Mainstreaming Gender at Polytechnics in Ghana: Opportunity for Development

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Abstract

Gender Mainstreaming is imperative in contemporary development planning. It is globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality especially in institutions of higher education. Polytechnics are crucial centres for change and gender mainstreaming their curriculum, enrolments, and general operation is also crucial as it will enable them to fulfill this mandate. Enhancing quality education by women and men, and removing gender stereotyping in the curriculum, career choices and the professions is the panacea for sustainable development. In this respect, obstacles to women’s participation in higher education need to be minimized or eradicated completely. Therefore, recruitment, enrolments, promotions and organizational structures need to be gender mainstreamed. This research involved extensive documentary reviews. Interviews with key selected stakeholders, representative of students, academic and administrative staff and decision-makers and implementers were also contacted. The paper suggests that the application of a gender mainstreaming strategy is possible, though complex. The case study institution analyzed shows some progress but there are still many challenges relating to structural issues, sustainability, policy formulation, the commitment of actors involved, and the whole aspect of attitudinal change both at individual level and collectively for the polytechnic.

Keywords: Gender, Gender Auditing, Gender Budgeting, Gender Mainstreaming, Gender Planning.

1. Introduction

Gender disparities in various societal organizations have been a subject of ongoing research initiatives. Gender mainstreaming is imperative in contemporary development planning. Gender mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality (March, Smith & Mukhopadhyay, 1999). Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a strategy or an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities - policy development, research, advocacy, dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, and planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects. Polytechnics are crucial centres for change in terms of research and manpower development and gender mainstreaming their curriculum, enrolments, and general operation is crucial as it will enable them to fulfill this mandate (Britum & Anokye 2006). Enhancing quality education by women and men, and removing gender stereotyping in the curriculum, career choices and the professions is the panacea for sustainable development (March et al, 1999). In this respect, obstacles to women’s participation in higher education need to be eradicated. Therefore, recruitment, enrolments, promotions and organizational structures need to be gender mainstreamed. The underlying argument of the paper is that polytechnic education sector in Ghana and more specifically at the Koforidua Polytechnic is not “sufficiently” gender mainstreamed. This is so in spite of the fact that in 2005, the Swedru communiqué adopted affirmative action policy for the establishment of gender desk in all universities in Ghana. However, as social institutions, polytechnics are not immune to the moral corruption of the society. It is imperative to highlight the issue of gender within the specific context of the complexities of polytechnics as higher education institutions where middle level personnel, future leaders and technocrats are trained as well as place where research is of particular value. Gender is the socially determined division of roles and responsibilities and power between men and women. These socially constructed roles are usually unequal in terms of power and decision making. These inequalities are also manifest in control over assets and events, freedom of action and ownership of resources, among others (Ellis, 2000). Furthermore, gender roles and responsibilities are culturally specific and can change over time, sometimes being rapidly influenced by socio-economic and technological change. The Koforidua Polytechnic has its own gender culture that is relationships between women and men, e.g. in whose hands are the most powerful positions, who has access to more resources, and who has stronger networks which they can appropriate to their own ends.

2. Gender in Polytechnics

Polytechnic education is one of the most key institutions responsible for re-thinking and re-defining reality thus a key to change. Gender is one of the changes that need to be addressed. Research and development are major sources of knowledge, and polytechnics are responsible for creating new knowledge, new values and attitudes. Polytechnics play a critical role in mapping out feasible potential directions that Ghana can take, whilst taking into consideration the historical context. The impact of gender disparities is a negation of the fundamental principles underpinning the existence of polytechnics. Portnoi (2003) asserts that, in order for higher learning institutions of which polytechnics form part, to be leaders and role models for democracy they must themselves practice the politics of inclusion and forge democratic principles. Gender is one of the tenets of development therefore mainstreaming gender in polytechnics is fundamental to matters that require to be addressed urgently, as it goes beyond the effecting of social justice and equity. Gender mainstreaming processes are contested; the contestation is evidenced by the reluctance to discard sectional or special projects for women and to make space for them in everyday operations, positions and situations where policies, priorities
and executive decisions are made. The gender debate in polytechnics cannot be isolated from the broader political, social, cultural and economic context. Locating the gender debate in polytechnics within this context helps to move towards a more systematic approach and broader understanding of the dynamics at play in historical space and time. In line with this view, it is important to locate this gender debate as embedded in the post independent Ghana whilst concurrently considering the influence of socio-economic and political variables. A Polytechnic as a human institution is culturally defined, and reflects and replicates the values of those who set it up (in the case of Koforidua Polytechnic, theGovernment of Ghana). Every institution normally has four components; strategy, structure, systems and culture (AAU Report 2006) as explained below:

1. Strategy includes an organization’s vision, mission, goals and how it intends to achieve them.
2. Structure refers to its divisions, allocation of tasks, and positions of authority and responsibilities, and the relationships between its members.
3. Systems constitute the rules, regulations, policies that govern the operations of the institution.
4. Culture is the shared values, opinions and norms of its members as determined by the conventions and unwritten rules of the organization, its norms of cooperation and conflict, mores and its channels for exerting influence. Gender mainstreaming would imply engendering each of these organizational aspects and levels.

2.1 Trends in Polytechnic Leadership in Ghana

There are 10 Polytechnics in Ghana namely, Accra Polytechnic, Cape Coast Polytechnic, Ho Polytechnic, Tarkoradi Polytechnic, Sunyani Polytechnic, Kumasi Polytechnic, Tamale Polytechnic, Wa Polytechnic, Bolga Polytechnic and Koforidua Polytechnic. A random selection of Polytechnics in Ghana reveals the following trends in top management structures:

1. The Rectors of all the nation’s 10 polytechnics, 9 are males and 1 female
2. The office of vice Rectors of the 10 polytechnics are all headed by males
3. Out of the 10 polytechnics Sunyani and Tarkoradi Polytechnics have their Registrars as females the registry of the other 8 are headed by males
4. The Koforidua Polytechnic which is the case under study have all the Deans of the 5 faculties as males.

Currently, in most of the polytechnics in Ghana, women are concentrated at the middle and lower end of the institutional hierarchy. As at 2015 there are no women full professors but only one associate professor. This picture points to the poor ratio of women to men in management and operations of the polytechnics in Ghana and the same scenario is evident especially in applied science and technology where very few female students and female lecturers are represented. It becomes essential to ask questions; what could have contributed to this scenario? Don’t we have enough highly educated women who can assume leadership positions? Can polytechnicsbe justified in criticizing structures that perpetuate oppression when they are themselves promoting the same inequalities? Is gender inequality less important than other forms of equality? How can polytechnics offer contemporary solutions through research when their structures are not gender sensitive? Regardless of the existence of enabling well crafted policies gender disparities persist in most polytechnics in Ghana and beyond. The situation is a clear manifestation of the gap that exists between policy formulation and implementation. This scenario shows that many women are not entering postgraduate programmes at the same rate that they enter undergraduate programmes in Ghana. For that reason it will be a canard to expect women to be comparatively represented on polytechnic teaching, research programmes and management structures. From the statistics, the ratio of women in management is very small compared to that of men.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of gender mainstreaming is premised through an analysis of the Moser (1989) Framework

2.2.1 Moser Framework

The Moser (1989) framework recognized the transformative potential of gender planning in development and practice. She therefore, developed a gender planning framework that distinguished between types of gender needs: the practical and the strategic. Rees (2000) reiterates that, the framework aims to set up gender planning in its own right. Gender planning aims to emancipate women from their subordination, leading to their achievement of equality, equity and empowerment. However, this varies with context, and is dependent on the degree to which women are subordinated in status to men (Moser, 1989). The framework questions assumptions that gender planning is a purely technical task and views it as distinct from traditional planning methods. Instead, Moser (1989) views gender planning as both political and technical in nature, assumes conflict in planning processes and characterizes planning as a debate. The Moser Framework has 4 categories of analysis. These are the Triple Role Framework, Practical and Strategic gender needs, Disaggregation of control of resource and decision making within the household and distinguishing between Women in Development (WID)/Gender and Development (GAD) policy approaches. The framework makes work visible and valuable through the concept of triple roles and categorizes policy approaches (Moser, 1989). Furthermore, the framework moves beyond technical elements of planning to recognize socio-economic and political dimensions in gender mainstreaming. The Moser framework assumes conflict of interest in the planning process and recognizes the transformative potential of gender planning. The framework conceptualizes planning as aiming to challenge unequal gender relations and support women’s empowerment (Moser, 1989). However, the idea of gender roles obfuscates the notion of gender relationships and can give false impressions of natural order and equality. The Moser Framework however ignores factors such as class, race and ethnicity in its approach. Moreover, the framework is static; it does not examine change over time as a variable. Potentially, policy approaches which could seem to be mutually exclusive may overlap in practice. The shift in focus from WID to GAD is clearly articulated in the feminist political ecology theory (Moser, 1989). Saunders, (2002) is of the view that, this theory carries with it assumptions that gender differentiation can be traced to societal division of labour, property rights and power relations, whether these are gendered, physical, racial, class-based, or cultural.
3. Materials and Methods

The qualitative research methodology formed the basis of this study, although a quantitative research design was also employed. The two approaches are complementary, providing different perspectives and answering different specific questions within any one broad area (Wiskers, 2008). In addition, qualitative research is inherently multi-method in design (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Flick, 1998) and this enabled use of triangulation to validate data gathered through extensive documentary reviews, interviews with key selected stakeholders, representative of students, academic and administrative staff and top decision makers and implementers were also contacted. Consequently, (Wiskers, 2008) states that qualitative research may help to understand the findings of quantitative research. In this way, the researcher endeavoured to offset the potential biases associated with quantitative research, mainly, such as being subject to researcher bias (Wiskers, 2008). Fundamental to this study is the use of a case study. Detailed empirical research is needed in a specific geographical context to understand the dynamics of gender mainstreaming. The approach is an efficient way of capturing context specific details. A case study is “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” and is particularly suitable for answering the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Roulston, 2010) for instance; How does Gender Mainstreaming contribute to development? According to Flick (1998), a case study is also defined as an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context and relies on multiple sources of data.

4 Gender Mainstreaming in Koforidua Polytechnic and Existing Activities to Initiate and Strengthen It

Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for men and women of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes in all areas at all levels (March et al. 1999). It is a strategy for making women’s and men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is reduced. The rationale for gender mainstreaming and gender equality policy perspective at Koforidua Polytechnic is twofold; a human rights perspective to ensure that men and women have equal access and control over recognizing the different interests, roles and responsibilities; and needs of women and men in order to meet and support these, with the aim to achieve an effective and sustainable development (Koforidua Poly Strategic Plan 2014). Most stakeholders (80%) at the polytechnic seem aware of the need for gender equity and equality but reality on the ground proves otherwise. Women are grossly under-represented as students, lecturers and administrators. Less than forty percent of the polytechnic enrolment of about 6888 students is female as at September 2015. The Polytechnic does not have a clear-cut gender-mainstreaming policy. It has affirmative action policies; but these appear to be mere policy frameworks which do not have significant bearing on gender, for example students are recruited on the strength of their qualifications rather than anything else. There are no gender equity policies with reference to staff recruitment, retention and promotion. Deliberate long-term efforts should be enacted to empower women in the academy.

Studies have shown that in the developing world, the lower education system still has a gender related bottleneck system. This is evident as women’s representation shrinks as the education hierarchy proceeds, so much so that, by the time of entry into higher learning institutions like polytechnics and universities, women are grossly underrepresented especially in the sciences and technology. For instance, out of the 10 polytechnics in Ghana, only the Koforidua Polytechnics have a female Rector, this is inconsistent with the gender balance advocated for by both the Ministries of Gender, that of Higher Education, girl child education and science and technological development. At the Koforidua Polytechnic less than half the executive posts are occupied by women, for example of the five executive dean posts are all occupied by males. Of the eleven faculties under the five Faculties of the polytechnic, 2 are headed by females; nine positions are occupied by males. This may imply that a few women specialized in the sciences both at senior high school, polytechnic and university and hence the need for gender mainstreaming at all levels of education at Koforidua Polytechnic in particular and polytechnics in Ghana in general. There is therefore the need to bring in science bridging courses to cater for both female and male students who fail to register for first time so that they prepare for science education at Polytechnic. In the same vein the Koforidua Polytechnic can expand its staff development programmes so that more lecturers with a Masters Degree are encouraged to pursue PhD Studies with financial assistance from the polytechnic. The institutionalization of gender mainstreaming policies and strategies has to be done at different levels in Koforidua Polytechnic that include the following:

Academic Bodies, Administrative Bodies, Faculties, Departments, Research and Development Student Bodies, Classroom Facilities

4.1 Gender Budgeting

Women’s rights activists have over the years spent significant amounts of energy advocating for gender budgeting, as a model and tool that ensures effective and responsive public policies for women. It helps to analyze whether programmes actually reach and benefit the most disadvantaged intended beneficiaries who are often girls and women (ILO-TVET, 2012). March et al (1999) opine that, the overall goal of gender budgeting is to reduce gender inequalities and to promote gender-sensitive development policies for poverty reduction and improvement of the welfare of women and men, boys and girls. This can be done through the central budget to achieve gender-sensitive budget that address the needs of all people equitably, while taking into consideration the special needs of people with disabilities. Mainstreaming gender into the polytechnic curriculum and the establishment of the Gender Mainstreaming office within the polytechnic community will help towards the actualization of a fully gender mainstreamed polytechnic. The organizational culture which is male dominated can be changed over time and Gender budgeting need to be taken into serious consideration towards the actualization of this venture. There is also the need to update current data to highlight important gender disparities. The polytechnic system should take gender issues as an integral part of all its dialogue, discussions, programming and planning process in all quarterly and annual reviews. An ongoing process of dialogue and
consultation on gender issues integration should be established with all relevant stakeholders that include other Polytechnics in the country and establish networks with international organizations.

4.2 Gender Auditing In Polytechnics

Gender auditing is a process to understand the situations of women relative to those of men in a given institution; areas of focus may include on the gender gaps in enrolment, retention and achievement by men and women (AAU Report, 2006). A gender audit will enable polytechnics to decide and secure commitment of top management to change towards greater gender equality so as provide gender training to human resources practitioners and staff. This done so that policies enacted are sensitive and fair to women and men's needs at work. In addition there is need to produce guidelines on gender-sensitive interviewing and assessment of applicants. Equal weighting should be given to different areas of academic excellence (research, teaching and community service) so that both men and women can excel in areas of their choice or in areas where they are very good at. Currently more emphasis is put on research in the polytechnics.

4.3 Human Resources for Gender-Sensitive Development

Human resource development will also play a key role in ensuring gender-sensitive development in terms of management. This calls for restructuring all departments to mainstream gender. Therefore a properly constituted human resource department that is gender sensitive with some kind of related training is essential. Meanwhile, commitment by senior management of Koforidua Polytechnic for example and utilizing more on the strengths and opportunities in gender mainstreaming as opposed to weaknesses and threats (as detailed in the table below) can foster development in our polytechnics.

4.4 SWOT Analyses for Gender Mainstreaming at Koforidua Polytechnic

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<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
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<tr>
<td>i) Equal opportunity for women and men to access Polytechnic programmes</td>
<td>i) An educated workforce ready to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Female Rector who can be a role model to students and faculty</td>
<td>ii) Enhanced employment opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>iii) Experience in module writing which can the writing of gender policies.</td>
<td>iii) Self actualization of aspirations</td>
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<table>
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<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tr>
<td>i) Over stretched infrastructure</td>
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<td>ii) Lack of gender desk</td>
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<tr>
<td>iii) Lack of gender and anti-sexual harassment policies.</td>
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<th>Threats</th>
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<td>i) Cultural values: gender insensitive habits that are difficult to shelve.</td>
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5. Conclusion

The study findings seem to confirm the Moser Frame work. Consequently, there are some posts within the Polytechnic set up that are point to taking into consideration the academic orientation of an individual, this include the post of Rector and those of Vice Rectors and other senior management such as the registrar, librarian, deans and directors. In order to achieve gender mainstreaming at the Polytechnics there are quite a number of requirements that have to be met and these include adequate expertise on gender issues in the management, coordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation system. For instance the Koforidua Polytechnic has an inadequate cohort of female applied science students to draw on from technical/secondary students to achieve gender balance. Koforidua polytechnic can draw inspiration from two different university scenarios. University of Ghana, Legon has a gender policy premised on goals, mission, gender analysis, gender equality, strategies, and performance assessment. It is essential. Meanwhile, the Koforidua Polytechnic has inadequate gender mainstreaming as opposed to weaknesses and threats (as detailed in the table below) can foster development in our polytechnics.
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