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Explore Barriers Limiting Effective Implementation of Gender Mainstreaming in Higher Education Institutions (A Case of TICD, Tanzania)

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ABSTRACT

The study examined barriers limiting effective gender mainstreaming practices in government owned Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Tanzania, focusing on the experience of Tengeru Institute of Community Development (TICD). Specifically, it examined barriers limiting effective mainstreaming of gender in leadership, teaching and learning environments. The study employed a qualitative research approach using case study design. A total of 39 respondents were involved in the study. A purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents for the study. Qualitative data were collected through key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) using a structured checklist and analysed using content analysis procedures. Overall, study findings revealed three unrelated barriers to mainstreaming gender in leadership, teaching and learning contexts as follows: first, noticeable gender inequality was observed in women's access to top-level leadership and managerial positions; second, gender disparities were found in students enrolment into various academic programmes, third, disparities in accessing accommodation facilities available within the TICD campus. Three institutional barriers were established, including lack of an explicit gender policy to provide guidance on how to mainstream gender at TICD, inadequate knowledge and awareness on the government's commitment to mainstream gender in education and training institutions, and dominance of patriarchy ideology among the staff members and students.. In terms of new contribution to knowledge, the study confirmed that government owned HEIs in Tanzania are still struggling to mainstream gender in their core functions caused by both internal and external factors. In the end, the study concluded that the situation of gender mainstreaming in TIC is improving progressively due to measures and efforts undertaken to enhance gender equality.

Keywords: Tengeru Institute of Community Development, Higher Education Institution, Gender Mainstreaming, Gender and Underrepresentation

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1990's, the implementation of gender mainstreaming in most public HEIs in most Sub-Saharan African countries was still lagging behind compared to those in other regions. This is the case despite having explicit legal framework and policy frameworks for promoting gender inequality at all levels. For instance, there are still noticeable gender inequalities among students and academic staff members in most HEIs in learning, working and accommodation environment (UNICEF, 2016). Likewise, in case of management and leadership positions, women are still lagging behind men in most HEIs (UNDP, 2016). Underrepresentation of female members of HEIs in various activities of the institutions is a barrier to achieve comprehensive gender mainstreaming. Gender inequality observed in HEIs is of high concern as the problem is still prevailing in areas where it was supposed to be addressed and resolved to form epicenter for efforts to bring about gender equality. Effective measures to address the problem of gender mainstreaming in HEIs are imperative to bring gender balance in the institutions.

Gender mainstreaming in Tanzania, HEIs in particular, has become vital due to gender inequality associated with gender practices. According to the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) report of 2018, there were 7647 teaching staff in HEIs in the country, among them 75.4 percent were male and only 24.6 percent were female (TCU, 2019). Also, the rate of female students in most HEIs has largely remained below 30 percent over a couple of years and discriminatory practices still prevail (Kilango et al., 2018). However, in non-university institutions under supervision of NACTE, the number of female students has been increasing and eventually closed the gap giving female students more opportunities than males. This however is not equally good as males are also lagging behind hence gender equality in student recruitment is not adequately achieved. Nevertheless, recruiting students more from one gender relative to the other because of promoting women may lead to non-implementation of the mainstreaming and lead to conflicted gendered policy (Rodriquez & Aboejo, 2018).

The observed lack of an explicit institutional gender policy to address gender inequality at the TICD as well as little attention given to gender issues affecting staff and students, has been worrisome for quite some time. The situation prompted the current study to examine barriers to effective gender mainstreaming in public HEIs in Tanzania, focusing on TICD. The TICD has been given the mandate to produce community development officers who

are responsible for implementing gender mainstreaming in the different public and private institutions in Tanzania. Thus, a study was required to understand aspects that perpetuate gender inequality and retard gender mainstreaming despite various interventions promoted by the government.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. Explore barriers limiting effective implementation of gender in higher education institution, Tanzania

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach, where a qualitative descriptive research design was optioned. The study used qualitative data collection methods. A sample of 39 participants were engaged in the study. The study used a Purposive Sampling approach to select participants. Data was collected using key informant interviews, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Based on the objective, this study used a thematic data analysis method where data was presented thematically.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Barriers limiting effective implementation of gender mainstreaming in higher education institution, Tanzania

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Overall, study findings in Table 4.2 show that majority of respondents (79%) aged between 20 and 59 years. The remaining 23% included those who were less than 20 years and over 60 years. The decision to include respondents aged below 20 to 60+ years was based on the assumption that gender inequality and stereotypes affect both men and women regardless of their sex, position and age. This implies that opinions and views of respondents were important, and most of these came from mature and experienced respondents who have been working at TICD for quite some time and served in different capacities.

Age Group	Staff		Students		Administrators		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%	N	%
< 19	0	0.0	8	20.5	0	0.0	8	20.5
20-29	0	0.0	9	23.1	0	0.0	9	23.1
30-39	5	12.8	4	10.3	3	07.7	12	30.8
40-49	2	05.1	0	0.0	3	07.7	5	12.8
50-59	2	05.1	0	0.0	2	05.1	4	10.2
60+	1	02.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	2.6
Total	10	25.6	21	53.9	8	20.5	39	100.0

4.1 Age distribution of the participant

The study aimed at exploring factors limiting effective implementation of gender mainstreaming at TICD. Three factors were identified to show barriers limiting successful and effective gender mainstreaming at TICD. These include, lack of an explicit institute's gender policy to guide the gender mainstreaming strategy, insufficient gender budget for gender mainstreaming in TICD, dominance of masculine ideology and insufficient awareness of gender mainstreaming strategy itself. Each of these challenges are discussed in the subsequent sections as follows.

Lack of an explicit Institutional Gender policy

Although TICD has been considering gender dimensions in its various documents and operations but it did not have an explicit institutional gender policy to guide the implementation of gender specific programs meant to achieve gender equality. However, since the year 2021, concerted efforts have been made to develop an institutional Gender Policy to guide process of mainstreaming gender as is the case in other HEI educations in Tanzania such as UDSM, SUA and UDOM. On the contrary, despite absence of gender policy, TICD has attempted to promote gender inclusiveness in management of the institute core functions including leadership and student enrolment. For instance in the year 2022, only four women out of leadership positions at TICD were held by women. These include Rector, Deputy Rectors and Heads of Departments (HOD). This happened because there is no specific

provision for promoting gender equality in recruitment and appointment of top leadership positions. Similar observations were observed in students' enrolment at TICD. In the year 2021, TICD had a total of 1973 comprising of 1301 female and 672 male students respectively. This suggest that there are more female than male students, hence making it a female dominated institution in term of students' population,

The study sought to understand how absence of gender policy TICD has constrained the implementation of gender mainstreaming. The policy is vital because it provides the framework and guidelines on how to practically mainstream gender into TICD core businesses including overall vision, mission and strategies. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they were aware of the importance of an institutional gender policy and its role and importance of in attaining successful and sustainable gender mainstreaming at TICD. Below are respondents' responses to this issue.

During interview, one respondent demonstrated that:

At the institute, since then, there was no gender policy in place; however, there are efforts underway to establish the policy in the institute. Gender related issues are subject to management decisions. All issues related to genders are out of the specific guidelines and lack legal backing. Forthcoming gender policy will support gender mainstreaming in the institute (Male respondent during interview held on 15 June 2025).

This implies that the issues related to gender mainstreaming lacked cemented support as they had no legal platform. At the time of the study efforts to design an explicit gender policy design for TICD were in progress at TICD as an attempt to facilitate gender mainstreaming in the institute. This findings support Onsongo (2011) study that identified lack of a gender policy as one of the barriers to gender mainstreaming in HEI.

Another respondent said that,

Gender policy is essential for effective involvement of women in decision making through gender programs of the Institute. There are efforts of involving women in management in the existing leadership. Though there is no gender policy, we are confident that there will be a policy in the nearest future that will support women programs as the preparation is underway. Therefore, gender mainstreaming efforts should be cemented by gender policy as important pre-condition for mainstreaming gender appropriately (Female respondent during FGD held on 17 June 2025).

This implies that in spite of absence of gender policy at TICD, gender related activities existed in the institute for quiet long; and expectations of new gender policy is bringing hope for more improvement of gender mainstreaming. This finding back up Cuñado and Abocejo (2018) study findings showing that gender policy is important for highlighting gender equality issues into focus so as to increase enhance the implementation of gender mainstreaming in institutional matters including policy guidelines and regulations.

Another respondent commented on why there is no working gender policy in the institution, by saying the following:

There was no effective gender policy to guide gender mainstreaming issues because the institutions has not set up policy that settle gender issues and promote gender programs. Nevertheless, the institute has its guidelines in dealing with various issues related to gender. The effort to bring about new gender policy by the institute will give gender issue more projections (Female respondent during interview held on 15 June 2025).

This argument implies that, for years the institute operated gender programs and related issues in absence of gender policy. The argument confirms Nyoni et al. (2017) findings that showed that most HEI's are operating without having effective gender policy something that weakens efforts to towards achieving institutional gender equality goals.

On the contrary, one respondent gave a different view concerning gender policy by saying that:

Gender policy is a government requirement and the institute obligation to set and observe it. It is not a matter of choice! At national level gender policy exists and is clear, but the problem is that TICD has no such policy however, the institute has promised to develop it soon. It is my expectation that the gender policy will bring changes particularly reviewing women specific roles in the leadership and management of most HEIs and TICD in particular....(Male respondent during interview held on 19 June 2025).

Overall, respondents' responses suggest that lack of a gender policy derails efforts to promote and support implementation of gender mainstreaming. In addition, the study indicates that in spite of widespread campaigns and efforts for promoting gender equality in HEI absence of a gender policy has been a barrier to gender mainstreaming in TICD. Lack of gender policy and insufficient adherence to specific institutional guidelines and objectives ruins the efficiency to implement effective gender mainstreaming.

Inadequate budget for implementing gender mainstreaming

The successful mainstreaming of gender in institutional programmes and in particular gender specific activities requires financial resources. In most cases, the institute requires financial resources to implement various gender specific programmes, including review of institutional policies and guidelines as well addressing various gender inequalities both in the learning, accommodation as well as leadership and management programs. This means that, the institute must be ready to allocate specific funds from its annual budgets to finance such activities.

Funds to facilitate various programs are provided by the government on yearly basis. However, over the past 5 years, no development funds from the government that were allocated to TCID. Only a year ago, (2021) the GOT allocated TZS 2.7 billion for development projects including construction of female students' accommodation and lecture halls. This show that students' accommodation challenges has remained unaddressed for the past 5 years.

The government decision to provide the institute with the development fund is a key to support gender programs. Allocation of funds for implementation of gender programs is a way to promote gender mainstreaming. The study found that TICD has allocated some funds to support its

development programs, including gender related programs. Respondents were asked to share experiences and views showing how inadequate funding affected implementation of gender mainstreaming efforts at TICD.

In showing how inadequate budget affect institutional efforts to mainstream gender in its programmes, respondents shared the following:

The institute's Budgeting Committee, has only one female member out of 4 members, this makes it difficult to exercise enough power in pushing for greater allocation to female oriented specific programs due to limited understanding on the gender mainstreaming strategy. At the end, little attention is given on issues related to women programs in terms of funds allocation (Female respondent during interview held on 15 June 2025).

The planning and budgeting processes are not gender sensitive in terms of having adequate representation of men and women. During the stage of planning as well as budget preparation and allocation of fund, most of committee members are men. In the same vein, another member of staff who participated in the study reported that d that:

The Budgetary Committee allocates funds to support the implementation of the SHE BRAVE program. More specifically, the 2022 annual budget on gender programs has been increased through SHE BRAVE because it embrace all necessary needs of gender programs implemented by the NWRDC. Generally, the existence of the documentation centre at TICD has attracted gender budgets for implementing other related programs and hence improving adequate fund for gender related activities including gender mainstreaming. (Female respondent during interview held on 23 June 2025).

The findings support study by Shao and Mukangara (2007) which revealed that efforts to implement gender mainstreaming effectively were constrained by insufficient budget allocation.

Masculine ideological system to gender mainstreaming

The study examined how perceived masculine ideological system in HEIs limits implementation of gender mainstreaming. In most HEIs in Tanzania male staff is privileged to access decision making position which connotes power to make various decisions on various issues, with the support of Governing Boards. Most HEIs leadership have relatively few female individuals relative to the male staff.

In view of this, the implementation of gender mainstreaming through various programs lack women influence. In some other cases, some decisions are on gender related issues are made without the support of women, something that weakens efforts towards implementing gender mainstreaming in HEIs.

This is reflected in a response by a respondent who said that:

Most of the problems on implementation of gender related activities include absence of enough women's voice due to male dominating scheme. As top jobs are dominated by male staff, women's issues lack deliberate push particularly in supporting equality among genders. Since they female are minority at decision-making bodies, they lack supportive platform to promote gender equality (Female respondent during Interview held on 15 June 2025).

This perceived masculine dominance implies that the leadership system not only dominated by men, but also denies women enough opportunity to voice over progress of female related programs at large. In same vein, Yehualashet (2010) argued that gender issues have not been well integrated into community domain of the institutions, since men are still dominating high ranking positions in the universities while women are not prioritized in the universities. Burkinshaw and colleagues (2017) found that women in Australian HEIs are under masculine competitive paradigm, supremacy and dynamics.

Likewise, a student respondent in one of the FGD explained how masculine ideological system within the institute lower efforts for promoting gender equality programs. She said:

The existing male dominant ideology in the HEIs is unpleasant and obstacles to female programs that lead to gender inequality. Few women get opportunities to participate in top management bodies. On the other hand, some subjects such as sciences and computer are regarded as male subjects sidelining female students' capabilities. It is clear that, male dominating ideology makes the situation unfavourable for promoting gender equality and drag behind efforts to tackle the problem of gender inequality (Male participant during FGD held on 20 June 2025).

This implies that, at TICD like other HEIs, male staff is perceived to be dominant in some important decision-making bodies/organs. However, no evidence of gender discrimination in the institute was available to validate this argument. This argument was backed up by Alwazzan and Al-Angari (2020) who mentioned some of the most common gender injustices and stereotypes which view females as been unfit to hold two responsibilities including productive and domestic roles. Earlier study by Fitzgerald (2018) viewed stereotypes as the source of double blinding by depicting females as good domestic managers, hence cannot make them good in non-domestic functions such as leadership. Similar arguments were echoed by Iwu and Azoro (2017) who claimed that, one of the factors that lead to poor participation of women in college science subjects included the belief that only men are considered to be fit study science subjects.

The above study findings from secondary sources show that problems of masculine ideological system affect implementations of gender mainstreaming as female are already less represented in the system. This makes most of the decisions of the institutions to lack female supportive contents; hence struggles in implementation of gender mainstreaming are weakened. In support of the findings, Alwazzan and Al-Angari (2020) note that failure to effective implementation of gender mainstreaming programs is rooted in structural barriers promoted by the gendered structure of careers; cultural barriers which generate stereotypes in various leadership positions; and situational barriers reflected in gender inequalities and discriminatory practices.

This is also supported by Iwu and Azoro (2017) study which found that factors that led to low participation of female individuals in various issues of the institutions is fuelled by patriarchal culture and stereotypes on access to knowledge, skills and other opportunities.

Limited awareness on gender mainstreaming activities

The study assessed the extent of awareness on gender mainstreaming activities in TICD and how it affects gender mainstreaming. Study findings show that, in spite of an existing call for gender equality in TICD through various programs, only few were able to understand what exactly gender mainstreaming means as well as programs associated with it. This has in turn caused barriers in the implementation of gender mainstreaming, thereby making a number of different gender issues to remain unresolved. The study used both interview and FGD in obtaining relevant data for the phenomena and related issues under study. Respondents with different understanding, experiences and views provided various responses in relation to the issue.

In an interview with one individual who participated in the study said that:

In fact, gender mainstreaming is a common phenomenon in our institute and there are programs related to gender undertaken here. However, despite the efforts applied, the issues of gender are not sufficiently given due attention. Neither is there any effective and popular programs introduced to shade light on this issue except NWRDC which was recently transferred here by the government and at least add values to gender issues (Male respondent during interview held on 19 June 2025).

This implies that in spite of existence of gender programs in the institute there were insufficient promotion of gender mainstreaming due to little attention allocated to it. The transfer of NWRDC to TICD is expected to bring lot of changes on the ground and will increase participation of women on gender programs.

In addition, another student respondent tried to recall whether or not she had encountered anything concerning gender mainstreaming. She said:

Who cares to make the concept of gender mainstreaming well known and implemented? Where should we find it!? We know nothing about what it means and how it works! The concept is not well and popularly incorporated into our institution's programs in spite of being the main institution dealing with gender related issues (Female respondent during FGD held on 20 June 2025).

This implies that insufficient awareness on issues of gender among students is one factor hindering effective implementation of gender mainstreaming. O'Connor & Irvine (2020) claimed that, lack of awareness hinders women from taking part in major gender issues pertaining to their lives since little is known about its importance. Low awareness of gender mainstreaming activities is a serious problem and it hinder promotion of gender related activities and offering low support.

One student respondent said that:

In fact, we have little knowledge on programs intended for women and we are rarely engaged to participate. Only when there is an event, which normally happens once or twice per year! The events are planned and organized at administrative levels, where we only participate during the day of events making our participation poor (Male respondent during FGD held 17 June 2025).

The study results indicate that, most students showed to have little knowledge on gender mainstreaming. They could not even understand what it exactly means and how it is implemented. O'Connor and Irvine (2020) argued that there is problems of awareness of gender concepts and related programs in most HEIs which reflects the institutions weakness to handle gender issues at broad sense. Cuñado and Abocejo (2018) pointed out various factors that influence implementation of gender mainstreaming approach include; creating conducive learning and accommodation environment for female and male student's, promote awareness.

During interviews one respondent claimed that:

In this institution, management has not conducted regular training on issues relating to gender mainstreaming, hence, little is known on it. There is also no gender related enhancement in the curriculum leading to lack of comprehensive knowledge on gender mainstreaming. This on the other hand, it makes it difficult to focus more on implementing gender mainstreaming requirements (Male respondent during interview held on 16 June 2025).

This implies that, the institute lacks proper pattern for promoting gender mainstreaming due to little or no effective gender related training programs and workshops. Training aimed to enhance increase in awareness and consequently, implementation of gender mainstreaming. In support of the argument, Onsongo (2011) noted that, lack of gender curriculum development in most HEIs is the main cause of poor awareness on gender related matter. Moreover, Walby (2005) asserted that curriculum development process lacks informative and expertise to integrate gender issues properly.

The findings from this study indicate that gender mainstreaming is facing considerable barriers such as insufficient promotion and facilitating gender programs through trainings and workshops, the establishment of gender related contents in curriculum development and lack of awareness towards implementation of gender equality. It was also found that, majority of the people in the institution under study lacked proper understanding on gender issues as the preparation and facilitation of gender programs lack participatory engagements. Insufficient knowledge and awareness on meaning, activities, programs and objectives of gender mainstreaming play major roles in hindering implementation of gender mainstreaming in HEI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that, the existing detrimental situation of gender mainstreaming in the higher education institution and particularly at TICD, was found to be contributed by various obstacles. It was learned that absence of an effective gender policy in facilitating gender activities, poor funding of women programs was attributed by insufficient funding of development projects by the government, masculine ideology is another situation reflected in gender mainstreaming initiatives where the institute is dominated by male staff, making women inadequate in pushing for their agendas during decision-making and awareness on gender mainstreaming especially for leaders who were expected to ensure smooth implementation of gender dimensions in their operations. The study recommended higher institutions to develop effective institutions and systems for effective implementation and plan for comprehending gender equality ought to be in short and long time for sustainability development

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