

# GENDER EQUALITY PRACTICES IN HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS IN TANZANIA

## Policy Brief # 2



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### Study title

*Gender Equality Practices in Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania*

### Context and research challenge

*Although Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) perform an important role in translating and implementing national gender policies, it remains unclear how gender equality is understood and implemented in the Tanzanian context.*

*This study maps the landscape of gender equality understanding and policies in Tanzania*

*It makes an empirical contribution by providing a systematic overview of the landscape of gender mainstreaming in Tanzanian higher education. It also makes a theoretical contribution by outlining the range of distinct Tanzanian conceptualisations of gender mainstreaming and equality*

For the past three decades, higher education (HE) in Tanzania has experienced remarkable growth in the number of higher learning institutions (HLIs), student population, and programmes offered (TCU, 2019). The number of accredited Universities has mounted higher from one University established at the time of independence (1963) to forty-nine HLIs in 2020 (TCU, 2020). This number include a blend of 21 public and 28 private institutions. In line with this growth, progress has been made in terms of the number of females entering tertiary level education, from below 17% in 90s to 42% in 2019/2020 (TCU, 2019). However, research to assess the efficacy of universities' policies and practices in relation to gender equality over the last decade and since the establishment of the SDG framework is deficient. It is not yet clear if pre-existing gender regimes and relations within the higher education sector are transforming to ensure equitable treatment for all students and staff.

Gender equality requires transformation of cultural and patriarchal gendered values and norms. Gender transformation in this context is understood as a change of universities' policies, ethos and environment to address and enable persons to critically challenge gender inequalities in power and privilege and to increase gender equitable attitudes and behaviours.



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## Objectives of the research

*To examine how Tanzania HLIs translate and implement gender equality and mainstreaming policies*

Over the last decade, little research has examined conceptualizations and implementation of gender equality policies in Tanzanian HLIs. Findings established that gender equality is frequently conflated with gender parity, and the practice of gender mainstreaming is seen as something external to and imposed upon Universities (Morley, 2007, 2010). There is further limited research on how these policies have been implemented and embedded over time, and whether they have facilitated a transformation in gender regimes and relations during this time.

This study addresses this gap by building on Morley's seminal work. It provides insights from the experiences of 14 HLI's across Tanzania on their journey of gender mainstreaming and gender transformation. It shares how these HLI spaces have conceptualised and operationalized gender-mainstreaming practices in their institutions. The study makes fresh empirical and conceptual contributions to the study of gender equality in HLIs in an African context.

## Scientific approach / methodology & methods

- Fourteen (14) accredited public and private universities were selected as study sites based on their unique contribution to understanding of the studied phenomenon
- The study employed interviews and document analysis to find out how gender policies were adopted, adapted, and implemented within the institution.

Fourteen case sites (universities) were selected based on their unique contribution to the understanding of the studied phenomenon. Case sites included accredited public and private HLIs that are regulated by Tanzania Commission of Universities (TCU). These institutions were over twenty years in operation and had demonstrable experience in gender mainstreaming; institutions were either secular or held explicit faith-based missions; that offered STEM only curriculum, medicine only curriculum and mixed curriculum. They ranged in size from large (>10,000 students) to small (<5000 students) located in urban and peri-urban spaces.

Semi-structured key-informant interviews were conducted in all sites to understand how gender policies were adopted, adapted, and implemented within the institution. The study also conducted a documentary review of the gender policies of institutions, and reviewed publicly available information on gender mainstreaming and equality initiatives through an analysis of institutional websites.

## Findings:

- There are diverse conceptualisations of gender equality and practices describing what a specific gender policy should entail in HLIs.
- There are diverse approaches used by HLIs in operationalising gender policies into strategies

As regards institutional understanding of gender equality and mainstreaming policies, findings indicate that there are diverse conceptualisations of gender equality and practices describing what a specific gender policy should entail. Generally, more than half of the participating HLIs had introduced some kind of a policy on gender equality and demonstrated awareness of the concept of gender mainstreaming. Three types of gender policies were found in the selected HLIs such as Gender Policy, Anti-sexual harassment Policy and gender sensitive hiring policies (as stipulated in the respective university's charters).

or mechanisms and implementing action plans

- The study found a range of agent and structural institutional based barriers to policy design and implementation including lack of political will, expertise, and funding and negative attitudes towards gender equality

Three universities had all three types of policies while six universities did not have any type of gender equality policies.

The study found evidence of diverse approaches used by HLIs in operationalising gender policies through strategies or mechanisms and implementing action plans. In terms of structural implementation mechanisms, six of the participating universities have established formal departments specifically to support scholarship in gender studies and to lead in gender coordination activities for the university. Six HLIs that had not invested in establishing gender departments/units indicated that gender matters were handled in the office of the Dean of Students (DoS) thus are regarded as student matters and not institutional concern of gender equality to the whole community including staff.

Both structural and agent-based attitudinal barriers to gender mainstreaming and achieving gender equality were identified in the chosen HLI's. We found structural barriers such as lack of funds, lack of systematic action plans, and lack of gender experts. It was found that most of the gender equality initiatives and activities carried out in HLIs are not planned through formal college planning processes and therefore they are not budgeted. Rather, training and activities are selected on an ad hoc basis as opportunities arise. Moreover, it was found that majority of the institutions (ten out of fourteen) lacked gender expertise. Individuals appointed to lead the gender centres are generally not gender experts. They reported that no on job training and not given help to perform their duties thus, opting to consult their own initiatives based on their experience.

Agent based attitudinal barriers found include lack of leaders' political will, and negative attitude towards gender equality. This result to the perception that gender equality is a neo-colonial 'western' value; and that gender based research is less recognized and emphasised within academic disciplines; consequently, academics are not encouraged or incentivized to bring a gender based research lens to their work. In one institution it was found that leaders perceive gender equality to be a matter of neo-colonialism and imposition, and not relevant to the African context. Thus questioning the overall effectiveness or impact of policies and practices. Low participation of staff and students in gender activities/initiatives is another agent-based barrier for the successful implementation of gender equality initiatives. It was reported that activities such as gender awareness or women empowerment workshops have received very poor response from academic staff and students.

Key messages for policy makers / academic leaders / civil society actors at multiple scales (local, national, international)

- for transformation to take place in HLIs gender intervention approaches should shift to more holistic gender responsive strategies that require whole-of-community and/or institutional response and transformation
- In order to be able to enhance understanding of gender equality and implement gender equality in HLIs and ensure that they do it at a reasonable pace, this study recommends for rigorous gender equality regulations as well as monitoring and evaluation by TCU and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.
- Universities' self-evaluation on gender equality should stretch further than just indicating numbers that describe access.

Overall, the study found that gender mainstreaming outputs and efforts are quite a spread in Tanzanian HLIs; however, there is little evidence to suggest that these efforts have yet been transformative in their impact. Impliedly, in Tanzanian HLIs gender equality is about structural adjustment towards gender parity (through gender and hiring policies) as policy statements focus on issues of access and gender equality of participation in decision making positions of both students and staff in HE

#### References:

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