



The Growth of Private Universities in Kenya: Implications for Gender Equity in Higher Education.

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Abstract

The establishment of private universities in Kenya and Africa is relatively new. At independence (1960s) there were about seven universities on the continent. However, by 2005 there were 85 private and 316 public universities in Africa (Kihara 2005). Kenya is leading in this expansion of private higher education in East Africa with 16 in 2006 compared to three in 1980. This article examines the implications of the growth of private universities on gender equity in higher education in Kenya. The article is based on two studies conducted in Kenya in 2002 and 2004 on the participation of women in university management. These two studies and a survey of literature on student enrolment in private and public universities reveal that private universities are providing increased opportunities for women to access higher education both as students and staff. Increased opportunities are provided through flexible admission and recruitment criteria, a conducive working environment and the appointment of more women into senior management positions.

Résumé

La création d'universités privées au Kenya et en Afrique est relativement quelque chose de nouveau. Au moment de l'indépendance (1960), il y'avait environ sept universités sur le continent. Cependant, en 2005 il y'avait 85 universités privées et 316 universités publiques en Afrique (Kihara 2005). Le Kenya est à la tête de cette expansion de l'enseignement supérieur privé en Afrique de l'Est avec 16 universités privées en 2006 contre trois en 1980. Cet article examine les implica-

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tions de la croissance des universités privées sur l'équité des genres dans l'enseignement supérieur au Kenya. L'article est fondé sur deux études menées au Kenya en 2002 et 2004 sur la participation des femmes dans la gestion des universités. Ces deux études ainsi qu'une enquête littéraire sur le nombre d'étudiants inscrits dans les universités privées et publiques montrent que les universités privées offrent aux femmes de plus en plus de possibilités d'accès à l'enseignement supérieur, en tant qu'étudiantes et membres du personnel. Ces possibilités sont offertes à travers des critères flexibles d'admission et de recrutement, un environnement de travail propice et la nomination de plus de femmes à des postes de direction.

Introduction

Kenya has experienced a rapid expansion in private university education in the last two decades. This article examines the implications of the growth of private university education in Kenya on gender equity in this sector. The history of university education in Kenya shows its demand has been growing over the years. The implications of private higher education on gender equity are discussed in relation to admission and recruitment policies, the university work environment and the appointment of women into management positions. Although the focus of the article is on the growth of private universities, a comparison is made with public universities where necessary in order to analyse the implications of the growth of private universities on gender equity in higher education.

Background and Context

University education in Kenya can be traced to 1951 when the Royal Technical College of East Africa was established in Nairobi. The college opened its doors to the first students in April 1956. In 1961, the Royal Technical College was transformed into a university under the name University College of Nairobi giving University of London degrees. In 1970, the University of Nairobi was established through an Act of Parliament (University of Nairobi Act 1970). The high demand for university education in the 1980s and 1990s led to the increase in the number of universities from one public university college in 1970 to seven public universities in 2007.

Private higher education in Kenya can be traced to the colonial period when missionaries established schools and colleges for their converts. The first private institutions of higher learning were the St Paul's United Theological college (1955) and Scott Theological College (1962). In 1970 the United States International University (USIU) established a campus in Nairobi. These early universities offered degrees in the name of parent universities abroad. For a long time the government did not give accreditation to these private colleges or uni-

versities. However, the increased demand for university education led the government to encourage the establishment and accreditation of private universities in the 1990s.

Private universities in Kenya fall into three categories; chartered (University of Eastern Africa-Baraton [UEAB], Catholic University of Eastern Africa [CUEA], Daystar University, Scott Theological College, United States International University [USIU], and African Nazarene University [ANU], Kenya Methodist University [KEMU], St Paul's University - Limuru); registered (East African School of Theology, Kenya Highlands Bible College, Nairobi International School of Theology, Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, and Pan-African Christian College) and those operating on letters of interim authority (Aga Khan University, Strathmore University, Kabarak University and Kiriri Women's University of Science and Technology) (Commission for Higher Education 2007).

Most private universities (12) are located in Nairobi (the capital city) and its peri-urban zones. The location of these universities tends to follow the pattern of Christian missionaries in establishing education institutions in Kenya during the colonial period (Wesonga et al. 2003). Their location implies that women and men who live far from Nairobi are not able to access the part-time (evening and weekend) programmes offered.

The growth of private universities in Kenya can be attributed to a number of factors. First, the increase in the number of qualified secondary school leavers seeking higher education. This increase in the number of qualified secondary school graduates has been triggered in part by the massive expansion of primary education. Despite the high demand for university education in Kenya, public universities admit about 10,000 students annually out of over 50,000 qualifying secondary school graduates (Joint Admissions Board 2003). The private universities have arisen due to the inability of the public universities to absorb all university-qualifying students.

Second, most of the private universities in Kenya are established and run by religious organisations. In Kenya 7 out of the 8 private chartered universities are sponsored and managed by Christian organisations. All the five registered universities are sponsored and managed by Christian organisations. Most of the Christian-sponsored private universities started by offering courses mainly geared towards training church ministers. Nguru (1990) observes that the major aim of these church-affiliated private universities is the same as it was with the earlier missionary schools, namely, to promote the spread of the Christian gospel. However, these religious sponsored universities have expanded their programmes to include secular courses in the social and natural sciences.

Gender Equity in Higher Education

Gender equity means giving men and women, girls and boys, the same opportunities to participate fully in the development of their societies and to achieve self-fulfilment. In this article the term gender equity is used to imply social justice and fairness in the distribution of resources and opportunities among men and women (staff and students) in universities in Kenya.

Global gender equity campaigns have been an important vehicle for encouraging the increased recruitment of women as students and staff into higher education. The issue of women's access to higher education came on the global political agenda in 1998 when UNESCO convened a World Conference on Higher Education at which a panel of experts reviewed the progress made in gender equality in higher education since the Beijing Conference (1995). The document *Higher Education and Women: Issues and Perspectives* prepared for the UNESCO conference identified two central areas related to women in higher education which needed the attention of researchers and policy makers. These are: fewer enrolments by women in higher education and the absence of a gender dimension in the higher education curriculum (UNESCO 1998a). The participants at the World Conference on Higher Education (1998) underscored the role of higher education in the enhancement of women's participation in the sector. Article 4 of the World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century (1998a) called for the elimination of all gender stereotyping in higher education at all levels and in all disciplines in which women are under-represented. Women's active involvement in decision-making in higher education was emphasised. The participants at the UNESCO conference recommended that by 2010 university chairs, professors, and heads of department posts should be filled by men and women on an equal basis (UNESCO 1998a).

A review of literature and research on Kenyan universities reveals that there are no policies or mechanisms in Kenyan universities (public and private) related to the implementation of the proposals made at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (Wesonga et al. 2003; Nyamu 2004; Onsongo 2002, 2005, Kimani 2005). However, there have been attempts by individual universities to incorporate women's issues in their programmes. Most of these attempts have been financed by donor funding or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the African Forum for Women Educationists (FAWE) and the Association of African Universities (AAU). The Association of African Universities, for example, launched a gender equity programme in 2001, which called for the establishment of gender units in member universities. By 2003 four public universities had established gender centres (Egerton University – 1992; Moi University – 2003; Kenyatta University – 2002, Maseno University – 2001). The

privately owned chartered universities had not established gender centres at the time when the two studies reported here were conducted.

The gender centres have been found to be ineffective in enhancing gender equity in the universities in which they have been established. This is because the centres operate in isolation from other departments and the mainstream activities of the universities. They lack adequate staff and resources to run gender sensitisation programmes on campus and the staff employed (directors) are women who sometimes lack knowledge and interest in gender issues (Keino 2002). It might be difficult for these centres to enhance gender equity if they are not incorporated in the mainstream activities of the universities. Molestone (2004) warns that so long as approaches to gender issues remain the domain of individual academics, departments, and optional courses in educational institutions, very little is going to be achieved in terms of gender equity.

Although there is no national legislation requiring universities to implement affirmative action to enhance women's access to university education, there have been temporary measures used by the Kenyan public universities to increase the access of women to university education. The Joint Admissions Board (JAB), the body that oversees all students' admissions to public universities, has been lowering the cut-off points for university entry for girls by one point. The board has used its own discretion depending on the overall performance in the national university entrance examinations. This action has sometimes increased the number of women being admitted to university. Affirmative action has been limited to student admission to undergraduate programmes in public universities. Nothing is being done with regard to, for example, the appointment of women into academic and administrative positions.

It is against this background that this article examines the implications of the growth of private universities in Kenya on gender equity. The article focuses on the areas of access, university environment (climate) and the appointment and promotion of women into management positions. In the next section a brief description of the methods used to collect data for the two studies on which this article is based is given.

Methods

The research findings upon which this article is based are part of two larger studies conducted in Kenyan universities on the participation of women in university management and a review of literature on the enrolment of male and female students in the universities. The first study was sponsored by the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA). The study was carried out between January and June 2002 to survey views and perceptions of university managers (men and women) and senior academic staff

on the factors affecting women's participation in university management in Kenya (Onsongo 2002). The sample was drawn from three public and three private chartered universities in Kenya. At the time of the study (2002) there were six public and five private chartered universities in Kenya. The universities were selected using stratified random sampling procedures. They were stratified into public and private, old and new. From each stratum three universities were selected purposively. Two of the universities from each stratum were from Nairobi (the capital city) because this is where most universities (public and private) are situated and one each from the countryside.

The respondents in the study were both men and women occupying management positions as well as senior academic posts in the selected universities. They included deputy vice-chancellors, deans of faculties, registrars, deans of students, directors of institutes, heads of academic departments and senior academic staff. The university managers were selected purposely whereas the senior academic staff were selected by stratified random sampling using academic ranks. Only senior academic staff at the rank of senior lecturer and above and who had worked at the university for a period of more than five years were included in the sample.

Data were gathered through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Questionnaires were used to solicit information from the senior academics staff on the factors they thought affected the participation of women in university management. Semi-structured interview guides were used to interview university managers (men and women) regarding the policies that govern recruitment, appointment and promotion of staff to senior management positions and the possible reasons for the absence of women from these positions. Document analysis guides were used to analyse such documents as recruitment, appointment and promotion criteria, job advertisements, job application forms and interview guides, as well as staff development policies. The lists of academic and administrative staff were used for gathering information about existing positions occupied by women in the university management.

The second study was a doctoral research carried out between January and July 2004 to explore the experiences of female managers in Kenyan universities (Onsongo 2005). In order to investigate these women's experiences, their career history in university teaching, how they got into management, the challenges they have faced and their coping strategies were examined. Their perceptions on gender roles and the impact of these perceptions on their performance as managers were also explored. The data were obtained through unstructured multiple interviews, marginal participant observation and document analysis from eight women and eight men occupying management positions at the level of academic

heads of department and above in one public and one private university in Kenya. Male managers were interviewed so as to shed more light on the influence of gender on the women managers' experiences. The data were analysed using qualitative techniques.

The theoretical framework used in the analysis of the data obtained is a feminist perspective. A feminist perspective posits that women and men have equal potential to develop themselves in all spheres of life but the realisation of women's potential is hampered by externally imposed constraints and influence of social institutions and values (Nzomo 1995). A feminist perspective was considered suitable for this analysis because it problematises the gendered relations in universities in order to interrogate the taken for granted relations between men and women which have led to inequities in the distribution of resources and opportunities among them (Flax 1997). Feminist studies conducted in universities, especially in the west and also in Africa, have shown that there is a male numerical and cultural dominance in universities that results in the universities and academic life being 'highly gendered organisationally, structurally and practically' (Hearn 2001:7). Hearn (ibid) identifies three features that characterise the gendered structure of universities as the exclusion of women from university education for a long time; men continuing to dominate the top positions in most disciplines and management positions and the high status universities being more male-dominated.

A feminist perspective is used in this analysis to interrogate the implications that the growth of private universities has on gender equity in higher education in Kenya. For example, where the analysis of the growth of private universities in Kenya shows that more women are gaining access to these institutions, a feminist perspective takes the analysis further to find out the areas or courses these women are gaining access to compared to men. In the next section the implications of the growth of private universities on gender equity in higher education are examined.

Implications of the Growth of Private Universities on Gender Equity in Higher Education

There has been an increased access to university education for women as evidenced by the research findings reported here. In this section a comparative analysis between private and public universities is done in the areas of admission and recruitment policies, student enrolment, appointment of women into management position and work environment in order to show the advances private universities have made in these areas.

Admission and recruitment policies in private universities

Recruitment and admission policies have critical implications for equity of access to university education because they provide the procedures and processes followed to realise the goal of women's access to higher education. The concepts of access and equity are closely linked. Access assumes that educational opportunities are available for all those who are eligible and who meet the required criteria (Koech 2000). This understanding of access introduces the concept of equity, which focuses on the values of fairness and social justice in the way social educational opportunities and resources are allocated or shared. Equity advocates for the elimination of all forms of discrimination based on gender, socio-economic status, geographical location, mental or other handicap (Koech 2000). Schuller (1991) argues that increased access is a precondition for equity and this entails making university education available to a greater number of students.

In this section the admission criteria used to admit students to private universities is examined with the intention of showing how they are enhancing women's access to university education.

For purposes of admission the private universities use the national minimum cut-off points of C+ (plus) in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary education (KCSE) examinations (university qualifying examination) for Kenyan students and for non-Kenyan students; the minimum university requirements in their own countries. In addition to using the national criteria for admission, private universities increase access to university education for women through flexible admission policies and programmes. Private universities also broaden access to university education for women and men by allowing the transfer of credits from previous courses attended in other accredited universities and colleges. These universities also admit working and mature students to their part-time and flexible (evening and weekends) programmes. With these flexible programmes, students can break and resume classes at their own convenience. Some public universities have also begun to make their admission policies and programmes flexible in order to widen access to university education.

It is important to note that admission to private universities is also determined by the student's ability to meet the cost of their education and accommodation. A study by Wesonga et al. (2003) found that the socio-economic status of students in the surveyed private universities was high. Most students in the private universities therefore come from high-income families and are able to meet the cost of their education. It appears that private higher education is beyond the reach of many Kenyans, especially those from poor and marginalized backgrounds. The cost of private higher education has implications for gender equity

because in most Kenyan communities the education of the boy child is valued more than that of the girl child (Eshiwani 1985; Boit and Koskei 2005).

As a result of this flexibility in admission policies and enrolment, some private universities have attained near-gender equity in enrolments. The enrolment of students in public and private chartered universities is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Male and female enrolment in chartered private and public universities between 1997 and 2002 in regular programmes.

Year	Public Universities			Private Universities		
	M	F	%F	M	F	%F
1997/1998	30,862	12,729	29.2	1,812	1,834	50.3
1998/1999	28,163	12,360	30.5	2,072	1,816	46.7
1999/2000	28,361	12,924	30.9	3,149	3,771	54.5
2000/2001	29,033	13,475	31.7	3,297	3,702	52.9
2001/2002	35,870	17,036	32.2	3,476	4,163	54.5

Source: Compiled from Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Statistics.

The data in Table 1 shows that overall there were more female than male students enrolled in private chartered universities in 1997–2002. During this period, however, only in 1998/99 were there more male than female enrolments. Female students' enrolment in public universities was lower than that of males in the same period. It appears that private universities are attracting more female than male students. However, the data in the table show that during this period the public universities together enrolled more (68,524) women than the private universities (15,286), which are small in size and offer few courses and programmes. The implication for gender equity in higher education depicted in the enrolment of women in universities in Kenya is that private universities provide additional spaces for over 10,000 women who would otherwise be denied university education due to the limited facilities in the public universities. Some of the factors contributing to the increased enrolment of female students in private universities identified by Wesonga et al. (2003:23) include:

- Because most courses offered in these universities are in the humanities and social sciences, women are over-represented in these areas.

- There is a considerable pool of female secondary school leavers with good grades in these courses that fail to get admission into public universities.
- The high levels of discipline and good learning environments in private universities reassure parents of their daughters' safety in college.
- The cost of local private universities is still lower than sending students to foreign universities abroad.

An analysis of the student enrolment in two public (Moi and Maseno) and two private (Catholic University of Eastern Africa [CUEA] and University of Eastern Africa-Baraton) in the 2002–2003 academic year revealed that female student enrolment is higher at the undergraduate degree programmes as their number decreases considerably at the postgraduate level. The student enrolment in the full-time, part-time, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in these four universities is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Student enrolment in various programmes in two public and two private universities in the academic year 2002/2003

University and Gender	Full-time	Part-time	Under-graduate	Masters	PhD	Total	%
<i>CUEA</i>							
Male	773	105	990	62	18	1,070	49.2
Female	894	98	1,080	21	3	1,104	50.8
<i>Baraton</i>							
Male	614	199	813	1	-	814	54.2
Female	667	17	684	4	-	668	45.8
<i>Maseno</i>							
Male	2,896	99	2,995	46	26	3,067	64.5
Female	1,636	33	1,669	7	8	1,684	35.5
<i>Moi</i>							
Male	4,953	1,965	6,918	400	29	7,347	65.2
Female	2,290	1,365	3,655	250	11	3,926	34.8

Source: Compiled from *Commonwealth Universities Yearbook 2005*, pp.1060-1978.

The data in Table 2 show that female enrolment in the two public universities is lower than male enrolment on the undergraduate, full-time, part-time programmes and postgraduate programmes. There are slightly more female students enrolled on the undergraduate programme at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa compared to University of Eastern Africa - Baraton. A possible explanation for the low enrolment of female student at Baraton is that the university has for a long time enjoyed a monopoly in science and technology courses among private universities (Wesonga et al. 2003). The data in Table 2 also depict a low enrolment of women at postgraduate degree programmes in all four universities. This low female enrolment in postgraduate programmes has implications for women's participation in universities both as academics and managers. It implies that there will be few qualified women to apply for academic and management positions in the university.

A critical analysis of the female students' enrolment in the various courses offered at the private and public universities shows that they are concentrated in the humanities and social sciences. The student enrolment in the various courses in 4 private and 6 public universities is summarised in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Enrolment in four privately chartered universities by gender and courses of study in 1999

University	Business Studies		Humanities and Social Sciences		Science and Technology	
	% Male	% Female	% Male	% Female	% Male	% Female
USIU	51	49	32	68	-	-
CUEA	48	52	37	63	61	39
Daystar	48	52	30	70	-	-
UEAB	54	46	48	52	52	48

Source: Wesonga et al., 2003, 'Private Higher Education in Kenya: Analysis of Trends and Issues in Four Selected Universities', a draft research report submitted to the Ford Foundation Office for Eastern Africa.

Table 4: Students enrolment in public universities by selected courses and gender in 1998/99

Course	Male	Female	Total	% Female
Education	8,749	5,289	14,038	37.7
Arts	3,568	1,910	5,478	34.9
Commerce	1,162	506	1,668	30.3
Agriculture	2,530	833	3,363	24.8
Engineering	2,435	244	2,679	9.1
Medicine	729	237	966	24.5
Science	3,677	1,000	4,677	21.4
Total	22,850	10,019	32,869	30.5

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology statistics.

The data in Tables 3 and 4 show that most female students were enrolled in the humanities and social sciences in both the private and public universities in 1999. The student enrolment in the various courses in these universities reflect a pattern of gender tracking, with females dominating in the humanities and social sciences while male students dominate in the natural sciences and technology.

The disciplinary choices of women has been the focus of debate in feminist discourses on education and gender equity especially in the western countries (Harvey 1993; McKinnon and Brooks 2001; Chanana 2004). The enrolment of women in the humanities and social sciences poses a challenge to the achievement of gender equity in higher education in Kenya and other parts of the world (Kimani 2005; Boit and Koskei 2005). The enrolment of women in these courses has knock-on effects on women's participation in the job market and implications for gender equity in higher education in particular and in society in general. The fact that women and men are not enrolled in similar courses only serves to reinforce inequality in terms of the kinds of jobs women do and this impacts on their position in society. Chanana (2004) observes that the clustering of women in specific subjects leads to their occupational segregation later in life. This is because most of the subjects that women are enrolled in do not have attractive remuneration implying that women stand to loose in terms of economic empowerment because they will earn low salaries upon employment. It can be argued therefore that since most private universities in Kenya are religious-based, with few science and technology programmes, the universities subtly channel female

students into the traditional fields that do not give them any competitive edge over male students. This means that their concentration in the non-marketable courses is being perpetuated, to their disadvantage.

In spite of the fact that most courses offered in the private universities are in the humanities and social sciences and the cost of private higher education is high, these universities are providing increased opportunities to Kenyans, especially women and those already in the job market, to benefit from university education. Those in the labour market are able to enrol and upgrade their skills at their own time and pace (evening classes and weekends). The launch of Kiriri Women's University of Science and Technology, the only women's university in Kenya, whose main goal is to encourage the enrolment of women in science and technology courses is a big step towards increasing women's participation in these courses.

However, the increased enrolment of female students in private universities is not reflected in the female academic and management staff numbers in these universities (Wesonga et al. 2003; FAWE 2001). In the next section the appointment and promotion of women staff into management positions in some of the private and public universities is examined.

Appointment and promotion of women staff

An analysis of women's participation in higher education as staff shows that there are generally fewer women holding academic and management positions compared to men in Kenya in both public and private universities (Kanake 1997; Lodiaga and Mbevi 1995; Onsongo 2002; Kamau 2001; Wesonga et al. 2003). A study by Kanake (1997) on gender disparities in Kenyan public universities revealed that women form a minority of university teachers. At the University of Nairobi alone, only 18% of the academic staff were women in 1995, while at Kenyatta University, 28.8 % were women during the same year. The women were found to be concentrated in the faculties of education and environmental education. They were heavily under-represented at the University of Nairobi's faculties of Engineering (2.3%), Architecture Design and Development (9.7%), Veterinary Medicine (10.2%), Pharmacy (11.1%) and Science (12.1%). A survey of the positions women occupy in university management in 2002 in the public and private universities is summarised in tables 5 and 6.

Table 5 shows that women are missing for the senior positions in the university hierarchy (vice-chancellors, registrars, and finance officers). Overall the public universities surveyed seemed to have more women as heads of departments (35) and directors of institutes (18). Only 2 women occupied the positions of deputy vice-chancellors. It was observed that women headed and directed the

departments/centres of Home Science, Music, Food and Nutrition, Gender Studies, and Student Welfare Services.

Table 5: Status of women in management in six Kenyan public universities in July 2002

Position	M	F	T	%
VC	6	0	6	0
DVC	13	2	15	13.3
Registrar	14	0	14	0
Principal	7	2	9	22.2
Director	42	18	60	30
Dean of students	3	2	5	40
Dean of Faculty	38	5	43	11.6
Finance Officer	6	0	6	0
Librarian	6	0	6	0
HOD	208	35	243	14.4
Council members	119	18	137	13.1

Source: Compiled from university calendars and staff lists.

Table 6 shows that majority of the women in the private universities under review occupied the positions of heads of department (17). Other women occupied such positions as librarian (2), registrar (3) and food services manager (2). Overall the private universities surveyed seemed to have more women (17 out of 21) heading departments than public universities (35 out of 105). Notable from the interviews was the fact that most of the women heading departments in private universities had worked in public universities for several years before moving to private universities. This led the researcher to conclude that private universities were opening more opportunities for women in management and were tapping unused resources in the public universities. One of the private universities surveyed in 2002 had a woman vice chancellor and a woman deputy vice-chancellor. At the time of the 2004 study two women headed two of the chartered private universities as vice-chancellors. Another woman was the vice-chancellor of one of the registered private universities in Kenya. Again in December 2004, one of the Christian-sponsored universities appointed a woman as its chancellor.

The appointment of women to the positions of chancellor, vice-chancellor and deputy vice-chancellor in the private universities implies that women are capable of managing universities. What is surprising, however, is the fact that most of these women holding management positions in some of the private universities are former employees of public universities where they served for many years and yet were not appointed into management positions.

Table 6: Status of women in management in 4 Kenyan privately chartered universities in July 2002

Position	M	F	T	%
VC	3	1	4	10.0
DVC	8	1	9	11.1
Registrar	2	3	5	5.0
Human resource manager	2	1	3	33.3
Director	2	1	3	33.3
Dean of students	2	1	3	33.3
Dean of Faculty	11	1	12	8.3
Finance Officer	4	0	4	0
Librarian	2	2	4	50.0
HOD	35	17	52	32.7
Total	71	28	99	100

Source: Compiled from university calendars and staff lists

The absence of women from senior management positions in public and private universities has implications for gender equity in higher education in as far as women are not involved in key decision-making positions in the universities like policy making, monitoring and evaluation and budgeting. Women appear to hold positions in the support services sector in the universities in the areas of student discipline, catering and guidance and counselling. These roles have been traditionally associated with women and have been known not to count for promotion to senior ranks (Onsongo 2000; Morley 1999; Brook 1997).

The possible reasons why private universities are appointing more women into senior positions includes the fact that they are run by Christian organisations from western countries where gender equity policies have been in opera-

tion for several years. Another possible explanation for the increased participation of women in private universities management could be their Christian commitment. There are more women practising Christians than men in Kenya (Wesonga et al. 2003 and Kasomo 2004). Another reason could be the fact that women are more interested in offering service than power and status and hence are more willing to move to these universities that are considered to be less prestigious in this context.

It could also be attributed to the fact that most of these universities offer courses in the social sciences where the majority of the women academic staff are concentrated (World Bank 2003).

Analysis of the factors influencing appointment and promotion in the private universities appear to suggest that these universities do not emphasise academic qualifications (i.e. PhDs) and experience like the public universities. It is also possible that these universities do not discriminate against women in appointments and promotion as was found to be the case in public universities. An analysis of the rate at which the men and women are promoted through the academic ranks, especially in public universities, during the 2004 study revealed that although some of the men and women interviewed had joined the universities at the same rank and had worked for a similar number of years, men were promoted faster and appointed to management positions earlier than the women. For example, in the public university, two of the women interviewed had taken 10 and 11 years respectively before being promoted to the rank of senior lecturer. The other two women had taken 6 and 7 years respectively before promotion to this rank. On the other hand one man had taken three years, another four years and the other two 5 years. The requirement in the public universities that one rises to the rank of senior lecturer before being appointed to a management position is likely to disadvantage women who for various reasons take longer to get a doctoral degree which is mandatory before one is promoted to this rank. The experiences of most of the women interviewed in 2004 showed that they had taken longer to do their PhD than the men (Onsongo 2005).

A feminist analysis of how men and women advance their careers in universities suggests that gender differences among men and women academics in universities result from overt discrimination against women and a male culture that marginalizes women (Castlemen et al. 1995; Everett 1994; Wyn 1996, Hearn 2001). For example, a study by Everett (1994) on sex, rank and qualification of men and women in Australian universities found that gender differences in rank are not caused by differences in age, higher degree, publications or time at one's university. Instead women were appointed to lower ranks than their qualifications would provide if they were men.

The private universities in Kenya are ahead of the public universities in the fact that they are the only ones having women as vice-chancellors. It appears therefore that private universities are opening more opportunities for women in management and are tapping the unused resource in the public universities. The appointment of women into senior management positions (chancellor and vice-chancellor) in the private universities has implications on gender equity in higher education. First, these appointments show that women are capable of managing higher education institutions. Second, the senior women managers are acting as role models for young women who may be aspiring to management positions in universities.

The environment in the private universities is also considered conducive for women managers. The next section examines the work environment in private and public universities to show how it enhances the participation of women staff.

Supportive work environment

A supportive work environment is crucial for career development for both men and women (Gupton and Slick 1996). Most of the managers in the private universities interviewed in 2004 perceived their work environment and senior management team as very supportive. The support from the senior management team in the private universities helps the managers in these universities to perform their responsibilities without fear. Most private universities surveyed were found to operate an open door policy that enabled the managers to get quick access to both their senior managers and the staff they were managing. Some managers in one private university shared their experiences:

... When we make suggestions they [administration] take them seriously
... they are very supportive (female manager).

In the public university it was quite a difficult environment because of the administrative structure. The structure was in such a way that you could not make any decision at any level without consulting the vice-chancellor... I found this slightly different in the private university... I realised that it was within my responsibility to make decisions... again in the public university policies are not followed... but in the private university the terms and conditions of service are followed faithfully... (male manager)

The male manager's comparison of the work environment in the public and private university suggests that getting the power and authority to execute responsibilities assigned is important in helping the managers in the private universities to perform their responsibilities.

The work environment in public universities in Kenya was perceived as hostile to women staff and may have contributed to some women moving to private universities. The hostility was experienced in the form of male intrusion in areas of responsibility, interruption of meetings run by women managers, political interference and sexual harassment. The hostile work environment in the public university positioned women as 'outsiders within' the university (Onsongo 2005).

One feature that makes the environment in the public university unsupportive to women managers and academics is the conservatism and bureaucracy. One female manager interviewed in 2004 described her experience:

Public universities have very rigid structures, very rigid ways of handling things.... And that sometimes is the undoing of the university management. There is a lot of bureaucracy, which actually does not augur well with the managers within. You find that even though you are given a management role, some of the resources that you require for your staff have to be approved by other people ... who operate within a very rigid structure, which has no room for new innovations... (female manager)

This woman's experience suggests that managers in the public university are given a position without authority. It can be argued that women are disadvantaged when the work environment is not supportive because they are under great scrutiny from the people they manage and they are judged more harshly if they fail to perform their responsibilities or deliver on targets. A hostile work environment has implications for women's participation in higher education as students, academic and management staff. One woman manager from the public university explained the effects of unsupportive work environment on women:

... the environment is not always gender friendly... you may require some financial support, material support and physical support and you find that you are not getting it, this compounds our [women] problem because we are judged by our outputs and whereas all these are hurdles to other people ours are more compounded... we have to prove that we are capable... so when the environment is hostile, then you are not able to do that (female manager).

Feminist research done elsewhere (mainly in the UK, USA, Australia and also South Africa) to document women's experience as managers and academics in universities shows that the university environment is hostile to women. The term 'chilly climate' has been used to describe women's experience of university environment (Sandler and Hall 1986; Sandler 1992, 1993 and Ramsay 1995). Ramsay (1995:92) identifies the chilly climate in universities as the:

...apparently harmless, neutral and long sanctioned actions and activities which are themselves embedded in the institutional climate and which collectively make up its culture.

The *chilly climate* has been found to contribute to women's frustration and sometime high turnover from the academy. For example the sexual harassment of women by male colleagues and senior managers found in Kenyan universities has caused academic career stagnation and sometimes led to some women quitting their jobs (Omale 2001; FAWA 2001; Onsongo 2005). A woman manager from the public university interviewed in 2004 observed that sexual harassment of women was a major factor contributing to the absence of women from senior management positions. She further observed that there was a general belief among Kenyan academic men that women who were occupying senior management positions had been appointed because they had sexual relationships with the men who appointed them.

Sexual harassment has been identified by feminists as the most common form of sex discrimination experienced by women in universities that is rarely acknowledged and reported about (Farley 1978; MacKinnon 1979; Brooks 1995; Cairns 1997; Omale 2000; Hagedorn 2000 and Durrani 2001). Farley (1978:68) defines sexual harassment as:

...unsolicited, non-reciprocal male behaviour that asserts a woman's sex role over her function as a worker. It can be any or all of the following, starting at commenting upon or touching a woman's body parts, repeating non-reciprocated propositions for dates, demands for sexual intercourse and rape.

MacKinnon (1979) argues that sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination, which blocks women's achievement of equality with men by supporting the institutionalisation of gender inequality in all its forms. This is because many women who are not strong and determined have no other choice but to handle their sexual harassment problems by quitting or changing jobs. It becomes a significant factor in women's job turnover and slower career advancement. The women from the private universities interviewed in the two studies reported here did not share any experiences of sexual harassment in their work environment.

The work environment in the private university has implications on gender equity in higher education. The women working in these institutions are likely to feel safe and therefore concentrate in the career advancement and job performance because of the support they enjoy from the administration of the universities.

Conclusion

This article has examined the growth of private universities in Kenya and its implication for gender equity in higher education. It appears that private universities are playing an important role in increasing opportunities especially for women to access university education as students, academics and managers. The opportunities are expanded through flexible admission and recruitment procedures and programmes, providing a supportive work environment for women staff and appointing more women into management positions. As a result of these flexibility there are slightly more female students enrolled in private universities than public universities as students. However, the female students are enrolled mostly in the areas traditionally regarded as feminine. The high number of female students is not reflected in high participation of women in teaching and management positions. The higher rate of participation of female students and women academic and management staff in private universities cannot be attributed to deliberate policies geared towards increasing their participation. In this regard therefore the growth of private universities in Kenya is not enhancing gender equity in higher education. For the private universities to enhance gender equity in higher education, there is need for them to develop policies and strategies geared towards the increased participation of women in universities.

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