Gendered Challenges and Opportunities in Module II Programs in Kenyan Public Universities: A Critical Appraisal

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Abstract

African countries have, since independence recognized education as a major catalyst of development. Five decades later, this focus has not changed although literacy rates remain low. In Kenya, many initiatives to increase access have been mounted and at the university level, public universities increased access by introducing self-sponsored programs, popularly known as Module II programs. The programs are being offered to mature students as a life-long learning model. This paper explores the intersection of issues of gender and these Module II programs in public Universities in Kenya.

Introduction

According to Morris (1999), the differential access to and control over the resources and benefits men and women encounter through developmental programs, educational or otherwise, are inextricably linked to the gendered nature of the organization providing the services. Stated in terms of the concerns of this paper, I appreciate that gender affects the differential access to and control over the resources and benefits men and women will derive from the Module II programs. I will thus critically evaluate key issues of intersection between these programs and gender in order to establish concerns, opportunities, challenges and trends in ensuring that both men and women benefit equally from the programs.

The paper will discuss the Module II programs from the perspectives of: Implications of already existing gendered disparities in higher education; The motivation of the Universities to offer them and; the motivation of mature students to take them; Intersection of Gender and continuing education; Module II programs in the context of the Millennium Development Goals; Educational benefits for women and girls and; Conceptual approaches to mainstreaming gender.

University Education in Africa: An overview

Most of the current African Universities date only from the post independence era, from 1960. Today there are over five hundred Universities and other tertiary institutions all over Africa. Addae-Mensah (2008) contends that for the best part of their existence, many of these universities have operated as institutions training mainly undergraduate students, with post-graduate studies relatively underdeveloped. Before independence, most African countries,' public and civil services were manned by civil servants from the former colonizing countries. The universities that were established in the post-independence era found themselves concentrating mainly on training the requisite manpower urgently required to take over the running of the public services in the immediate post-independence era. These pioneer universities e.g., Fourah Bay College, Fort Hare University, Makerere University, University of Ibadan, University of Nairobi etc. succeeded in ensuring that hardly a decade after independence, virtually the entire public service and even some key specialised industrial and infrastructural setups were totally manned by graduates of these new African universities.

Although African universities have had to withstand great difficulties, they have contributed immensely to the advancement of their respective countries. There is however need for the Universities to think about transforming themselves into credible research institutions capable of standing on their own among reputable world universities. The need for this change has been expressed in various fora in the last decade. Specifically, in February 1999, under the auspices of the Association of African Universities (AAU) a conference of Rectors, Vice Chancellors and Presidents of African Universities (COREVIP) was organised in Arusha Tanzania, with the theme "Revitalising Universities in Africa: Strategies for the 21st Century".

The main objective of the conference was to deliberate on the key challenges facing African universities and appropriate strategies to approach these challenges during the 21st century. It was also meant to facilitate a debate on what Africa needs to inject into its universities in order to accomplish their role as providers of high quality manpower and new knowledge critical for Africa's development in the 21st century. Issues dealt with included:

Quality and academic standards; Funding and related issues; Institutional governance; Human resource; Cooperation in graduate training and research; ICT and globalisation and; Gender issues including access, quality and relevance. It is the last issue that is my primary concern in this paper.

University Education in Kenya

University education in Kenya began in 1963 with just 571 students enrolled in Nairobi University College (Weidman, 1995). Since then, the system has undergone considerable expansion, and as of 2009, there were a total of 7 public universities and 12 newly established university colleges and over 22 private universities with varying levels of accreditation. There is an estimated 122,874 university students in the country of which approximately 80 percent are in public universities (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2009). Kenya also has a number of public middle level colleges. A number of public middle level institutions that offer diplomas in certain fields including engineering, education, and computer science have been recently elevated to university college status and affiliated as constituent colleges of the public universities. In 1994, the government of Kenya decreased the education budget from 37 percent of its total annual recurrent budget to about 30 percent stating that it was not possible to allocate additional funding to higher education (Kiamba, 2004). This shortfall in the public budget for higher education brought about the impetus for institutions to look for alternative income generating sources, in effect, reducing their overdependence on the government budget. To this end, several strategies for revenue diversification were adopted. These included establishment of units for income generation, Institution of overhead charges on externally funded research projects and the introduction of the Module II (parallel track) programs in 1998. It is the latter measure that is of interest to this paper.

Gender and Module II: Problems, Priorities and Risks

Over the last ten years, Kenya has witnessed an unprecedented growth of Module II programs in the public universities. The nascent nature of these programs is borne out by the fact that the earliest started in 1998 and the rest have grown over subsequent years. Different terminologies have been used to describe these programs viz; parallel programs, self sponsored programs, direct entry programs, full fee paying academic programs and Module II programs. Within the context of this paper, I have used the term Module II programs to refer to all the adult/continuing/lifelong, self-sponsored education programs in public universities in Kenya, which are being offered to mature students who meet the cost of their studies as opposed to the direct entry regular students who are on government sponsorship. As expressed by Morris (1999) quoted above, there is need to acknowledge that the differential access to and control over the resources and benefits men and women will accrue from the Module II programs are linked to the gendered nature of the organizations providing them. The argument I am therefore pursuing in this paper is that key issues of intersection between gender and the Module II programs need to be explored in order to establish potentialities, opportunities, challenges and trends that should inform gender parity in the programs. The term Gender parity is used here to refer to an approach that will ensure that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages by the Universities mounting Module II programs. The ultimate goal would be to ensure that men and women benefit equally from the chances of advancement offered by the Module II programs in Kenyan public Universities. The general thrust of this paper is to raise the profile of this issue demonstrating that it should be a key consideration by government and institutions while deriving policy for and mounting programs in Module II Programs.

The need to raise the profile on the issue of gender in Module II programs arises out of the recognition that the discourse surrounding Module II programs raises serious concerns about the Universities' objectives, focus and priorities. The Universities are suspiciously being seen as sidelining important issues of quality and access to cash in on a population with an ever-increasing appetite for continuing education. In an article aptly entitled "Uneasy balance between academic merit and cash" appearing in the Sunday Standard of 14th June 2004, attention is drawn to the fact that Universities are eager to cash in using the Module II programs. In fact, a quotation attributed to the then Nairobi University Vice-Chancellor is telling. Explaining the University's stand he says:

> We have vigorously continued the consolidation and diversification of income generation especially in those areas that are related to our core business and where we have a market comparative advantage. For example, the full fee paying academic Programs, popularly known as Module II, have continued expanding and now account for about 50 per cent of the current population of over 30,000 students, [Emphasis mine] (Sunday Nation 14th June 2004, pg19 Col, 7)

One immediately notices the economic language and tone of this quotation. It reinforces the position of this paper that Module II programs are about income generating as much as or more than they are about meeting emerging learner needs. It portrays Universities as "merchandising" knowledge. As noted earlier, there has been a phenomenal expansion of these programs in Kenyan public universities. This rapid expansion has been engendered by various socio-economic circumstances given impetus by globalization, forcing universities to transform in an effort to diversify their capital base in the face of consistently decreasing capitation from governments. Thus, the discourse and operational environment that informs transformation and hence the diversification into Module II programs seems to revolve around economic and structural adjustment problems.

Yet, the Module II programs are being offered not just in an environment of economic and structural problems, but more importantly within an educational set up that has well documented gender disparities. Statistics on enrollment in Kenyan Universities shows a sustained gender imbalance in favor of males in all Universities (See table 1 below). The danger is that, unless a very deliberate effort is made to foreground this gendered context and mainstream gender at this nascent stage of the programs, gender and all its manifestations will be sidelined and suffocated by the overwhelming issues of economic survival that have given impetus to development of the programs in the first place. The outcome will be that module II programs will perpetuate the gender disparities that currently characterize the educational sector in Kenya, or worse still, create new ones that will diminish or undermine any gains that could have been made towards gender parity in this and other levels of education. Eventually the benefits of Module II programs will not benefit men and women equally. Granted the need to generate extra income, Universities must nonetheless be made to sufficiently address issues of gender among others, to ensure that such issues are not sacrificed at the alter of "diversification and consolidation of income generation." One of the main challenges in this area is to ensure that module II programs do not perpetuate already existing gender disparities in education or inadvertently and inconspicuously create new ones.

The educational challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa are daunting. While the importance of education in enhancing socio-economic and human development is generally agreed upon, (Oxfam, 2002b: 1), prospects of universal primary education are dim (World Bank 2001:1). Kenya has made a significant stride in this area by starting a free primary education policy in January 2003 and free secondary education at the beginning of 2008. However, this is costly in terms of both human and financial resources and it will take sometime for the government to re-focus on other educational sectors. Debate thus needs to be initiated and pursued in other educational sectors like continuing education or otherwise a lot may go wrong before the spotlight is directed there. In this paper, I seek to point out to policy makers in higher education and in government pertinent issues of access and equity by focusing on gender in Module II programs. This is to take caution that these issues do not get submerged and drowned in larger problematics like universal primary education, structural reforms in higher education and survival of universities in the face of advancing globalization. In this regard, World Bank president James Wolfenson provides a significant assessment:

> All agree that the single most important key to development and poverty alleviation is education. This must start with universal primary education to girls and boys equally, as well as an open and competitive system of secondary and tertiary education…*Adult education and lifelong education must be combined with the fundamental recognition that the education of women and girls is central to the process of development* [Emphasis mine](World Bank 2001:iii).

The significance of this paper lies in its effort to foreground the gender angle and caution that educational opportunities offered in Module II programs benefit men and women equally.

Recent Developments and future Prospects

UNESCO (2003) identifies the pertinent issues with regard to recent developments and future prospects of higher education as widening access, improving relevance, diversifying funding, improving quality of research, curbing brain drain and incorporating ICT. These were issues also identified at the 1998 World Conference on Higher Education. Notably, improving access of women to higher education was specifically identified as a key issue in access. Further, continuing and distance education are identified as important modes of widening access to those living in rural areas and women. Oduaran et al (2004) in this regard focuses on learning transformations in university continuing education and the African response and presents a useful historical analysis of the trends of continuing education in Africa.

They note that transformations of continuing education in African universities have been induced by changing political controls, broad policy modifications, economic structural adjustments and teaching-learning methodologies embedded in increasing application of andragogy and ICT. Notably, the authors concede that university continuing education in Africa needs to respond to the problems of widening access in the light of demands for competence and competitiveness in globalizing economies – and therefore, to needs of changing learners and communities in the contemporary times. The question thus arises as to how universities can do this while they are themselves struggling under the weight of structural adjustment and decreasing capitation from the government. How do we ensure that universities are effectively and genuinely responding to changing learner needs and not actually taking advantage of these needs for their own economic survival? An evaluation of the objectives of module II programs is thus called for.

Gendered Context: Difficulties for Module II

At the inception of the Module II programs in the late 1990's, literature abound that suggested that education at all levels was gender biased and that women were underrepresented in absolute numbers and in relation to science oriented courses. Jejeebhoy (1995:4) had observed that:

> Educational status and the disparities in attainments between males and females vary both by region and over time. In most of the developing world, women's educational levels are low and gender disparities are wide.

Although disparities in literacy between males and females had considerably narrowed in sub-Saharan Africa from 1970 to 1990 (Jejeedhoy, 1995: 5), gender imbalances still persisted, a pattern also identified by Kwesiga (2002). A study carried out in the mid-nineties in east, central and southern Africa on literacy rates among both males and females revealed a general trend where the higher one moves in the ladder of education, the lower the level of education for women gets and the higher it gets for men SIDA (1995: 36-37). By the time of the inception of Module II programs, the situation in Kenya was not different from the rest of Africa in general as disparities between males and females characterized enrolments in various education and training courses (Republic of Kenya, 1998: 25). A report on gender analysis in continuing education in Kenya between 1988 and 1993 revealed that there was low enrolment of females compared to males at all levels of education. In line with the regional trends identified above, the number of females enrolled was found to decline progressively up the education ladder (Republic of Kenya, 1993: 22).

An analytical report on gender dimensions on the Kenya 1999 population census shows that 36% of all males and 34% of females aged above five were attending school at the time of the census. The proportions for those who had left school were 47% of all males and 43% of females. Comparison of 1989 and 1999 census figures indicated a drop in the percentage of males attending school by about 4% and that of females by about 1%. At age 10-19 in 1999, higher proportions of males than females attended school and proportions of females attending school was even lower beyond age 25 (Republic of Kenya, 2002a: 48-50). These figures imply that gender imbalance in primary school attendance between 1989 and 1999 was negligible while females get disadvantaged in secondary level and even more in higher education. This is the context in which Module II programs were introduced.

The Kenya economic survey of 2005 indicates a marked rise in enrolment and completion rates in all levels of education between the year 2000 and 2004. Although there seems to be marked improvement, gender imbalances in school enrolment still persisted in secondary and higher levels of education. Student enrolment in Kenyan post secondary technical training institutions between the year 2000 and 2003 was largely dominated by males with females comprising below 50% of the student population (Republic of Kenya, 2005: 45-51). The situation in the Universities has not been any different. Table 1 below shows the enrollment trends in all Kenyan public Universities over a period of 5 years from 2003.

The statistics of Table 1 show marked differences of enrollment of males and females in all public Universities. Total enrolment in the universities grew by 5.4 per cent from 112,229 students in 2006/07 academic year to 118,239 students in 2007/ 08 academic year. Students' enrolment in public universities rose by 6.3 per cent from 91,337 students in 2006/07 academic year to 97,107 students in 2007/08 academic year, with Nairobi University, the oldest and largest, constituting 26.3 per cent. Male student enrolment increased by 7.1 per cent from 56,517 to 60,504 while female enrolment went up by 5.1 per cent from 34,820 to 36,603 during the same period.

The proportion of female students enrolled in the universities was 40.1 per cent of the enrolment in 2007/08 compared to 39.1 per cent in 2006/07 academic year. In all the public universities, males' enrollment surpasses that of females' almost by half.

Institution	**2003**		**2004**		**2005**		**2006**		**2007**	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
NAIROBI	16,992	9,720	21,268	11,706	21,940	11,706	22,513	12,426	23,513	12,826
Full time	9,603	4,406	9,987	5,250	10,800	5,250	10,858	5,536	11,340	5,714
Part Time	7,389	5,314	11,281	6,456	11,140	6,456	11,655	6,890	12,173	7,112
KENYATTA	10,735	5,023	11,252	4,803	10,896	4,803	8,845	7,891	10,172	8,425
Full time	5,221	3,495	4,313	2,887	4,356	2,887	5,066	3,285	5,826	3,507
Part Time	5,532	1,528	6,939	1,916	6,540	1,916	3,779	4,606	4,346	4,918
MOI	5,804	4,634	6,796	5,214	6,831	5,214	8,604	6,059	8,674	6,158
Full time	4,107	3,211	4,304	3,195	4,311	3,195	5,654	3,554	5,700	3,612
Part Time	1,697	1,432	2,492	2,019	2,520	2,019	2,950	2,505	2,974	2,546
EGERTON	6,908	2,444	6,350	2,247	6,262	2,247	8,163	4,006	8,262	4,205
Full time	6,207	2,196	5,540	1,960	5,322	1,960	7,319	3,383	7,408	3,551
Part Time	701	248	810	287	940	287	844	623	5,450	654
JOMO KENYATTA (JKUAT)	3,202	1,455	4,315	1,959	4,207	1,959	4,460	1,845	2,659	2,512
Full time	1,373	624	2,201	999	2,240	999	2,176	524	2,791	713
Part time	1,829	831	2,114	960	1,967		2,284	1,321	3,487	1,799
MASENO	3,428	2,179	3,413	2,168	2,826		2,778	1,937	2,370	2,199
Full time	2,777	1,765		1,690	2,106		1,888	1,277	1,117	1,450
Part time	651	414		478	720		890	660	946	749
Special	-	-		-	775		1,154	656	508	278
MASINDE MULIRO	-	-		-	420		620	422	438	179
Full time	-	-		-	355			234	60,504	99
Part time	-	-		-						
Totals	**47,087**	**25,464**	**53,394**	**28,097**	**53,737**	**27,940**	**56,517**	**34,820**	**60,504**	**36,603**

Table 1: Enrollment in Kenyan Public Universities by Gender between 2003-2007 (Source: Republic of Kenya, (2008) Economic Survey)

The above statistics and discussion buttresses the concerns of this paper. It is obvious that by the time that Module II programs were being introduced, there were identifiable and well documented gender skewed statistics in education access and enrollment at all levels and specifically tertiary level. While Module II programs are an avenue for increased access and participation for women, it would be unfortunate to assume that this will happen automatically. The extent to which Module II programs will provide equal opportunities for men and women and not perpetuate the disparities discussed above will be the result of conscious gender mainstreaming. This paper urges that such planning is currently lacking and that we risk extending the same said gender disparities despite the opportunities for access that Module II programs offer.

The problem of gender imbalance was not just identifiable in overall trends of enrollment and access by the time Module II programs were being introduced. Literature, then as now, showed gender disparities in representation of women in science and technology based courses, (Gurumurthy, 2005). "The issue of women's access to science is part of the wider issue of women's access to education, training and employment, which raises a number of fundamental questions, dilemmas, perspectives and strategies", (Shelley and Whaley, 1994: 136). This matter had been equally highlighted by Kwesiga (2002: 71-73). In a gender analysis of the enrolment rates in arts and science related courses in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa, the study had observed that females prefer the arts over science subjects throughout the region. The study also points to females' relatively poor performance in mathematics and science.

Mboya (1998: 127-128) had equally observed that women had been historically under-represented in sciences in East Africa although there had been a gradual improvement in female enrolment in some institutions of higher learning and technical colleges. The study had noted a general decrease in the proportion of females enrolled in technical and science related fields in the institutions of higher learning. Statistics in the Master Plan on Education and Training in Kenya 1997-2010 indicated that females were adversely under-represented in science, mathematics and technology based courses both at the university and other tertiary institutions. In 1995, for instance, only 23.7% of the enrolment in national polytechnics was female, not to mention that a small proportion of the female students were enrolled in science and technical based courses, (Republic of Kenya, 1998: 26-27).

A research project concerned with women and men in Kenya had further pointed to the existing gender disparities in favor of male students in enrolments into science and technical oriented courses in universities and tertiary institutions (Republic of Kenya, 2000: 14-24). In Kenya Polytechnic and Mombasa Polytechnic, distribution of students enrolled by course and sex revealed serious gender gaps in favor of male students in engineering oriented courses. Females constituted about 20% of the students enrolled in science, medicine and agriculture related courses in public universities. The situation was even worse in engineering courses with the percentage of females dropping to 10. Female students were predominantly enrolled in arts and education courses registering 30% and 40% of the student population respectively (Republic of Kenya, August 2000: 23-25). Shelley and Whaley (1994:136) have argued that:

> a complex web of decisions, assumptions and beliefs that define girl's and women's roles in society underpins the provision of opportunities in education and training and the way that women are able, and *feel* able, to take advantage of these opportunities.

In their discussion of the constraints specific to science, they state that the major problem is not one of attracting women to science subjects but:

> …the existence of the general barriers to access for women, compounded by the additional ones specific to access in science, presents a huge challenge to the access and in retaining them through such courses, (Shelley and Whaley, 1994: 40).

Shelley and Whaley give the following factors as the reasons for low numbers of women in science.

- The absence of or low numbers in female teachers in science tends to reinforce sex stereotyping in curriculum choice.
- Although there is little difference in the background knowledge the girls and boys bring to secondary school science, the differences in their attitudes and interests result to the tendency for girls' preference for biological as opposed to physical sciences.
- Female teacher's negative attitudes to science or labeling of science as men's subjects are transmitted to their students in day- to- day classroom interaction (Shelley and Whaley 1994:140).

Bendera (1998), Kwesiga (2002), and Williams (1993) have pointed to the role of sex stereotyping in responsibilities and careers reflecting the females as poor performers in school and only fit for the art subjects and the males as better performers especially in science subjects as a factor that accounts for low levels of enrollment of women in science oriented disciplines. Negative self esteem on the part of females is another factor that they have associated with gender imbalance in enrolment into science subjects. This results from the general belief that girls are poor in mathematics and science, and generally clumsy with mechanical tools. The negative self esteem among females is made worse by parental attitudes. Girls face discrimination and lack of acceptance by their male counterparts in science related courses and some male teachers also believe that science is a male domain (see Bendera 1998: 102; Mboya 1998: 129; Williams 1993: 137-138; Kwesiga 2002: 52-61). Bendera (1998: 58) cites discriminatory practices in streaming at secondary school level in Tanzania. This points to the situation in African countries where students are placed in either science or arts streams in secondary schools. Discrimination against females in this exercise affects their future careers and selection of courses in institutions of higher learning. These factors are seen as contributing to gender imbalance in education and in science related courses in particular. Given that such attitudes are carry-overs from earlier educational levels, there is urgent need for us to re-examine Module II programs in relation to the actual access they afford women to pursue studies in science and technology oriented courses.

Gender in Mapping Continuing Education

Module II programs in Kenya are being offered within the purview of continuing education and it is important to discuss the nature of continuing education and its ramifications on gender. Becher (1989) and Tight (1999) contend that continuing education is poorly mapped out as a field of study compared to other disciplines. Tight (1999) notes that due to this poor mapping, continuing education carries with it certain "myths" in form of assumptions, practices and beliefs that need to be deconstructed by paying attention to their narrative and character. These myths are relevant to this paper since in the all too poorly mapped out Module II programs, they are evident and would affect the delivery of these programs especially when we take into account gender.

The first myth is that adults are "volunteer" learners and those seeking continuing education programs are portrayed as making a *conscious* and *free* choice to engage in learning. The model learner is one with a fairly stable work and family life, who, viewing a realm of possibilities for expending their time and money, see the innate value and pleasure of learning. Reality is, however, quite different. Tight quotes Lankshear et al (1997) to argue that because of the changing economic forces, individuals are compelled to seek multiple or "portfolio" working careers and to undergo regular updating and re-training through continuing professional development. Those who do not engage in continuing education risk exclusion from mainstream economy and society. In reference to Module II programs, we need to establish to what extent male and female learners feel compelled to participate in these programs and what perceived disadvantages accrue from being unable to participate and how they would affect men and women.

The other myths in continuing education are that it is 'good' for the learner, all participation is of value and its aim is to produce self-directed learners. Tight discuses the counter myth showing that continuing education has unsettling or deleterious effects on those participating in it. This is of course a direct effect of the growing socio-economic compulsion to participate in it. Research has shown that those returning to participate in continuing education particularly women, (Pascall and Cox 1993), risk a break-up of their marriage and family, face considerable personal stress since many learners are not prepared for the challenging and unsettling requirement to reconsider and adapt their existing beliefs to encompass new understandings. In this regard, it is important to explore the deleterious effects of Module II programs on men and women participating in them.

Some types of education and training are valued much more than others, exploding the myth that all participation in continuing education is beneficial. I have insisted that for Module II programs to be valuable to women, they must provide them with access to disciplines where they are currently underrepresented. Further, educators are in the business of addicting learners to their wares again exploding the myth that those seeking continuing education programs are self directed. Tight here echoes a concern that is important to this paper - that continuing education is a business and that institutions offering the programs are in a 'competitive marketplace' in which their survival depends upon their attracting sufficient customers. We are, therefore, justified to ask to what extent Module II programs seek to meet genuine needs of learners and make them independent and self-directed as opposed to addicting them to their 'wares' for their own benefit.

Why Module II must deliver on Gender: A global Perspective

The MDGs Perspective: Taking Action

As stated above, the present paper is situated along present national and international efforts to address gender inequalities in general and in higher education in particular. The Gender Equality and Education Task Force of the United Nations Millennium Project[1], working on the project's gender equality goal, envisioned elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education preferably by 2015 (UNDP 2003, Gender Equity Report).[2] These goals had previously been emphasized in the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000.

[1] The Millennium Project was established by the United Nations to identify the best strategies for meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to help countries achieve the goals agreed upon by 189 governments at the Millennium Summit held in 2000. The MDGs aim at reducing poverty and its correlates by 2015.

[2] This is a preliminary output report of the Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality. The task revisited the contents of this document in their report entitled: Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women. The report is discussed at length in the literature review.

This focus on gender equality in education is informed by the fact that gender disparities that disadvantage women are present at all levels of education and are much more worse in third world countries. With special reference to tertiary education, UNESCO (2003) identified gender inequality as one of the challenges besetting higher education in sub-Saharan Africa. Kwesiga (2002) focuses on international efforts by way of Conferences and declarations aimed at increasing girls' access to education. The *Global Platform for Action (*Beijing, 1995), the *Ougadougou Declaration and Framework for Action* in 1993, the *5th Dakar Conference on Women* in 1994, and the 1993 *Pan African Conference on the Education of Girls* among others have advocated for women's right to equal educational opportunity. These conferences have caused African states and regional organizations to recognize the need to tackle the issues of gender disparities in education.

The strategies adopted by the Millennium project are described in the UN Millennium Project's report *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals,* which was coauthored by the coordinators of the UN Millennium Project task forces. In a report titled, *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women*, (Hereafter referred to as *Taking Action*) the task force on Education and Gender Equality has identified the interventions and policy measures needed to achieve each of the Goals. *Taking Action* is reviewed here at length because it best expresses the international approach to education and gender in developing countries, and proposes short and long term goals and objectives that should benchmark progress in the area of education and gender well into the next two decades.

The task force underscores the need to place women's empowerment at the center of development plans—an emphasis that is shared by *Investing in Development*. The task force underscores that there can be no development, and no lasting peace on the planet, if women continue to be relegated to subservient and often dangerous and back-breaking roles in society. The report explains why gender equality is vital for achieving all of the Millennium Development Goals. The task force notes that women carry the brunt of poverty, support and care for their families and sustain life by collecting food, fuel, and water. It is time for development practice not only to honor those life-sustaining roles, but to promote women's rights, empowerment, and leadership actively at the center of economic development. The report shows how to do this in practical terms. It argues persuasively for policies and actions to guarantee universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, invest in infrastructure to reduce women's time and work burdens, guarantee women's' and girls' property and inheritance rights and reduce gender gaps in employment and wages.

Taking Action emphasizes that gender inequality is a problem that has a solution. Two decades of innovation, experience, and activism have shown that achieving the goal of greater gender equality and women's empowerment is possible. There are many practical steps that can reduce inequalities based on gender—inequalities that restrict the potential to reduce poverty and achieve high levels of well-being in societies around the world. There are also many positive actions that can empower women. Without leadership and political will, however, the world will fall short of taking these practical steps—and meeting the Goal. Because gender inequality is deeply rooted in entrenched attitudes, societal institutions, and market forces, political commitment at the highest international and national levels is essential to institute the policies that can trigger social change and to allocate the resources necessary for gender equality and women's empowerment. The same argument can be made for Module II programs. There is need to allocate resources and institute policies that will ensure that women are not short changed and are able to benefit equally from the pursuit of these programs.

Before the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, nearly every country had made a commitment to equal rights for women and girls by ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Signatories are legally obligated to meet the commitments they specify. Often described as the international bill of rights for women, CEDAW provides for women and men's equal enjoyment of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights. It is unique in establishing legal obligations for state parties to ensure that discrimination against women does not occur in the public sphere or the private sphere. There is need then to ensure that the opportunities that have been made available through Module II programs benefit both men and women equally and better still address the already existing gender disparities in education.

UN member states also made important commitments to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

According to *Taking Action*, the inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment as Millennium Development Goal 3 is an ardent reminder that many of those commitments have yet to be kept. It also offers a critical opportunity to implement those promises. National and international women's movements have worked to hold governments accountable for the legal and political commitments they have made through CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and other international agreements. It is women's activism and social mobilization, combined with innovative responses from some governments and civil society organizations, that have led to significant improvements in women's and girls' status since the first UN Conference on Women in 1975 in Mexico City. Investing in women's advocacy organizations is key to holding the international community and national governments accountable for achieving Millennium Development Goal 3. This point is relevant to the argument I am making here because it brings in the issue of accountability and agency. Universities as government institutions should be held accountable in ensuring that they do not institute programs that perpetuate existing gender disparities or those that do not offer equal opportunities across gender to alleviate these disparities.

In the past three decades women have made gains, particularly in health and education, as evidenced in lower mortality rates, higher life expectancy, and reduced gender gaps in primary school education. Despite these gains, it is clear according to *Taking Action* that many countries will miss the first deadline for the Goal 3 target: eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005**.**This, the task force recognizes would be the first visible Millennium Development Goal failure. That failure they contend should spur the global community to re-energize and take action so that the target deadline of eliminating gender disparities in all levels of education by 2015 is met. In doing so, countries should strive to achieve more than numerical parity. The spirit of the Goal—gender equality and the empowerment of women—requires fundamental transformation in the distribution of power, opportunities, and outcomes for both men and women. Significantly, *Taking Action* argues that genuine equality means more than parity in numbers, which can sometimes be achieved by lowering the bar for all—men and women. It means justice, greater opportunity, and better quality of life so that equality is achieved at high levels of well-being. This insistence is quite relevant to Module II programs. The expanded access to University education through Module II programs is thus a key opportunity in realizing the goal of elimination of gender disparities in higher education by 2015. The opportunity must however be planned for and its potential to do so maximized.

To ensure that Millennium Development Goal 3 is met by 2015, the task force has identified seven strategic priorities. These interdependent priorities are the minimum necessary to empower women and alter the historical legacy of female disadvantage that remains in most societies of the world. These seven priorities are much broader than the Goal 3 target. That target is restricted to education, a focus justified by the strong evidence that investing in girls' education yields high returns for girls themselves and high returns for development (Schultz 2001). By setting an ambitious target for eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education—in less than a decade—Goal 3 sends a clear message that gender inequality in education in the twenty-first century is unconscionable and must be rectified. Education may be an important precondition to women's empowerment, but it does not guarantee that empowerment. For this to occur, women must also enjoy equal rights with men, equal economic opportunities, use of productive assets, freedom from drudgery, equal representation in decision making bodies, and freedom from the threat of violence and coercion. When we look at Module II programs as an avenue for self advancement, we need to think of how women can benefit equally with men in this opportunity. This is given further impetus by the task force's believe that, achieving true gender equality and women's empowerment requires a different vision for the world, not just piecemeal rectification of different aspects of inequality. The task force's vision is of a world in which men and women work together as equal partners to secure better lives for themselves and their families. In this world, women and men share equally in the enjoyment of basic capabilities, economic assets, voice, and freedom from fear and violence. They share the care of children, the elderly, and the sick; the responsibility for paid employment; and the joys of leisure.

Of the seven priority areas given by the task force, two are particularly relevant to my concerns in this paper. These are; to strengthen opportunities for post-primary education for girls while meeting commitments to universal primary education and eliminate gender inequality in employment by decreasing women's reliance on informal employment, closing gender gaps in earnings, and reducing occupational segregation. Module II programs should be seen as a way of strengthening educational opportunities for women.

But most importantly, it should be seen as a way of advancing career development for women, closing gender gaps in earnings and reducing occupational segregation.

Male Partnership and Operational Framework

Like race and ethnicity, gender is a social construct. It defines and differentiates the roles, rights, responsibilities, and obligations of women and men. The innate biological differences between females and males form the basis of social norms that define appropriate behaviors for women and men and determine the differential social, economic, and political power between the sexes. Although the specific nature and degree of these differing norms vary across societies and across time, at the beginning of the twenty-first century they still typically favor men and boys, giving them more access than women and girls to the capabilities, resources, and opportunities that are important for the enjoyment of social, economic, and political power and well-being. In addressing Goal 3, the task force has focused on the historical disadvantage experienced by women and on how gender norms and the policies based on those norms have perpetuated that disadvantage. The report notes the ways in which gender norms and policies also negatively affect boys and men, but the primary focus is to rectify the most common gender-based disadvantages—those faced by women and girls. The report recognizes, however, that men's engagement in meeting Goal 3 is vital. They can work as partners with women to bring about changes in gender roles and norms that can benefit both women and men. The report, therefore, suggests ways in which policies and interventions can engage men as equal partners in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Based on past analyses of gender in society, the task force has adopted an operational framework for understanding gender equality that has three main dimensions. The first is the *capabilities domain*, which refers to basic human abilities as measured by education, health, and nutrition. These capabilities are fundamental to individual well-being and are the means through which individuals access other forms of well-being. Second is the *access to resources and opportunities domain*, which refers primarily to equality in the opportunity to use or apply basic capabilities through access to economic assets (such as land or housing) and resources (such as income and employment), as well as political opportunity (such as representation in parliaments and other political bodies). Without access to resources and opportunities, both political and economic, women will be unable to employ their capabilities for their well-being and that of their families, communities, and societies. Finally there is the *security domain*, which is defined to mean reduced vulnerability to violence and conflict. Violence and conflict result in physical and psychological harm and lessen the ability of individuals, households, and communities to fulfill their potential. Violence directed specifically at women and girls often aims at keeping them in "their place" through fear.

It is evident that at least the first two domains have important implications in relation to Module II programs. Under the capabilities domain, the task force explicitly identifies education as an important factor in advancement of gender equality. Access to resources and opportunities domain has implications on the ability of women to participate in education, and in our case Module II programs, and affects the potential for the advancement of women.

Focus and Strategies for Achieving Gender Parity

One of the main strategies towards gender equality in *Taking Action* is to strengthen opportunities for post-primary education for girls. Global commitments to girls' education have focused in the main on primary education. As a result, over the past decades, girls' primary school enrollment rates have increased in most regions. While this focus must continue, and international commitments to universal primary education must be met, the task force notes achieving Goal 3 requires strengthening post-primary education opportunities for girls. The evidence suggests that among all levels of education, secondary and higher levels of education have the greatest payoff for women's empowerment. This gives us a justification for seeking to foreground Module II programs as a viable avenue to have women access education at higher levels and thus reap the greatest payoff.

According to the task force, a number of interventions that have proven their effectiveness for increasing girls' participation in primary school may also apply to post-primary education. These include making schooling more affordable by reducing costs and offering targeted scholarships, building secondary schools close to girls' homes, and making schools safe and girl-friendly. Additionally, the content, quality, and relevance of education must be improved through curriculum reform, teacher training, and other actions (DeJaeghere, 2004).

Most important, education must serve as the vehicle for transforming attitudes, beliefs, and entrenched social norms that perpetuate discrimination and inequality. All interventions taken to promote gender equality in education must, therefore, be transformational in nature. Universities mounting Module II programs need to be sensitive and receptive to lessons learnt in these interventions.

Educational Benefits for Women and Girls

Increased access to educational opportunities indicates that the benefits of access to Module II programs for women may have a host of many more advantages than is presently appreciated. Data from around the world show that increased education is associated with the empowerment of women (Malhotra, Pande, and Grown 2003). Studies in Latin America, Asia, and Africa show that higher levels of education increase the probability that women will engage in formal paid employment (Birdsall and Behrman 1991; Cameron, Dowling, and Worsick 2001). Higher levels of education increase the gains from formal labor force participation more for women than for men (Deolalikar 1994; Aromolaran 2002; Birdsall and Fox 1985). Female secondary education is a critical influence on fertility and mortality, Subbarao and Rainey (1995). Higher levels of education play an important role in promoting health. Studies have found that only at secondary or higher levels of schooling does education have a significant beneficial effect on women's own health outcomes, for risks of disease, and their attitudes toward female genital cutting (Malhotra, Pande, and Grown 2003). Higher levels of education—six years or more—always have a positive effect on a woman's use of prenatal and delivery services and postnatal care, and the effect is always much larger than the effect of lower levels of schooling (Elo 1992; Bhatia and Cleland 1995; Govindasamy 2000).

Education of girls and mothers leads to sustained increase in educational attainment from one generation to the next. Multiple studies find that a mother's level of education has a strong positive effect on her daughters' enrollment —more than on sons and significantly more than the effect of fathers' education on daughters (Lavy 1996; Ridker 1997; King and Bellew 1991; Lillard and Willis 1994; Alderman and King 1998; Kambhapati and Pal 2001; Parker and Pederzini 2000; Bhalla, Saigal, and Basu 2003). Further, the more educated a mother is, the stronger the effects. *Taking Action* recommends strengthening opportunities for post-primary education for girls and from secondary to postsecondary education. A gender sensitive approach in Module II programs will significantly increase these benefits that society accrues from women attaining higher education.

Solution Models: Gender for Module II

In mainstreaming gender in Module II programs, universities need to be guided by theoretical and empirical assumptions from both gender approaches and adult/continuing/lifelong education approaches. Such a conceptual framework would help to situate the task of mainstreaming gender in the intersection of the two general issues of gender and continuing education in order to guide policies and practice.

To this end, the Women in Development (WID) and Gender in Development (GAD) models would be significant. According to Commonwealth Secretariat (1999), WID is based on the rationale that women constituted a large untapped resource, which should be recognized as being potentially valuable in economic development. This thinking was strongly affected by the "trickle down" and "human capital" theories of the 1960s and 1970s. The inadequacies of the approach began to come to the fore in the late 1970s when it became apparent that the relative position of women over the two decades of modernization had not only shown very little improvement, but had actually declined in some sectors like education. The WID approach did little to determine why women had not benefited as much as men in the development process. Thus Gender and Development (GAD), was offered in the 1980s as an alternative.

The approach focused on the social relationship between men and women in which women have been subordinated and oppressed. The GAD approach supports the WID view that women should be given an opportunity to participate on equal terms in all aspects of life but its primary focus is to examine the gender relations of power at all levels in society so that intervention can bring about equality and equity between women and men in all spheres of life. In the GAD approach, women are viewed as agents of change rather than passive recipients of development assistance. Key issues involved in engendering the education sector incorporate both WID and GAD models. It's my contention in this paper that Module II programs should adopt ideas from these models in order that they adequately deal with gender issues.

Important strategies in this regard include:

- Obtaining a clear quantitative picture of gender roles and ratios in various levels and areas of the education system
- Identifying possible factors related to any gender gaps and inequalities identified and planning for the elimination of these factors
- Assessing the educational needs, immediate and practical as well as long term and strategic, of women and men in a given and planning to meet those needs and
- Ensuring that women and men share equitably in the designing, planning, decision-making, management, administration and delivery of Module II programs and also benefit equitably in terms of access, participation and the allocation of resources.

It is important in planning policies for addressing gender issues in the Module II programs that universities consider the theoretical bases from which development approaches for women originate i.e. the shift in emphasis from women in development to gender in development and its potential for the efficient use of educational development resources, since a major objective of the GAD approach is ensuring that women are empowered to affect development planning and implementation. This focus would enable Universities to foreground the need to mainstream gender in Module II programs and address these gendered targets including:

- Making explicit the importance of gender along with other demographic factors for consideration in the delivery of Module II programs.
- Ensuring gender equity in the access to Module II programs both generally and in relation to disciplines and courses that would guarantee women entry into traditionally male dominated careers.
- Overcoming structural barriers which may influence access and/or participation of men and women in Module II programs and,
- Increasing the participation of women in the planning, implementation and management of Module II programs.

The conceptual framework must incorporate an approach that deals with the learning process in adult/continuing/lifelong education. The Module II programs are being mounted in the era of globalization, characterized by dramatic social-economic changes that affect individuals and organizations alike:

> There is no longer any certainty about anyone's job, chosen career, place of work, abode, relationships and economic circumstances. Turbulence and rapid change characterizes an environment that is dominated by economic forces beyond any individuals and most organizations [Universities] control, (Hase and Kenyon 2000).

The Universities are forced to mount Module II two programs by the same social economic forces that compel individuals to seek them. There is therefore a need to incorporate a theory of learning that deals with the motivations for adult learners that will be linked to the above gender models. Institutions can be guided by the andragogical model postulated by Malcolm Knowles (1968, 1975, 1980, 1984, and 1986). The model is predicated on four basic assumptions about learners all of which have a relationship to the notions about the learners' ability, need and desire to take responsibility for learning. These are:

- Their self-concept moves from dependency to independency or self-directedness.
- They accumulate a reservoir of experiences that can be used as a basis on which to build learning.
- Their readiness to learn becomes increasingly associated with the developmental tasks and role.
- Their time and curricular perspectives change from postponed to immediacy of application and from subject centeredness to performance centeredness.

Combining these conceptual and theoretical insights will help institutions re-evaluate their approach to offering Module II programs and to further institutionalize considerations in the programs.

Conclusion

Various issues are evident from discussions of this paper. First, challenges to education in general demand a focus on issues of access, relevance and quality as they affect women. Secondly, the extent to which Module II programs are or are not meeting the strategic gender needs of participants need to be addressed and linked to the known benefits of higher education for women.

Thirdly, a re-examination of motivations of Universities to provide Module II programs and the need to keep a gender sensitive approach is needed. Fourth, Module II programs need to be linked with realities of gender empowerment as espoused in the Millennium Development Goals and lastly, a keen re-evaluation of the assumptions and beliefs associated to perceived benefits of continuing education is needed in order to understand how the counter myths affect men and women in the Module II programs.

Gender balance in education is not only a matter of social justice but also of good economics. Gender disparity in education lowers the potential well being of the society given that education has direct effects on human development. To be sure the Government of Kenya in the 2005 economic survey records various practices regarding the efforts it has put in place to achieve gender balance in education. One of these strategies is the introduction of Module II programs, meant to be flexible learning programs at various public universities, targeting school leavers and both public and private sector employees who could not be absorbed through Joint Admissions Board (Republic Of Kenya, 2005: 50). This practice gives willing males and females a second chance to pursue university education. However, it is the assumption that "willingness" and "ability to pay" are the overriding factors that determine participation in these programs, that needs to be revisited. If we are going to use these programs to remedy the existing gender disparities in education or at least not replicate them, we need a more focused and conscientious approach as opposed to the present willing buyer willing seller attitude. To use a cliché, "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it". The contention of the present paper is that, the question of whether men and women benefit equally from perceived increased access through Module II programs in Kenyan public Universities cannot be left to chance.

This paper is a preliminary effort to raise the profile of gender in Module II programs in the Kenyan Public Universities. There is need for further research to be conducted in this area. Wainaina (2009) presents a comprehensive effort to do this but more research is still called for. This is because research in gender studies is one of the most important prerequisites for ensuring gender parity, since it is the main tool to detect current issues and problems in a given policy field (GREG 1998). In addition, fundamental research in gender studies, will lead to identification of new fields for public universities and help develop more profound knowledge on the mechanisms which (re)produce gender relations with particular regard to Module II programs. The rationale for this is that gender equality must be constantly fought for, protected and promoted – like human rights, which it is an integral part. Achieving gender equality in all sectors of society is a continuous process that has to be constantly put into question, thought about and redefined. This paper has sought to do this in relation to Module II programs. It is crucial that education systems, and in the case of this paper Module II programs, empower both men and women and take caution in counterbalancing the existing gender disparities in enrolment and eventually eliminating them.

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