

WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION NETWORK (WoHEN)

Concept Note for the Celebration of the 2022 International Women's Day

Theme: Breaking the Bias in African Higher Education: Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow

INTRODUCTION

Biases and gender inequality in African higher education limits the progress and development of the sector, and more broadly the continent. Over the years and in line with various global and continental agendas, stakeholders have been called upon, through various advocacy campaigns and platforms, to improve women's equal participation and access to higher education. However, beyond access, higher education institutions need to pursue an agenda of breaking the biases and ensuring equality in all facets of their operations/interventions. A policy brief by the Forum of African Women Educationists (FAWE), highlights the need to shift to more holistic gender responsive strategies which also address issues affecting women's abilities to fully engage and perform within these institutions. Stakeholders need to work synergistically towards improving on the current situation where women are underrepresented in fields such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). The unconducive environment in HEIs which perpetuate gender inequality and the low numbers of women in leadership roles are all issues which require critical attention.

A commissioned study by the Association of African Universities, titled African Women in STEM – Paradigms and limitations (2019), reports that despite overall achievements, women are still under-represented in leadership positions in the STEM fields due to their susceptibility to constraints facing women in STEM fields. Findings of this study showed that the major factors that may influence the participation of women in STEM fields are: Firstly, the perception that STEM is a technical/difficult/stressful terrain (26.7%). Secondly, the belief by society that science is a field designed for males (20.7%). Another major factor, according to this study, which may influence the participation of women in STEM fields is the African society and culture (15.9%). Aside fear (8.9%), choice (2.2%), non-interest (2.2%), other factors (8.10%) may also influence the participation of women in the STEM fields. This study brings to the fore the various biases and societal perceptions which affect women's equal participation in the field.

Besides, these biases need to be addressed, because women's equality and empowerment is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, SDG 5, which targets achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, underscores how integral gender equality is

towards the achievement of sustainable development. Similarly, for African higher education to ensure a sustainable tomorrow, ensuring gender equality today, should be a key priority.

The 2022 International Women's Day (IWD) Celebrations

International Women's Day (March 8) is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating women's equality. IWD has occurred for well over a century, with the first IWD gathering in 1911 supported by over a million people.

Conscious of the gender inequalities in African Higher Education, the Association of African Universities has been joining the world to celebrate this important day and to advocate for gender equality in African HE. This year, the celebration is being hosted under the Women in Higher Education Network (WoHEN). WoHEN was established to support women to participate effectively in the higher education sector, and across all the higher education thematic areas - leadership, management, administration, agriculture, business, health, STEM, education, humanities, social sciences, and technical and vocational education.

This Network is being hosted by the Association of African Universities (AAU). Membership to the Network is open to females on the continent – that is female students, female lecturers/professors, female researchers, female personnel, female administrators, and female leaders in higher, tertiary, and vocational training institutions

The adapted theme for the 2022 International Women's Day Celebration by WoHEN is “*Breaking the Bias in African Higher Education: Equality Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow*”. The forum being organized on March 8th, will among others, provide the platform to highlight the gender inequality in higher education institutions in Africa, discuss the best possible ways to curb the biases and to also establish a roadmap towards achieving a gender-inclusive community in African higher education.

Objectives

- Draw attention to the gender inequality in the African higher education sector
- Engage in advocacy for the implementation of policies which promote gender equality in higher education
- Promote the need for African HEIs to take cognizance of the specific needs of female students and lecturers and to implement strategies which respond to these needs
- Promote the economic empowerment of women in higher education by promoting equal pay
- Create a platform for various actors-educators, policymakers, and partners to discuss pertinent issues related to the promotion of equality in higher education in Africa.

Expected Outcomes

- Documentation of the areas of gender biases in higher education identified by participants
- Documentation of the pragmatic actions to be undertaken by HEIs towards addressing the biases and ensuring gender equality in their systems and practices
- Generation of a communique at the end of the event for dissemination and further engagement with stakeholders

Event Details

Date: March 8, 2022

Time: 10:00 am – 12 noon (GMT)

Venue: Virtual Event.

Register via

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUucOChpjosG913pXTdxn5tk1_KlCw1UB4o

Organizers: Women in Higher Education Network and the Association of African Universities

Target audience: Female VCs, Pro-VCs, Presidents, Rectors, Provosts, Registrars, Deans, Directors, Deputy Directors, Lecturers, Non-academic staff, Students and Men who are interested in the Theme are invited to participate.

Join the conversation by following the hashtags #Breakthebias #WOHEN2022 #Womeninhighereducation

For any further information, please contact Ms. Naomi Darko (ndarko@aaau.org) or +233 50 123 8468 (Call/SMS/WhatsApp)

Background

The Association of African Universities (AAU) is the apex continental organization and voice of higher education in Africa, established 55 years ago. The AAU prioritizes strengthening intellectual engagements and discussions on topical issues that address Africa's developmental goals, and generally other global issues - be they existing or emerging.

One of such key issues relates to gender inclusiveness and the AAU has over the years, been taking the lead to drive women and young girls' equal participation in higher education sector. As a forum for consultation, exchange of information and cooperation among institutions of higher education in Africa, AAU is cognizant of the gender imbalance in African higher education and has thus been dedicated to ensuring gender inclusiveness in its various initiatives and projects, including hosting its flagship Women in Higher Education Network (WoHEN) events regularly.

The promotion of gender equality is firmly rooted in AAU's Strategic Plan, which was carefully crafted to help Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) respond to the realization of the targets of continental and global; strategies, agenda and frameworks such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, the Continental Educational Strategy for Education (CESA16-25), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The AAU has its headquarters in Accra, Ghana, and was founded in Rabat, Morocco, on November 12, 1967 – following initial planning and discussions held at the University of Khartoum in Sudan. The AAU has a current membership of over 400 members and still counting. The AAU provides a platform for collaboration, networking, joint research, co-reflection, consultation, debates, and cooperation on diverse issues pertaining to higher education.