

How Culture Affect Women in Management Positions in Higher Educational Institutions in Uganda

Nelson Jagero

(Corresponding author)

Senior Lecturer School of Post Graduate Studies and Research Kampala International
University, Dar es Salaam Constituent Collage Tanzania
Postal address: P.O BOX 9790 Dar es Salaam
E- mail: jagero66@yahoo.com

Peninah Beinomugisha

Deputy Director Academic Affairs Kampala International University, Dar es Salaam
Constituent Collage Tanzania
P.O BOX 9790 Dar es Salaam Tanzania
E-mail: beinomugisha@gmail.com

Enos Rwasheema

Faculty of Education Kampala International University, Dar es Salaam Constituent Collage
Tanzania P.O BOX 9790 Dar es Salaam Tanzania
E-mail: ekrwasheema@gmail.com

Mkitaswidu I Bin Said

Ministry of Education and Vocational Training Tanzania
P.O BOX 2669 Dar es Salaam Tanzania
E-mail: binsaids@yahoo.com

(Received: 30-7-11 / Accepted: 14-3-12)

Abstract

This paper is about women in higher education management. The issue addressed is the continuing under-representation of women in higher education management. The data presented show that in spite of advances which women have made in many areas of public life in the past two decades, in the area of higher education management they are still a long way from participating on the same footing as men. Whereas the hope is that academic life is a sphere where in theory, women should find few barriers to opportunity and that if there is anywhere that women professionals should be successful, it is in the universities, the reality seems to be that academia has been perceived as traditionally elitist, male and patriarchal in its workplace culture, structure and values. The research design used in the study was qualitative research design. The sample consisted of 15 males and 25 females, who were obtained by purposive sampling. The qualitative data was collected using in-depth interview and focus group discussions. The major finding of the study is that culture, family duties, domestic labour affect women advancement in management positions in higher educational institutions in Uganda .

Keywords: Culture, women in management, Higher Education, Family duties.

Introduction

Like other women in Sub-Saharan Africa, Ugandan women carry a heavier workload than men but their workload at house hold level is not commensurate with the amount of power they have to take decisions. Kwesiga (2002) writes about the anthropologist and poet Okot p'Bitek, who labeled the African woman as 'sweeper, cook, ayah, dish-washer, cultivator, store-keeper, builder, runner of errands, cart, lorry and donkey'. Many other commentators have echoed this description, including President Museveni of Uganda, who in 1986 referred to Ugandan women as donkeys, tractors, water pipes and factories. None of these were intended to be derogatory but to graphically depict women's multiple roles (Kwesiga 2002).

It is indicated that women occupy 23.9 percent of the National Assembly according to the Human Development Report (2005) and Uganda takes the 6th position in Africa. Male dominance is depicted in both management and school administration. Higher levels of learning for example, like in Universities, males are in top positions and in higher echelons of management sometimes it's even hard to tell whether the University administration has any female on any of the administration posts like the senate, university committee, university board and other key positions in the University, of which Uganda Christianity university-Mukono is not an exception (Bantebya 2005).

The situation of women particularly in the Higher Education (Universities) in Uganda is inextricably linked to the position of women in society. Traditionally women were taken as child bearers, cooks, men's property; housewives and had no say in public places and were denied a right to go to school although the situation is changing in the recent years. In trying to figure out the impediments of women to higher education management it's wise to first know their participation in lower education levels for this is the seed bed from which higher education managers come from. I will therefore incorporate few of the reasons that are hampering women in lower education levels in my discussions so that it's possible to identify the reasons hampering them later in higher education levels.

Study Area

Uganda Christian University is located 23 Kilometers from Kampala, in Mukono district, on the main road to Jinja. It is a private university, chartered and fully accredited by the President of the Republic of Uganda, through the Ministry of Higher Education and Sports and the National Council for Higher Education. It is owned by the Province of the church of Uganda, and has campuses in Eastern, Western and Northern Uganda.

By 2003/04 academic year, the students' body totaled 2664 ranging from 20-60 years old, about 46% of whom are female. 2005/2006 the enrollment had almost no difference between the male and the females, of 4335 total enrollment, 50.01 were female men. Currently the university enrollment totals to 5170 students in 2006/2007 academic year, 50.3% are female.

The university council is comprised of 32 members of whom 6 are female and there is one female compared to 4 males on the university cabinet. Women senior-lecturers and lecturers make up only 15% of the academic staff with only 1 female professor (www.ucu.ca.ug).

Literature Review

Women's low participation in higher education management roles is highly associated with norms and values embraced by men as well as women in the field of work. They are expressed in the form of stereotypes manifested in the socialisation process and reinforced by social practice. Anker and Hein (1986) noted that women are secluded in the labour market in order to limit their interaction with unrelated males. In most societies women are protected from mixing with men and since working outside the home entails doing so, women end up

being kept in the back-ground of management positions. Socialization process does not empower women in anyway. For example in the Middle East the low proportion of women is linked to a bias against women being exposed to interaction with men. Bakri and Besha (1989) noted that culture and tradition impacted very strongly in determining societal attitudes towards women professionals in positions of authority and responsibilities in East Africa. This has indirectly affected and shaped their attitudes and their behaviour and extrinsically disempowered women.

The cultural norms still hold that regular working hours are incompatible with marriage and child-care. A women's role is portrayed as bearing and rearing children. Lubwama (1996) in her study about role conflict and women's performance observed that women in Africa face deeply embedded social and cultural constraints in performing their roles and responsibilities. They dictate that women are groomed to become responsible housewives whereas boys are treated to become responsible men. Such beliefs are observed by Davidson and Cooper (1992), Kwesiga (2002), that women's place is in the private sphere where she has to fulfill her roles. Men on the other hand are encouraged by society to assume positions of responsibility and hence rise in their careers.

In addition to the above the culture and societal expectations is another factor hindering women's progress to higher educational management. Generally speaking Ugandan culture explains partially why women lack a burning ambition to be at the top of the ladder in their profession and are thus extrinsically not empowered, just because it's in their culture to play a second fiddle to men which has affected their attitude and thus robbing them the intrinsic power. Cultural roles, society expectations and responsibilities of being a mother/wife, tie them behind the doors of management rather than advancing for top positions. In fact one of the arguments put forward to explain the diminishing numbers of women available for top faculty and administrative positions is that women frequently have to take time out for childbearing and childrearing and giving all the care to their husbands rather than building their research and career, this explains why women usually go back home earlier than their counterparts at work. (Kweiga, 2002).

Methodology

The Sampling Procedures

Following what Twuwansi (2001) writes; for those doing impressionistic studies and aim at exploration into social phenomena within a short period of time, purposive sampling is relevant for such studies. Purposive sampling was therefore deemed appropriate for this study. Mbaga (2000) holds that in purposive sampling, the researcher handpicks subjects to participate in the study based on identified variables under consideration. Purposive sampling is used when the population for study is highly unique. It differs from other types of sampling in a way that purposive restricts the sample population to a very specific population and then tends to use all the subjects available.

Population and Sample Size

The total population for UCU in 2006 was 5513 of whom, 2733 are females and distributed accordingly into different positions. 20 in administrative positions and only 3 are females, two 238 are in academia and only 83 are females, 85 are non-teaching staff of whom 60 are females and 5170 is the student body and 2587 are females students. Females comprise of 2273 to 3240 males.

The only 3 females in top and middle management were included in the study, the number was minimal because they were the only females in key managerial positions, and other 2 females working as Assistant Academic Registrars were also included as junior managers. 10 more female lecturers were included, of whom 3 were senior lectures, 3 were lectures and the

other 4 were junior lecturers plus 10 non-teaching staff (they included secretaries, cooks, office messengers, cleaners, library attendants, and bursars). For males, 4 were chosen among university administrators, 6 lecturers of whom 2 were senior lectures, 2 lectures and 2 junior lecturers and 5 non teaching staff members were included in the study. The total number of respondents was 40 of whom 15 were males and 25 were females.

Data Analysis

This is the act of transforming data with the aim of extracting useful information and facilitating conclusions. Data analysis is usually more narrowly intended as not aiming to the discovery of unforeseen patterns hidden in the data, but to the verification or disproval of an existing model, or to the extraction of parameters necessary to adapt a theoretical model to (experimental) reality (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). It is a process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to the mass of collected data. According to Bell, data collected by means of questionnaires, interviews, diaries or any other method mean very little until they are analyzed and evaluated.

The Findings

Clifford Geertz (1973) defines culture as a symbol system of meanings: culture is that which we understand and give meanings to our lives. It “denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men (women) communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about life and attitude towards life.” Our values are culturally conditioned. Everything we say, think and do is influenced by our culture. Culture is the environment in which what we believe takes place.

Most of them both males and females believed that culture has played a big role to keep women relegated in the lower levels of management. Almost 90% of the all the respondents believed that women are what they are now because of the African culture. That is women were meant to serve a second fiddle to men, be cooks, dish-washer. Some respondents said that all this originated from the era of colonialism where by the first schools to be built were boys schools and later girls schools where girls were taught home keeping, home economics, and all secretarial work which is far different from what boys were taught. Boys were taught how to lead, govern because most of them were the sons of the chiefs and kings (refer 1.2.1)

The way society views women is different as most of the women admitted that almost 70% percent of their male clients get surprised when they enter their offices and to worsen the situation some even ask, “Can I talk to the head of department”. In this case it’s a female who heads the department but the other party hardly believes to find a female heading. A female administrator revealed:

When one enters the office he/she expects to find a male in the office. Some of the parents, students and other people often confront me to tell them where the administrator could be, who he is and how he looks like? Some are very free to say to my eyes “can I talk to the head of department please” even some know but they are not so sure because administration has been patriarchal from time memorial.

The cultural and societal attitudes holds some women to be in lower positions of management like being office messengers, clerks, secretaries while others to keep their families because an African woman’s success is seen in how well her family progresses and is organized. This view is in line with what O’Connor writes that, “the issue of feeling responsible for the family home was also highlighted ... she could not shake off the feelings that had been instilled into her as a child” (Leonie & O’Connor 1999:90). From the interview carried out 80% of both male and female respondents believes that if the woman is to lead, then she has to be an assistant to a man due to the fact that they have a lot on their finger tips before and after a working day. But a male respondent stated:

...what can a woman do, can she also manage for instance a department, may be if we want to see it collapsing [sic].

However through another in-depth interview with other males, some believed that women are good managers irrespective of the cultural norms and attitudes. They believe that cultural and societal norms have kept women down but they called upon women to challenge such beliefs and be available for any work at any time. A male lecturer had this to say:

I have worked with women ever since I started working, for six years I have been supervised by a female administrator. She is so hard working, determined and I think she overcame the so called cultural and societal attitudes, norms...

African culture never at one moment empowered women to greater heights in their career. This has also affected women's attitudes towards some of the jobs and services in their societies. One female administrator indicated that some women don't even apply for the jobs however much they are qualified because they feel that certain jobs are meant to be occupied by men. In her words:

I can not do some jobs; such positions are managed by men. Our culture made us serve from the back seat. Oooh can I manage such office

From the above statement therefore it would be imperative to say that the culture has affected women's adventure and from footing at the equal pace with men. Women are not therefore extrinsically empowered by the culture and societal beliefs which has also reduced their intrinsic empowerment. They don't feel eligible to do some jobs as stated above. However we need to note that the trend is changing, actually some respondents said that in few years to come the number of women in management might be equal with that of men since there is almost equal number in student enrollment, at UCU 50.03% of female students and 49% of males in 2006/07 academic years. But why equalize in the next years? Why not now? What is missing and what needs to be done? Actually someone was making a comment that in future if all these women who are tutorial assistants went forward and did their Masters degrees and came back as lecturers we would even make half men half women teaching staff in this university (UCU). She added:

...we still have chances, if we improve our attitudes and feelings. We still look down to our selves, even sometimes when we are educated, potential and eligible to do some work we still feel we are women, we confess it before people that we are women, which is a big problem, and some women have not come to the level of knowing that they are at the equal footing with men. They can do what men do; they still apologize for being women which is very bad and think it's because of culture. I don't see it as culture but some women are not intrinsically empowered.

Owing to the above therefore, women need to know that they are women and they can do anything given the opportunity. If they improve their ability, be determined that they can work and put in much effort. Some women just don't want to put in much effort but well knowing that our society has and/or is patriarchal, I think women have to go an extra mile just to show that 'they can do it', they can work as one female in a focus group discussion observed:

...they are not just woman but also people who are potential to do any kind of job and can make the office run.

From the above, some respondents both men and women said it's high time we stopped blaming the culture, societal attitudes and other agents but to check our women's performances. It's thus imperative to say that unless you empower yourself, the government, university, and culture will not empower you. Women need to be aggressive, assertive and should be determined. Then they can challenge the so called the culture and societal attitudes. This concurs with what Sen (1997) discusses that; it is something women need to do for themselves. Thus, it is misleading to assume that governments or other external agents can empower women.

Recommendations

Right from the beginning, boys and girls are treated differently by the members of their own environment, learning the differences between boys and girls, women and men. In summary, early gender socialization, similar to all other learning processes, starts at birth. It is also clear that gender socialization is culturally bound. As boys are favoured in most cultures, this will be reflected in their self images: boys being more assertive and demanding, girls being more submissive and modest.

Gender socialization should thus be focused on, if the boys and girls are to grow appreciating and treating each other equally. The advantage of early gender socialization is that it promotes equality between both sexes from an early stage; it empowers both sexes to be able to do things, because it is from this stage that the child learns that he/she will grow and rule the real world. As for disadvantages, interaction between sexes may make the opposite sex feel inferior, which may promote negative behaviours. Looking at the world now, it is vital that early gender socialization be implemented because with this, we are going to live in a world where women can do anything men can also do.

In the two focus group discussions, the participants suggested that the socialization process should be improved such that boys and girls are socialized in a more or less similar manner. They pointed out that the way girls are expected to behave and the roles they are taught to perform encourage submissiveness which undermines their assertiveness and chances of performing leadership roles. Two women lecturers suggested that parents at homes, teachers at schools and any other person with the responsibility of taking care of children should avoid treating boys and girls differently. This will in a way give power and voice to the voiceless. Because when these two categories of people are treated equally, females both will feel almost equal and female will in way develop power to change the tradition. In support of the suggestion revisit to the socialisation process one of the secretaries observed that.

All the gender stereotypes and perception about men and women are social constructions arising from what society members have internalized in the socialisation process..

References

- [1] E. Bakri and M. Beshu, *Women and Development in Eastern Africa*, An agenda for research proceedings of the workshops of women and development in Eastern Africa held in Nazareth in Ethiopia, (1989), Published by the Organisation of Social Science Research in Eastern Africa.
- [2] G.K. Bantebya, Women in academia: Voices from south, *Department of Women and Gender Studies*, (2005), Makerere University.
- [3] E. Basirika and E. Baingana, Women participation in politics, business and power positions in Uganda, *A Consultancy Report (unpublished)*, (1997).
- [4] M.J. Davidson and C.L. Cooper, *Shattering the Glass Ceiling*, (1992), London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.
- [5] G. Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Selected essays, (1973), Ink Publishers, New York.
- [6] J.M. Hornosty, Balancing child care and work: The need for a woman friendly university, In the illusion of inclusion: *Women in Post- Secondary Education*, (1998), Halifax, Fernwood Publishing. <http://www.ucu.ac.ug>
- [7] C. Joy Kwesiga, *Women's Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda's Experience*, (2002), Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- [8] W. Leonie and E. O' Conner, *Stepping out of the Shadows: Women in Educational Management in Ireland*, (1999), Dublin: Oak Tress Press.
- [9] M. Lubwama, Role conflict and its effects on the performance of female employees of Makerere University, *Unpublished Dissertation*, (1996), Makerere University Kampala.

- [10] Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research (3rd Ed.)*, (1999), London: Sage Publications.
- [11] F. Mbaga, *Introduction to Social Research*, (2000), Makerere University (Unpublished).
- [12] C. Musiimire, Role conflict: The public/ the domestic, *Presented on the 8th Quarterly Seminar on Theme: Gender and Management*, (1997), Makerere University Kampala, Unpublished.
- [13] G. Sen, Empowerment as an approach to poverty, *Background Paper to Human Development Report*, (1997), http://www.globalhealth.harvard.edu/hcpds/wpweb/97_07.pdf. Accessed 04.10.2006.
- [14] P. A. Twumasi, *Social Research in Rural Communities (2nd edition)*, (2001), Ghana: University Press, Accra.
- [15] UNICEF, *Girls' Education in Uganda*, Uganda Country Highlights, (2003). www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index.html, Accessed 10.08.2006.