	43.0
Swaziland	0	6.7	11.5	35.7
Tanzania	8.6	3.8	12.7	10.7
Uganda	16.7	20	7.7	18
Zambia	8.3	0	17.4	10.2
Zimbabwe	0	33.3	----	10.8

Source: Bunyi (2003), Appendix Table 3; ----- data not available

The disparities are more prominent in science departments that include natural sciences, agriculture, engineering, medicine and veterinary medicine. This comes out clearly in the following table.

Table 2: Percentage of female academics in African universities by rank in science departments

Country	Professors	Senior lecturers	Lecturers
Botswana	0.00	0.06	0.02
Ghana (Legon, Cape Coast, UST, Kumasi)	0.01	0.11	0.12
Nairobi, Kenya		0.10	0.12
Lesotho	0.00	0.06	0.08
Malawi	0.04	0.13	0.17
Ibadan, Nigeria	0.04	0.13	0.18
Swaziland	0.14	0.00	0.21
Tanzania	0.03	0.03	0.07
Zambia	0.10	0.00	0.11
Zimbabwe	0.05	0.13	0.17

Source: Authors calculation, (2003)

The following are a few more recent illustrations provided by SARUA (Southern African Regional Universities Association) of the gender parity/disparity situation in some universities in the SADC (Southern African Development Community) region (for which gender-disaggregated data are provided):

- In the University of Dodoma, in 2007, the Government of Tanzania appointed 97 academic staff positions of which just over 30 percent are female.
- Of the current 120 members of academic staff in Mzuzu University in Malawi, 19 are females.
- In Copperbelt University, Zambia, 25 of the current 193 academic and research staff are women.
- In the University of Namibia, Of the 340 academic and research staff, 42 percent are female.
- Mozambique's Higher Institute of International Relations has 84 academic and research staff, of which 13 percent are female.
- Of the 42 members of staff in the University of Technology Mauritius, 40 percent are female.
- In the University of Witwatersrand, 47% of the 1,230 academics and researchers are women.
- In 2006/07, the National University of Lesotho reported having 374 academic staff of which 162 (43 percent) were female.

What is revealed by the above figures is that gender disparities exist in general but are not uniform. It is more severe in some universities than in others.

Furthermore, upward mobility of female staff seems to be a problem. Recent figures show that only 17 percent, 15 percent, 7 percent and 10 percent of the professorial staff were female at the Universities of Ghana, Stellenbosch, Ibadan and Dar es Salaam respectively (Tetty, 2009). Such disparities could have some adverse psychological impacts. As Tetty (op.cit.) explains, "if upward mobility for female staff is seen as a difficult proposition, there is a strong likelihood that women will not see academia as a career worth pursuing, further diminishing the capacity of these institutions to increase the number of qualified staff" (p. 13). Also, "there are not enough females in the professoriate to serve as role models who can attract prospective female academics or mentor those already in their institutions" (p.14).

The factors that contribute to the sharply tapering pyramidal structure of female education (from a broad primary education base to fast narrowing secondary, university, science and technology, undergraduate and postgraduate) are well-known:

social, cultural, economic, and political. Here, we shall not go into them at length but confine our discussion largely to the financing aspects. However, this is not to imply in any way that the other factors are not important. Indeed, the powerful influences of the other factors create an entrenched societal mindset that militates against female progression in education and is not easy to transform. They render financing a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the promotion of gender parity and national development. Even if the needed finance is available for gender-promoting affirmative actions, the results may not be seen on the ground unless accompanied by commensurate attitudinal changes.

The Financing Issue in Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Tertiary education witnessed a significant expansion in Africa over the decades. The number of universities in SSA rose from 13 in 1960 to about 300 in 2002. However, funding did not keep up with this expansion (Bunyi, 2003). Two causal factors can be ascribed to the above phenomenon. The first is that expenditure compression was one of the main ingredients of the Structural Adjustment Programs that were implemented during the 1980s. Declining allocations to education, especially higher education, was inevitable fallout of this policy. The second factor is that African Governments wanted to create more universities to gain political mileage. But since the size of the resource cake did not expand much, or even declined in real terms, the share of each institution had to fall. It was a fruitless exercise in capacity expansion without ensuring satisfactory utilization of existing capacity. This has been witnessed in many countries including Zambia. The consequences of the above developments was a shrinkage in academic programs, cutbacks in research, reduced bursaries, and decline in staff conditions of service, all of which led to a notable reduction in both the quantity and quality of universities' programs. In the longer run, there were also not enough funds to repair the worn-out infrastructure, leave alone expanding it to cater to the growing student population. The use of new technologies invariably lagged behind.

Another important reason is the World Bank's emphasis in the 1980s and 1990s on primary education. A case was made out that the developing countries in SSA must use their limited resources to ensure universal primary education and not fritter them away in tertiary education which was too costly. Michael Kelly, a noted Zambian educationist who prepared a report for UNICEF in 1994 (see UNICEF, 1994), stated, for instance, that spending on one university student in Zambia was between 164 and 266 times higher than the spending on a primary student. Based on such data, he argued – and probably rightly at that time – that it was "socially

inefficient for Zambia to spend its public resources in this way. Since the return to primary education is considerably higher than to university education. It is also a socially inequitable way, since those from poor families are not well-represented in the universities, whereas those from better-off households are over-represented” (p.24). It is only lately that the World Bank and other donors have changed their views about higher education and conceded that it can have a positive impact on economic development.² Bloom, Canning and Chan (2005) state that university education will positively impact on economic growth and development in Africa through the process of technological catch-up. According to their calculations, SSA’s current production level is about 23 percent below its production possibility frontier. Given this shortfall, the authors conclude that increasing the stock of tertiary education by one year could maximize the rate of technological catch-up at a rate of 0.63 percentage points a year, or 3.2 percentage points in five years.

It is from this new perspective that financing of higher education in Africa today has to be viewed. Expenditures on higher education need to be treated as compulsive expenditure just as African countries, through IMF/World Bank conditionality, were forced to treat expenditure on debt servicing in the era of structural adjustment.

The Gender Issue in Higher Education in Zambia

Michael Kelly (op.cit.) wrote that “the narrowing of educational opportunities, which is so characteristic of primary and secondary education, becomes even more pronounced at the tertiary level”. In 1993, only 35.5% of the trainees in secondary teachers’ colleges were female, while in vocational and training institutions, less than one-third of the total enrolment was female. And, almost all female students, were training in such traditional areas as secretarial and office work. Female participation in such areas as plumbing, electricity, and automotive engineering or air support services was almost non-existent. Kelly quotes a 1992 Government report on *Focus on Learning* that states that “fields of study are so apportioned that women and men are shown as having and exercising different options in their career choices. Kelly further goes on to assert that the girl child in Zambia, entering Grade 1 at the bottom of the educational ladder, “sees little ahead to excite and motivate her, little to enhance her self-respect in her status as a girl or to enable her to build a positive and confident self-image” (op. cit. p.40). The above situation in respect of female higher education has been inflexible with respect to change over the years. In 2003, Lulat found that the sex ratio among student, faculty and administration in Zambia’s universities was male-dominated. He stated then 30 years earlier,

for every female student, roughly 4.5 male students attended the University of Zambia. The picture in 2003 had improved but only slightly. The ratio was roughly 3 males for every female. As we shall see in the next section, this ratio has not changed significantly today. According to a World Bank (2004) gender-related report on Zambia, there is evidence that women who have been empowered through education are better able to engage in productive activities, find formal sector employment and earn higher incomes and greater return to schooling than their counterparts who are not educated. Women with higher education, have the least fertility rates, deliver children in health facilities through medical professionals and seek treatment for their children from health facilities. In sum, higher education has the best results for women’s reproductive health, poverty reduction and economic empowerment – vital ingredients for sustained development.

The above being the case and given that women in Zambia constitute more than 51% of the population, their lagging behind in all steps of the educational ladder (with higher the step, greater the lag) constitutes an important source of missed potential for economic growth and development. Human capital formation so necessary for a country’s development is constrained by the inadequate opportunities for women to access higher education. There are currently six universities in Zambia: University of Zambia in the capital city Lusaka, Copperbelt University in Kitwe, Mulungushi University in Kabwe, Cavendish University (Zambia) in Lusaka, Zambia Adventist University in Monze, Northrise University in Ndola and Zambia Open University. Of these six universities, the first three are public universities.

The University of Zambia is the premier and largest university that became operational in 1966. Gender and finance have both been, and continue to be, the binding constraints to the institution’s development. In the next section, we look at this premier institution of higher learning to understand the gender dimensions of financing higher education from both positive and normative angles.

The University of Zambia: A Case Study

The University of Zambia, UNZA as it is popularly known in the country, has shown some improvements in respect of some gender-related aspects. But it still has a long distance to traverse in respect of attaining gender equity. UNZA still has a poor report card on many of the benchmarks for gender equity. But there are incipient signs of a new commitment to travel in a new direction to reach a new destination. UNZA management has produced two major gender-related documents – HIV/AIDS Policy in 2005 and Sexual Harassment Policy in 2010. Currently, an Ad Hoc

² We shall revert to expand on this in the next section

Committee on Gender has submitted a draft Gender Policy document to the UNZA management for adoption by the University. This will be a first major step among the three public universities, none of which so far have implemented gender policies. None of these institutions have any information on gender-disaggregated data on critical variables such as dropout rates or any stimulation packages for female staff to pursue academic careers.

Some pro-gender initiatives are in place. 30 percent of first year admissions and 25 percent of bursaries are reserved for female candidates. The remaining respective percentages in respect of admissions and bursaries will be equally open for both male and female applicants on the basis of merit. UNZA's Strategic Plan also states that one of its main objectives will be to mainstream gender in all its programs. Be that as it may, a report by NUFFIC (Netherlands Organization for International Cooperation) (2010) states that the current university education system in Zambia is characterized by:

- High dropout rates, low output rates, often gender-specific;
- Hardly any reference to gender-specific needs;
- A low number of female staff in high management positions or pursuing academic careers within universities.

The above features are applicable to UNZA. The following statistics delineate the highly gender-insensitive situation that has obtained in the institution over the years:

- There has been a scant presence of women in administrative leadership and decision-making roles. Over a period of 44 years, the university has had no female vice-chancellor, only 1 female deputy vice-chancellor for a period of three years, only 2 registrars each of whom served for two years.
- There has been a negligible presence of female staff in senior academic positions. Few women have succeeded in attaining professorial positions of academic leadership and even positions of Senior Lectureship which is regarded as a career grade in the university.
- In the University's supreme academic authority, the Senate, there has been little presence of women.
- In terms of representation at Council, the gender situation has been gloomy. Out of the fourteen terms of the Council, only three have been female-headed. In addition, only 29 percent members are female in the 2008-2010 Council. However, the current Council is headed by a female. More generally, for 30 out of the 44 years of the

Council's existence, the chairperson has been male – another instance of male domination of the University's decision-making positions.

- Gender-wise breakdown of academic performance belies the popular notion of female inferiority or incompetence in the sciences. If one takes exclusion from program as a criterion of poor performance, female students' performance has been consistently much better than male students' performance in every school and in the University as a whole. During 2007 – 2009, 154 males were excluded from programs as opposed to 67 females. The fact that despite this difference, female entrants to the University constitute a smaller percentage in comparison to male entrants is indeed a loss to the nation in terms of inefficient utilization of human resources.
- Females constitute 35 percent of the student population. The gender disparities are extremely severe in some schools such as engineering and mines.

The lack of gender parity in the utilization of UNZA's budget and finance is reflected by the distribution of opportunities for academic upward mobility which in turn correspondingly affects opportunities for upward career mobility. The benefits of Government bursaries and various categories of Staff Development Programs are highly skewed in favor of male students and staff. Even private sponsorship is availed of more by male students. Staff Development Fellows, SDFs, (trainees who are not members of staff) and Special Research Fellows, SRFs, (members of staff sent for doctoral programs) are predominantly male. As at March 2010, there were 80 male and 34 female SDFs. Between 2007 and 2009, there were 38 male and 18 female SRFs. Thus, the gender imbalance begins at appointment level and continues even after appointment. This would be a major explanatory factor for the gender gaps in the academic hierarchy. The gender gaps are more prominent in some schools. For example, there are no SRFs in the Schools of Mines, Engineering, and Law and there are more male SRFs than female SRFs in all schools except Medicine³ and Library where female SRFs exceed male SRFs in number.

There are fewer females being sponsored by various sources (Government, Employers, Church, and NGOs). There have not been significant improvements in the number of females sponsored between 2007 and 2009. There are also more males on self sponsorship. The proportion of self/privately-sponsored female students has only averaged 43 per

³ This is welcome as it is gender parity-promoting.

cent between 2007 and 2009. This could be explained by cultural tendencies that tend to favor investments in male children than in female children.

Analysis and Recommendations for the University of Zambia

It is clear from the preceding section that the University of Zambia has all along been operating its programs and activities with a level of gender insensitivity bordering on gender blindness. If this trend and scenario continue, the cost to the nation's development will only mount over time. Corrective measures to repair the damage already done so far are overdue. The University must begin to function effectively on the premise that women and men are equally important for the country's development.

In order to promote gender parity and development, affirmative actions that go beyond paying lip service to gender, must be put in place. The formulation of a Gender Policy offers opportunities for the institution to do this. Affirmative actions are needed in four main areas: gender mainstreaming of budgets, leadership pattern change, institutional mechanisms and mindset reform. Accordingly,

- Gender-responsive budgets: UNZA's budgets will have to make provisions for altering the current gender-skewed distribution of admissions and staff development schemes. There must be a focus on addressing the prominent deficit in the presence of females in science-related schools such as Engineering, Mines, Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, while improving further the gender parity in those schools where the situation is not too bad (e.g. Education) and without undermining the favorable gender parity that exists in yet some other schools (e.g. Humanities and Socials Sciences and Law). Separate sub-budgets within the budgets should be created to provide training programs and special scholarships for women in schools and departments⁴ where the gender gaps are pronounced.
- Gender-sensitive leadership: The top leadership in UNZA's administration is almost exclusively male. Such leadership may not always appreciate the role played by women in the domain of the intellect. It is, therefore, necessary to bring gender parity in the structure of the leadership. UNZA's Search Committees appointed by the Council to recommend candidates for the top administrative positions must be mandated to recommend candidates for top

management positions such as Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Bursar, etc. on the basis of adherence to the principle of gender equality. Such Search Committees must themselves be gender-sensitive and for this they too must have adequate representation of females. Administrative positions such as Deanship, Directorship and Headship must not have just a sprinkling of females as is most typically and normally the case. There must at any given time be stronger gender parity by making these appointments on a rotational basis.

- Budgets must also make provisions for accelerated sabbaticals and special funds to promote female scholarship and research to enable the ascendance of more female staff to the academic leadership ranks of the professoriate.
- Gender-monitoring institutions: In order to ensure that UNZA truly remains an equal opportunity employer, it must set up an Equal Opportunities Committee, with preferably a female chairperson, under the aegis of the University Council. The main task of this Committee should be to review and monitor all action plans to promote gender equality.
- The above Committee should be assisted by a Budget Monitoring Committee that will regularly assess the extent to which budgetary allocations are pro-active in respective of gender promotion activities.
- Gender-empathetic mind-sets: The creation of institutions and enhanced and gender-mainstreamed finance will not be enough if the culturally-ingrained mindsets that are wont to look upon women with an attitude of condescension do not undergo a significant change. Unfortunately, such changes cannot be wrought overnight. One has to take recourse to the Fabian Socialist approach of "permeation".⁵ Ideas that have evolved through rational thinking and conviction than those that have been imposed through revolutionary - and perhaps violent - changes are more likely to endure. Through strong advocacy strategies, UNZA authorities must create gender awareness among both staff and students within UNZA as well as the outside society at large.
- A start to the change of mindsets within UNZA would be to ensure that no student who enters the portals of UNZA will leave without having been exposed to a course or

⁴ It is ironic that currently the Department of Gender Studies in UNZA does not have a single female member of staff!

⁵ See a recent paper by McKernan (2004)

at least a module on gender and its importance to social, economic and human development. UNZA, in other words, must create not just technically and professionally competent human capital but also gender-empathetic human capital.

There is no gainsaying that all the above measures to be implemented effectively will entail larger budgets for UNZA with reordered priorities. The degree to which the UNZA management will be able to persuade the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance to release greater subventions to UNZA and/or enthruse donors to help implement gender promotion programs will be the first benchmark of the management's own conviction and capability.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The gist of this paper is the affirmation of the sequential link that exists between financing and development. Human capital is key to a country's development. Higher education, especially in science and technology, is key to human capital formation. Female higher education is key to human capital formation. And finance is key to the adoption of a committed, sustained and pro-active strategy for the promotion of female higher education. But finance in itself cannot deliver the goods in the absence of attitudinal changes. As a recent report of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (2006) states: "While many institutions have encountered donors and partners who indulge in 'gender-speak', institutions may acquiesce in making some grudging gestures and statements about gender as a means of securing donor funding while continuing with business as usual in their daily operations. This results in token 'gender gestures' such as appointing one or two females as deans, managers and administrators while the business of the institution continues in its gender-blind or gender-biased manner". Unless institutions genuinely resolve to rise above such tokenisms, despite higher finance, higher education will not be effectively linked to higher development.

As ILO (2007) suggests, there is need to make gender "visible", "specific", "concrete" and "integrated". Gender mainstreaming must imply gender constituting an integral part of budgets, curricula and most importantly of mindsets.

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