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Assessing women participation in higher education leadership: case studies of Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda

Evaluación de la participación de las mujeres en los puestos de liderazgo en la enseñanza superior: estudios de caso de Kenia, Sudán del Sur y Uganda

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Abstract

Policy frameworks and legislation have enhanced the implementation of programs focused on improving women's education in Eastern Africa, yet gender parity remains a challenge in higher education, especially in top leadership positions. This study assesses women's participation in leadership roles in higher education in Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda and explores appointment criteria, obstacles, and mechanisms to increase female representation. Data were collected through desk research and a questionnaire aimed at university officials and administered online. The final sample consisted of 19 higher education institutions, and basic descriptive statistics were generated from the collected data. The results show that women comprise less than half of the top positions at both administrative and academic levels within the studied institutions. The key factors considered for appointing women to leadership positions include qualifications based on experience, leadership potential, and formal preparation. The study unveils challenges in the sector and contributes to evidence-based policymaking.

Keywords: higher education; women; gender equality; Kenya; South Sudan; Uganda

Resumen

Los marcos políticos y la legislación han impulsado la implementación de programas centrados en mejorar la educación de las mujeres en África del Este, pero la paridad de género sigue siendo un reto en la enseñanza superior, especialmente en los puestos de liderazgo. Este estudio analiza la participación de las mujeres en puestos de liderazgo en la educación superior en Kenia, Sudán del Sur y Uganda y explora los criterios de nombramiento, los obstáculos y los mecanismos para aumentar la representación de las mujeres. Los datos se recogieron mediante una revisión documental y un cuestionario dirigido a funcionarios universitarios y administrado en línea. La muestra final se centró en 19 instituciones de enseñanza superior, y a partir de los datos recogidos se generaron estadísticas descriptivas básicas. Los resultados muestran que las mujeres ocupan menos de la mitad de los altos cargos, tanto a nivel administrativo como académico, en las instituciones estudiadas. Los factores clave que se tienen en cuenta a la hora de nombrar a mujeres para puestos directivos son las cualificaciones basadas en la experiencia, el potencial de liderazgo y la preparación formal. El estudio revela los retos del sector y contribuye a la formulación de políticas públicas basadas en evidencia.

Palabras clave: educación superior; mujeres; igualdad de género; Kenia; Sudán del Sur; Uganda

Winnie V. Mitullah; Sibrino Forojalla; Benon Basheka; Daniele Vieira Do Nascimento; Karina Ginoyan

1. Introduction

Education is considered to be an ultimate equalizer. Its effect is longstanding and is reflected in the socio-economic and political status of women and men. It is acknowledged that education imparts requisite skills and competencies for human development which enhances the quality of life (UNESCO, 2020). It is significant for the creation of human capital, which is a factor of economic growth and poverty alleviation (Sifuna, 2006). Unfortunately, access to and participation in education, especially in higher education, among women – who are the majority in terms of population – continues to be unequal in Africa (Sifuna, 2006).

Globally, women's enrolment at the tertiary level has experienced exponential growth compared to that of men over time. However, this has not been the case in developing economies where only 73 females are enrolled for every 100 males (UNESCO, 2020). Syomene and Kindiki (2015) underscore the place of women's access and participation in higher education in the social and economic development of the society and further note that literacy and numeracy competence among children is directly linked to the mother's level of formal education.

Education has been declared a basic human right which must be enjoyed by all: girls and boys, women and men alike. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) under Article 26 (1) advocates for technical and professional education and equally accessible higher education to all. Under Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination Against Women (1979), countries are called upon to end discrimination against women and girls and to ensure equal rights in education by ensuring access to education and vocational training at all levels. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) made calls for equal treatment of women and men in education, while the Dakar Framework of Action on Education for All (UNESCO, 2000) committed to the need to provide access to education to women and girls. It further called for the need to eliminate systemic gender disparities in the education system from enrolment to completion, from teacher training to career development. The Millennium Development Goals (2000-2005) and Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030) all call for access to quality education. SDG 4 calls on governments to see to it that the learning outcomes for the entire lifecycle for women and girls are improved. Regionally, African Union Gender Policy calls for the use of sex-disaggregated data and performance indicators in a bid to enhance gender equality and a responsive environment.

Still, there remains a general scarcity of detailed analyses of the state of women's leadership in higher education in many African countries. This position is in line with the observations by Morley (2005) whose first attempt at this subject gave the phenomenon of gender inequality in higher education at college and subject levels a detailed attention. There have been reports indicating that during the 1970s and '80s women became better integrated into the education systems of most African countries. While this is true and the female participation rates have been approaching parity at the primary and secondary school levels, the tertiary sector has lagged behind (Kwesiga, 2002). Less scholarly attention has been paid to the nature of the support which needs to be rendered to those few women in higher education leadership positions to succeed in their performance and to encourage their counterparts in ascending to leadership positions. There is the assumption that the nature of the support for the successful performance of those in leadership may be a strong attraction to many others to assume similar positions (Nakamanya *et al*., 2017).

Countries with a high number of women enrolling and completing education have been known to have high levels of poverty reduction and economic productivity (Carvalho & Machado, 2010). Leadership and governance of the higher education sector are often used to describe certain categories of positions in both administrative and academic systems of universities. Nakamanya *et al.* (2017), while alluding to leadership in higher education, reported a dearth of women occupying leadership positions in universities globally, particularly in Africa. Whereas senior leaders were vice-chancellors and deputy vice-chancellors, the middle-level leaders were deputy principals and faculty deans. The authors described this situation as miserable.

Despite some improvements, women generally are still lagging behind and there seems to be limited targeted interventions addressing the issue of vertical advancement in administrative and academic positions. This study is aimed at assessing the situation of women's participation in higher education leadership in three selected African countries: Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda. In particular, the research analyses the current status of women's representation in higher education, including in leadership and governance positions, explores what key competencies are considered in the appointment of women in leadership positions and what key factors inhibit women from holding these positions, and identifies what mechanisms and strategies are needed to increase the participation of women.

2. Data collection

This paper has the overall objective of assessing women's participation in higher education leadership in Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda through literature review and primary data collection. The three participating countries were selected by the funding agencies of the research. Specific research questions included the following: what is the current status of women's representation in higher education, including leadership and governance positions? What are the key competencies considered critical for women in current leadership and governance positions in higher education? What key factors inhibit women from holding higher education leadership and governance positions? What strategies are needed to increase the participation of women in the higher education sector?

The study relied on secondary and primary methods for data gathering. Primary data was collected through a questionnaire developed to generate primary information on the key staffing positions in the universities. This was submitted to the appropriate persons within universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs). Respondents to the questionnaire were selected based on length of service in employment and administrative position. Almost all those who responded have served at least 5 years up to 20 years and above and all hold positions of heads of departments in the institutions. In Kenya, 57% of respondents were women, while 43% were men. Additionally, the questionnaire identified the key factors inhibiting the representation of women in higher education, the competencies of those in leadership positions, and the strategies likely to promote the participation of women in higher education leadership. In Kenya, the total sample included nine universities, but two of the private universities did not complete the survey. In South Sudan, the total sample included seven institutions, of which two are private. Data collection in this country posed challenges due to widespread institutional distribution and the fact that some have not resumed operations after the COVID-19 pandemic

Winnie V. Mitullah; Sibrino Forojalla; Benon Basheka; Daniele Vieira Do Nascimento; Karina Ginoyan

up to the date of data collection. In Uganda, the total sample included five universities, all public. The instrument was administered through an online format. The collected data were analysed using basic descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages.

Secondary data was drawn from documentary sources and government publications. Relevant policies and legislations were analysed to assess how they provide for gender equity and women's inclusion. The study also reviewed the existing documents on the state of women in leadership within the countries' higher education systems. The further assessment included the policy and legal frameworks that support women's participation along with peer-reviewed publications.

3. Understanding the selected countries´ scenario

The education sector in Kenya, higher education in particular, has witnessed tremendous progress as well as challenges with regards to women over the years. To ensure equal opportunities and access to quality education for all, in line with international treaties and standards, Kenya is committed to providing opportunities supportive to women and girls. Vision 2030, which is the Kenyan long-term development blueprint, espouses gender, youth, and vulnerable groups as significant to social, economic, and political development (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2008). The Vision emphasizes access to quality, relevant and globally competitive education, training, and research as a priority development agenda. The State Department of Gender Article 27(2) of the Constitution provides that every citizen has equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms without discrimination. One of these is the right to education under Economic and Social Rights in Article 43 (f). The Constitution further provides for equality and freedom from discrimination (Article 27 (3)). To implement these provisions, the State has put in place various relevant policies and legislations. National Policy on Gender and Development 2019 acknowledges the gains made in gender equality in education, but also observes that the right to education is far from being realised. The policy highlights challenges facing women in fully fulfilling their educational goals. Established in 2011 the National Gender and Equality Commission Act (Republic of Kenya, 2011) seeks to reduce gender inequalities and discrimination against all citizens of Kenya. The Commission ensures compliance with gender equality and freedom from discrimination of the marginalised, including women. The Commission is also responsible for coordinating and advising on public education programs for the creation of a culture of respect for the principles of equality and freedom from discrimination. The Education and Training Sector Gender Policy 2015 (Republic of Kenya. Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2015) reviewed the Gender in Education Policy of 2007 with a view to incorporating emerging issues that have implications for gender equity and equality in the education sector. The policy provides for promotion of gender equality and equity as well as coordination and facilitation of gender mainstreaming in national development. The policy prohibits gender discrimination in determining access to education and outcomes. Under section 3(1) (j), the Universities Act (Republic of Kenya, 2012) provides that the object of university education for all includes promotion of gender-balance and equality among students and employees. Section 6(6) provides for gender consideration in determining the nomination criteria for the members of the Commission, by ensuring balanced gender equity in

the commission. Further, section 12(2) stipulates that all appointments take into account gender equity in accordance with the Constitution. Finally, to ensure gender parity and equality, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Act (Republic of Kenya, 2013)provides for non-discrimination in gender regarding the admission of students in technical institutions.

In spite of these several policies and legislations, access to higher education has been hampered by socio-economic inequities. Those falling within the low socio-economic bracket are still underrepresented in accessing higher education. With expansion and high demand for higher education, limited resource investment capacity has been developed in HE institutions to support the expansion. This has resulted in financially incapacitated institutions with students unable to finance their studies. The case of women is dire due to related socio-cultural disadvantages which result in them not being prioritized in cases of resource scarcity. Though Kenya has a Higher Education Loans Board (HELB), its funding has not been enough for tuition fees in addition to other expenses for students from poor backgrounds, in particular women. Consequently, there is still a need for gender equity-based scholarship and grants adoption. This will help eliminate discrimination of gender and those from poor backgrounds (Odebero *et al.*, 2007).

The expansion of higher education capacity has seen enrolment increase in Africa. According to Gyimah-Brempong & Ondiege (2011), Africa registered an increase of 77% enrolment in higher education compared to 53% increase globally between 2003 and 2008. In Kenya, the implementation of Free Primary Education was aimed at increasing completion rate in primary schools. This impacted on the transition rate to secondary level which in turn impacted positively on girls. Likewise, since 2003, Kenya has witnessed an expansion in higher education with enrolment in higher education increasing from 58,637 in 2004/2005 to 324,560 in 2014 (Odhiambo, 2016). The data shows that in tertiary education, women students sponsored by the government to attend universities increased from 22,731 in 2018/19 to 39,702 in 2020/21 representing a 74% enrolment increase. At the tertiary level, women slightly exceeded male students in government-sponsored diploma programs in 2016/17 to 2020/21, which is a good sign of progress (KNBS, 2021).

Odhiambo (2016) believed there continued to be a gap between boys and girls despite government efforts to promote access to education among women. According to Wamahiu (2011), in Kenya girls are at a greater disadvantage. In every 100 girls, only 76 complete primary schools compared to 87 boys. Writing on why women lag behind on gender equality in education, Akala (2019) observed that only 30% of the 85% of learners progressing from primary school to secondary level get to higher education, with women accounting for only one-third of the enrolment figure, thereby creating the imbalance experienced in higher education. Akala (2019) further noted that the gender gap which goes beyond higher education to all levels in Kenya is as a result of lack of opportunities, poverty, insecure learning conditions, high cost of education, long distances from schools and the ever-demeaning cultural practices that have always relegated women to the periphery.

Higher education in the Republic of South Sudan is fairly new as an organisation or government. Unlike most ministries of the National government, it was established for the first time following the declaration of independence of the country on 9th July, 2011. The normal advancement of girls' education in South Sudan was severely retarded by northern Sudanese authorities in the wake of the Torit Mutiny in Southern Sudan in

August 1955. All elementary and intermediate schools for boys and girls were shut down for an entire year and reopened only in August 1956. A milestone in advancement in girls' education was the establishment of Aboudia girls' Intermediate school in Juba in 1960. Another critical development in the advancement of girls' education in Southern Sudan was the return of a group of young men and women, after completing their secondary schooling in Uganda, to join Khartoum University in July 1972, following the Signing of the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement between the Sudan Government and Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM). These were the children of South Sudanese refugees who had fled to Uganda following the outbreak of fighting against the Sudan army. In 1977, the first admissions to the University of Juba finally materialized. This favoured the prospect of girls' advancement into higher education. It did not take place immediately as there were no girls in the first group of students enrolled in the first University colleges. This was because there were no girls' secondary schools in Southern Sudan at the time. Gradually, however, Southern Sudanese girls who could not find university places in Uganda or had up to 'O' level qualifications, began returning to join the University of Juba. With the formation of the interim Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) in 2005 and the constitutional requirement that 25% of leadership positions be allocated to women, the universities were included and the first two female Deputy Vice Chancellors were appointed at the University of Juba and Rumbek University, in 2015.

South Sudan communal societies are heavily based on tradition and customs. Consequently, its liberation struggles for leadership have always been predominantly male-led. Women, however, became actively involved in the politics of peace when large scale population displacement took place from the South to the North during the liberation struggle, 1983-2005. The value of this effort was that when peace was attained in 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the interim Constitution of South Sudan, section (4a) Article 16, called on all levels of government to "promote women's participation in public life and their representation in legislative organs by at least twenty-five percent as an affirmative action to redress imbalances created by history, customs and tradition". In the domain of education, Article 29 (section 1) of the 2011 constitution, amended in 2013, declares education as a right for all citizens. It emphasizes that governments must provide equal access to education without discrimination based on religion, race, ethnicity, health status, gender, or disability. Section (2) of the same article adds that governments should guarantee free and compulsory primary education, along with free literacy programs. Consequently, access to and equity in education figure among the top priorities of the National General Education Policy, 2017-2027 (2017). The main access and equity objective is to increase the participation of all children, youth, and adults in general education.

Higher education is regulated by the Higher Education Act (Ministry of Justice, 2012). Section 6 of the Act sets the strategic goals and objectives and establishes the Council for Higher Education as a policymaking body. In 2011, South Sudan developed a long-term strategic plan: 'South Sudan Vision 2040: Towards Freedom, Equality, Justice, Peace and Prosperity for All' (Government of South Sudan, 2011). The plan envisages that by 2040, the country will have a quality education system that will be able to prepare its youth to cope effectively with a global dynamic environment and that the education system will be relevant, of high quality and accessible. The government organised the 'Special Student Fund', used to secure accommodation in the form of hostels for higher education students according to gender. Food was provided in the hostels, also general logistics covered,

including transport to and from lecture sites of individual universities. This arrangement continued to be provided to universities in the South of Sudan in the interim period 2005-2011. Unfortunately, since independence, this fund has ceased to exist.

The expansion of higher education capacity in South Sudan has been seriously limited following the separation of the country from Sudan. Admission into the three oldest universities in the united Sudan was national. However, with separation in 2011, students from Sudan withdrew from the three universities. Since there were few secondary schools in the South, the number of students who met the standards for university entrance were limited. Out of the total enrolment in the five public universities, women were 26% (Akec, 2021). However, when all the prevailing circumstances of conflict are taken into account, this achievement by women is quite encouraging.

The number of women in higher education in Uganda still falls below their male counterparts, including in leadership and governance positions across almost all levels of the tertiary education sector. At both country and regional levels, the issue of women's representation in higher education has been a major subject of debate in the context of the broader gender equality and equity discourse in development (Morley, 2005). In 1990, the government of Uganda introduced the Affirmative Action policy in the governance of higher education. Through this policy intervention, as of 1991, qualified women were entitled to a bonus point of 1.5 for college admission. The primary purpose of this was to increase the participation of women in higher education. In 2005, a quota system was introduced as a second high-level strategic measure. This required that 25% of all government sponsored public university educational opportunities be allocated through a district population quota-based system, and 75% through the national merit system. The key legal and policy instruments for gender in Uganda include: The 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda; The National Gender Policy 2007; The Equal Opportunities Act of 2007; The Gender in Education Sector Policy of 2016; The Public Finance Management Act of 2015. There are other policy frameworks within individual universities, and all are clear on gender considerations. However, the University & Other Tertiary Institutions Act of 2001 (UOTIA) (as amended) is not aligned to these instruments.

Uganda has made some progress in the general policy environment for gender equity. However, the country lacks institutional policies crucial for the success of women in leadership as has been done in other countries, such as family-friendly work policies. According to Geoffrey (2020), structural impediments to gender equality in the higher education systems explain why high-profile fields of study and managerial positions remain deeply embedded in masculinity. This institutional environment perpetuates a culture of inequality that impacts on women's welfare and development. The university admission custom and tradition in the country appears to promote widespread acceptance of masculinity as a norm in the country's public university educational distribution system (Carvalho & Machado, 2010). In a study by Morley (2005), it was reported that fewer women from districts located in geographically disadvantaged areas were admitted to public universities from 2009 to 2017. Kwesiga (2002) explored the factors that affected women's access to higher education in Uganda. The author states that the family, society, and state acted as if they were constantly weighing the profitability of investing in boys' or girls' education, assessing the future practical value of the individual. As a result, lower status within the family structure, lower perceived social value, exacerbated by general economic constraints and deficiencies in the education structure made girls' education, particularly higher education, appear less profitable than that of boys. This

obscured the indirect benefits that families and society would reap from higher rates of female participation in higher education. Furthermore, Carvalho & Machado (2010) found that horizontal and vertical forms of segregation still existed in many higher education systems. The participation of women at the doctorate level drops and this has a cumulative effect on the actual participation of women in leadership and governance positions in higher levels of education.

4. Results: advancements and challenges in women's participation in higher education leadership

4.1. Gender composition of decision-making bodies and academic staff

In Kenya, the analysis of the sample universities regarding female participation in higher education confirm the review of secondary literature. In particular, there is minimal representation of women at the top leadership and governance positions across the Kenyan universities (Table 1). With regards to the university council, there is an average women representation of 37% against male at 63%. Both University of Nairobi and Maseno University are leading in the public universities with high (44%) female representation against 56% male representation. Technical University of Kenya comes second at 38% against 62% men. Riara University which is private has a balanced gender representation at 50%.

The research showed an average representation of women (32%) and men (68%) in the senate across the sampled universities. This is below the two-third gender constitutional requirement of composition of the public service. Though below this threshold, universities score differently, ranging from 25% gender representation in Technical University to 40% in Riara University. This shows more inclusion in the private university, and merits deeper investigation. In central management, an average of 32% female and 68% male representation across the universities was registered. Bomet University and Maseno University are the only institutions with constitutionally required gender representation among the case studies. A very low female representation was registered among the university deans, directors and principals at an average of 25% against male majority of 75%. Bomet University College, Maseno University and University of Nairobi had a representation of 29% women against 71% men, 25% against 75% and 23% against 77% men respectively. Rongo University had the lowest female representation at 14%. However, the University of Eldoret has an outstanding gender representation at 40% women against 60% men. With regards to heads of departments, there is an average women representation of 36% against men at 64%.

Table 1.
Kenya: Gender composition of governance and management structures

	University Council		University Appointment Board		University Senate		University Central Management		University Dean / Directors / Principals		University Heads of Departments	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
University of Nairobi	44%	56%	25%	75%	30%	70%	29%	71%	23%	77%	34%	66%
University of Eldoret	29%	71%	30%	70%	32%	68%	25%	75%	40%	60%	19%	81%
Maseno University	44%	56%	57%	43%	33%	67%	40%	60%	25%	75%	42%	58%
Rongo University	22%	78%	-	-	32%	68%	25%	75%	14%	86%	40%	60%
Bomet University	33%	67%	67%	33%	-	-	57%	43%	29%	71%	25%	75%
Technical University of Kenya	38%	62%	18%	82%	25%	75%	13%	87%	21%	79%	28%	72%
Riara University	50%	50%	-	-	40%	60%	38%	62%	20%	80%	66%	34%

Source: the research

The study found an outstanding representation of women on the Appointment Boards of Bomet University College and Maseno University at 67% women against 33% male, and 57% women against 43% male respectively, with Bomet University College recording the highest (67%) women representation across all the universities sampled for the case study. Cumulatively, the women representation on the Appointments Boards of all the universities sampled is 39% against 61% male representation. This falls within the requisite constitutional provisions. However, the individual universities, in particular the University of Nairobi, which is the largest in the country, need to do more to implement the already existing gender mainstreaming policies in the Institutions of Higher Learning in Kenya.

Table 2.
Kenya: Gender composition of academic staff

	Professors		Associate Professors		Senior Lecturers	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
University of Nairobi	17%	83%	22%	78%	31%	69%
University of Eldoret	24%	76%	21%	79%	-	-
Maseno University	7%	93%	33%	67%	18%	82%
Rongo University	0%	100%	0%	100%	25%	75%
Bomet University	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%
Technical University of Kenya	13%	87%	12%	88%	42%	58%
Riara University	-	-	0%	100%	80%	20%

Source: the research

With regards to the gender representation of professors, in Rongo University, men comprise 100% (Table 2). The University of Nairobi with the highest (107) number of professors had only 17% women professors. Cumulatively, the governance and leadership positions in Kenyan universities is male dominated at 73% against 27% female representation. There is a low representation of women among associate professors in public and private Kenyan universities. All the associate professors at Rongo, Bomet, and Riara Universities are male. At the University of Nairobi, women make up 22% of associate professors and 31% of senior lecturers. At the Technical University of Kenya, women comprise 42% against 58% of men. The senior lecturers in Bomet University College are all men, however, it is worth noting that Bomet is still a constituent college of Moi University. Rongo University has 25% women against 75% male representation, while Maseno University has 18% women against 82% male representation.

Table 3.
South Sudan: Gender composition of governance and management structures

	University Council		University Appointment Board		University Senate		University Central Management		University Dean / Directors / Principals		University Heads of Departments	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
University of Juba	19%	81%	7%	93%	14%	86%	8%	92%	18%	82%	13%	87%
Upper Nile University	-	-	-	-	6%	94%	0%	100%	19%	81%	9%	91%

Source: the research

The response rate has been very low from the institutions in South Sudan. The public universities in South Sudan are widely dispersed all over the country and communication in the country is rather difficult and slow. In the case of the private university colleges, these are largely concentrated in Juba, and there are few staff members who are recruited full-time by the institutions. Moreover, as indicated by Akec (2021), there are very limited numbers of female academic staff members who are currently fully employed at the institutions. Nevertheless, according to respondents from the University of Juba, the oldest and largest populated institution in the country, followed by Upper Nile University, women's participation at governance and leadership levels is at best below 20% (Table 3). This of course is not unexpected, considering the historical evolution of female education from the very commencement of modern education by the missionaries in South Sudan in 1902. At the professorial level, the highest representation is 5% (Table 4).

Table 4.
South Sudan: Gender composition of academic staff

	Professors		Associate Professors		Assistant Professors	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
University of Juba	5%	95%	2%	98%	5%	95%
Upper Nile University	0%	100%	0%	100%	4%	96%

Source: the research

In Uganda, historically, Makerere is the first university in East Africa and the largest in the country. The university opened its doors in 1922, as a male technical college. It was not until 1945 when its first female student was admitted (Onsongo, 2009). Even though the numbers have changed significantly since 1945, realities on the ground remain largely unchanged for most women especially as far as leadership and governance representation are concerned. At Kabale University Council, there are a total of 13 male members and 10 female members. Within the Senate, there are 38 members and of these, there is only 18% women representation compared to 81% male representation. One can also highlight the case of Muni, which is one of the public universities located in the West Nile region of the country. Data shows that there are only 26% of females in the university council. The situation is not any better at academic levels.

4.2. Factors considered in the appointment of women to leadership positions

This study investigated the main factors considered by universities in hiring for positions of leadership. Through the administered survey instrument, the participants were asked why, in their opinion, some women in their institutions were hired or appointed to leadership positions. In Kenya, qualification in terms of experience scored 100% (7 respondents), with potential leadership qualities closely following at 86% (6 respondents). Formal preparation ranked next at 71% (5 respondents), while effective management skills were noted by 57% (4 respondents). Similarly, considerations such as the next step for upward mobility and affirmative action compliance each received 57% (4 respondents). Reward for hard work was acknowledged by 29% (2 respondents), while expertise in community relations and mediation skills were recognized by 14% (1 respondent) of the participants.(Figure 1).
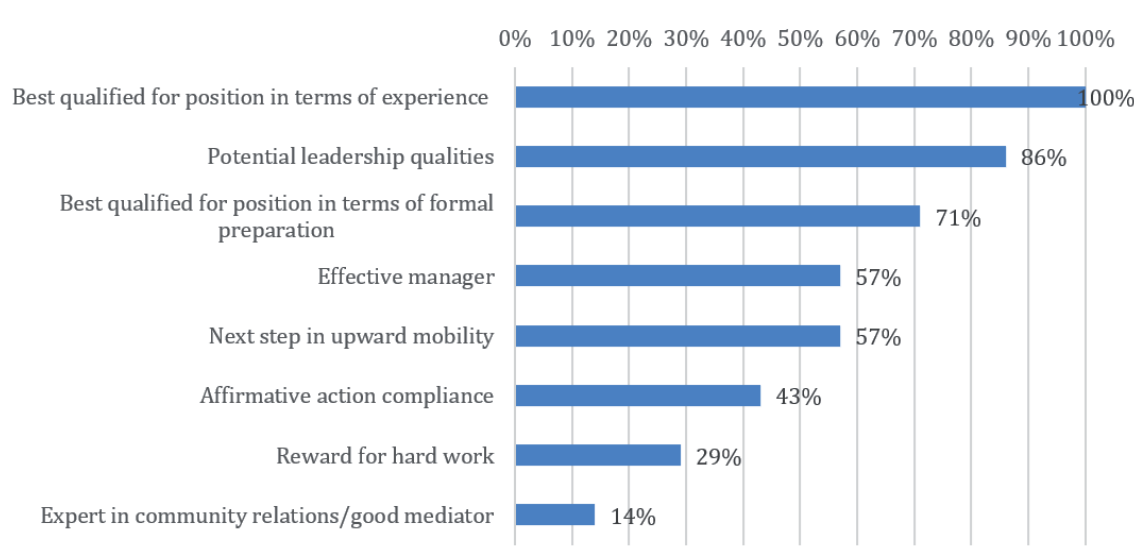

Figure 1. Kenya: Considerations when hiring and appointing women for leadership positions. *Source:* the research

In South Sudan, all the respondents are unanimous that women are hired or appointed in leadership positions because of their potential leadership qualities; they are considered equally best qualified for positions in terms of experience as well as formal

preparation. Other attributes considered for women in leadership positions currently include reward for hard work and being an effective manager.
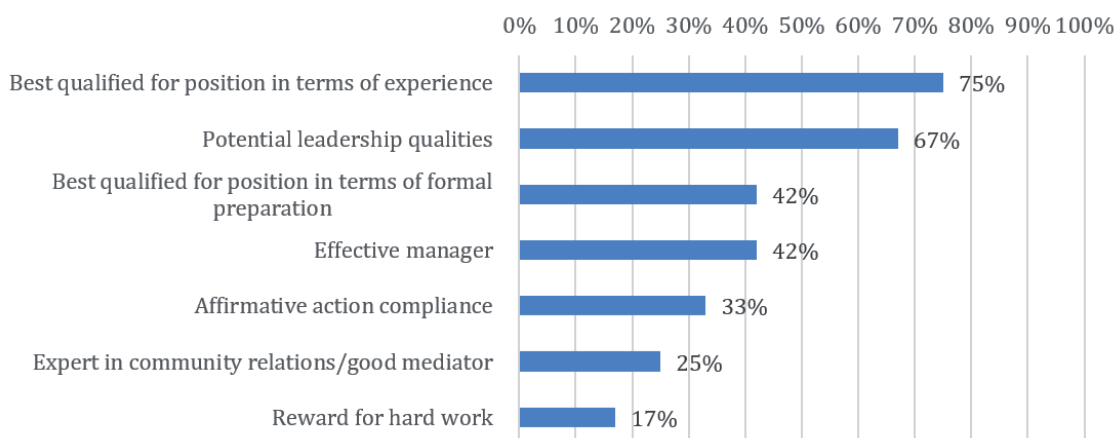

Figure 2. Uganda: Considerations when hiring and appointing women for leadership positions. Source: the research

In Uganda, the results suggest that the majority of higher education institutions sampled in Uganda select women for leadership positions because they believe women are the best qualified for such positions, while reward for hard work is not a major reason why women are recruited (Figure 2). Affirmative action compliance counted for 33% of the responses, potential leadership qualities (67%) and best qualification for the position (42%).

4.3. Factors inhibiting women joining higher education

In Kenya, the Likert scale analysis of the data from the study characterised the inhibiting factors to be socio-cultural, institutional, and individual. At the individual level, the majority (72%) agreed with the perception that women demonstrate behaviours that prevent development of sisterhood and support which impact on their advancement to leadership positions. Almost an equal number (71%, or 5 respondents) cited difficulties in building and maintaining positive relationships with female colleagues, while 57%, or 4 respondents, strongly held the perception that women in senior organisational positions tend to dissociate from members of their own gender which blocks their ascension to higher positions. Culturally, slightly over half (57%, or 4 respondents) of the respondents maintained that career women are frequently torn between family and work responsibilities, while an equal percentage (57%, or 4 respondents) agreed with the assertion that traditional societal biases of male against females is a key inhibiting factor to women's progression to leadership positions. Institutionally, the majority (71%, or 5 respondents) held the view that weaknesses in implementation of existing inclusive policies by universities is a major impediment to women's progression to leadership positions. Other institutional inhibiting factors include bias in appointment bodies (58%, or 4 respondents) and structural problems in institutions that prevent women to ascend to leadership positions (58%, or 4 respondents). Conversely, the majority (86%, or 6 respondents) of sampled Kenyan institutions disagreed with the view that women are being discriminated against and lack support from men in authority and male colleagues. Similarly, 71%, or 5 respondents, disagreed that women are considered ineffective in decision making.

In South Sudan, the findings that emerged are from only two universities. Respondents agree that an inhibiting factor is the weak implementation of existing inclusive policies. Another inhibitor is the discrimination and lack of support from male authorities and colleagues. The behaviour of women in leadership positions, hindering collective advancement, is considered a hindering factor as well.

In Uganda, the majority (92%) of participants attributed the limited advancement of women in leadership positions in higher education institutions to the absence of regulatory obligations for gender ratios in leadership. Other factors included career women balancing family and work responsibilities, restricted geographic mobility, negative attitudes from male faculty, personal safety concerns, and lack of gender sensitization programs (83%). Additionally, the absence of gender-inclusive policies was mentioned (75%). The majority of participants did not consider women in senior positions disassociating from members of their own gender as a significant constraint.

4.4. Strategies needed to increase women's participation in leadership

In order to enhance women's progression in leadership positions in higher education, it is incumbent on HEIs to put relevant strategies in place. Key among these are the existing gender policies and mainstreaming programs.

At the policy level, the consensus of the sampled Kenyan institutions under study was that implementation is of the essence. There was a need to undertake an assessment of the efficacy of the existing policies, the development and implementation of gender inclusive policies for leadership in higher education institutions, and the implementation of affirmative action for leadership positions. Similarly, sampled institutions called for the revision of laws to make it obligatory to have women in governance and leadership organs in universities. Institutionally, all the Kenyan institutions under study emphasized the need to build the capacity of women to engage in gender-responsive research, and to nurture a gender-responsive organizational environment. This has the potential of creating a critical mass of potential women leaders in various universities, and active participation of women in leadership. A high percentage (86%, or 4 respondents) supported the implementation of institutional mentoring programs for staff, and establishment of women's career growth funds to support women's progression. Similarly, an equal percentage (86%, or 4 respondents) call for changing the patriarchal traditional norms and perceptions regarding female leadership within Kenyan HEIs. Finally, there is the need for effective orientation in the institutional policies, procedures, guidelines, and job descriptions of senior leadership positions, and to develop a uniform process of accessing leadership positions (86%, or 4 respondents). In South Sudan, vast majority of respondents (94%) agreed with the necessity of inclusive policies, mentoring programs, career funds, and other mechanisms that, if implemented, can facilitate the advancement of women's engagement in leadership roles within HEIs. 92% of respondents agreed that changing traditional perceptions regarding female leadership, implementing institutional mentoring programs, and building capacity to engage in gender-responsive research were the best strategies needed to increase women participation in leadership of higher education institutions in Uganda. 83% of participants recommended establishing a uniform definition of women's leadership, creating career growth funds, and promoting open competition for top positions. Lastly, 75% of participants in Uganda agreed with implementing a standardized process for accessing leadership positions.

5. Conclusion

The numbers of women in higher education governance and leadership are improving, albeit not satisfactorily. Many sampled universities have gender policies and gender mainstreaming programs, and some have an affirmative action on gender, yet the barriers to taking up administrative positions persist. Most respondents call for sensitization, mentoring, and self-advocacy training. Furthermore, it has been evidenced that academic qualification is not enough, and women should be mentored and trained in leadership. In Kenya, for instance, there are no programs to support women's access to positions of power in the sampled institutions, except at Rongo University. The university has affirmative action during recruitment, but the details were not provided. Apart from this, public universities have gender mainstreaming as part of their performance contracting, but the majority focus on sensitization on gender issues and hardly address the hard strategic questions of upward mobility in administrative and leadership positions. A reflection on what can be done to motivate women to leadership positions revealed a willingness to take action. Training in administration and management, mentorship, supporting career growth, flexible working hours, and women-friendly facilities such as day-care centres were highlighted as important for motivating women faculty members for administrative positions. In South Sudan, the first consideration at public universities for increasing the level of their functioning is the need to increase salaries and regular payments, to align with neighbouring countries in the region. The gathering of statistics for all the institutions in order to arrive at a comprehensive conclusion for the current study is difficult. The majority of the institutions in South Sudan have recently re-opened following their closure in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. In Uganda, the need for women-friendly facilities and gender-inclusive policies, adopting communicative leadership where dialogue, nurturing, and problem-solving are central, were noted as viable opportunities. It was further conceived that women are likely to be open to alternative approaches that are communicative and participatory. In general, some universities also called for more hybrid work (online & physical) initiated during COVID-19, and an attitude change in employees to recognise efficiency and leadership over gender identity. However, hybrid work also has implications, especially for women, which are still to be fully studied and documented. Special consideration should be given to females both as students and academics by providing them with conditions facilitating their study and work. In the case of women academics, special provisions in the form of scholarships to world universities of high academic standing should be considered by the government and its partners. All the above cannot apply, however, unless special consideration to higher education is not given as the foundation of socio-economic development and progress.

6. Acknowledgements

7. References

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