

The Cultural View and Complexities of Gender Mainstreaming in Newly Established Universities in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the concept of gender mainstreaming and raises questions about a series of category construction in debates and discussions. Discussions on gender, given its basis in identity politics, have the potential to become highly contentious. It is possible that given their postcolonial heritage the 'cultural argument' against gender may hold sway in a majority of institutions of higher learning. This is the position that gender equity /equality is an alien concept imposed by the West that does not complement endemic cultural values. Thus the aspiration of gender equity / equality can be seen as a corruptive force of globalization that can 'westernise', and damage the image / 'purity' of local women. Then there is the 'nature argument', which posits that nature or biology deigns the roles and responsibilities, characteristics and behaviours of women and men. Thus the notion of gender equity / equality is projected as unnatural or against nature's intentions. Similarly, there is the 'history argument' that portrays women and men as having historically assigned status and roles. As a result, it is contended that there is no necessity to alter this state of affairs. Another argument, the 'common sense argument' is one which deigns that men are traditionally the breadwinners and it is common sense therefore that men have to be given opportunities at the workplace as women have to carry out the domestic work. Other prejudices contend that when women work, they invariably take leave for pregnancy and childbirth thereby causing disruption to the institution. The concept of gender equity / equality is also seen as against men and the family and, conversely, as being irrelevant today when women have achieved many things in the public sphere. Aside from this wide range of resistances to gender mainstreaming, some women tend to claim that their careers have not been affected by gender discrimination; and that if one does one's work diligently one can succeed anywhere. At the same time, others may not want to highlight women's issues on the basis that it would lead to undue attention, taunting, and further derogation of women at the workplace.