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Navigating the DUO Mandate of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University: Achievements and Pitfalls

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Abstract

The Programme of Women Studies at the SWGS, Makerere University, was a product of women movement in civil society and academia. It was to act as the academic arm, not only to teach, research, and undertake publications but also to perform outreach activities that serve the women's movement in the civil society and policy makers. While in academia a number of achievements in terms of teaching, research, and publications have been realised, the extent to which the school as an academic arm, has met the mandate of supporting the women's movement and policymakers has not been studied. The study used qualitative methods of data collection from various stakeholders, including the founding members of the school in both academia and civil society organisations, students and current staff. Findings show that the school's mandate of outreach is still functional, although the vitality with which it began has gradually waned over time because of some changes within and outside the school. For the school to rekindle this mandate, requires calling upon all the civil society organisations that participated in the establishment of the school to come together and reminisce on the collaborations, and set a new agenda for the year(s) ahead.

Keywords: Community outreach; women's movement

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Introduction

Unlike other disciplines, women studies emerged from a political and social movement outside the walls of the university. Fed up with discrimination and the male-dominated nature of university structures, including disciplines and programmes taught, they demanded that programmes on women studies be introduced (Crouch, 2012). Born out of activism and outside the university walls, meant that the programmes on women studies started with a dual mandate. First, the programmes on women studies were to act as an academic arm of the women's movement (Bart et al,. 1999; Bird, 2002). The goal of the academic arm was to introduce, institutionalise and grow women studies as an academic discipline to transform mainstream or male-centred disciplines, programmes and institutional practice. Second, the academic arm was also meant to serve the women's movement where it emerged. This second goal meant that the academic arm was to provide a theoretical and knowledge base to the women's/feminist movement and policy makers (Stromquist, 2001). In other words, the *academic* arm meant that the academy was also to be a part of the struggle for women's liberation (Bird, 2002) through knowledge creation relevant to the women's movement and policy makers. This second goal is in conformity with one of the universities' goals of community engagement. However, while in academia there have been a significant number of achievements in terms of teaching, research, and publications, the key question this article addresses is: to what extent has the academic arm, particularly in universities fulfilled its second mandate of supporting the women's movement agenda and policymaking? This second mandate is akin to outreach, or broadly speaking, community engagement. The article therefore examines the engagement of academia with the women's movement and policy makers outside the university within the context of Uganda, particularly the school of Women and Gender Studies (SWGS) at Makerere University.

Like in Western Europe and North America, the programme of Women Studies at the school of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University was a function of the Ugandan women's movement or activism who were working in civil society organisations. However, since its establishment, no deliberate studies have been conducted to ascertain how the school of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University has fulfilled this second mandate. A glimpse of it only appears in a few studies (see Sicherman, 2005; Ernstberger, 2020; & Bantebya & Kindi, 2022) that have looked at the emergence of the Women Studies programme at Makerere University but not the second mandate of outreach activities. The paper discusses achievements, challenges and strategies wherein the school of Women and Gender Studies at

Makerere University has engaged with the woman's movement agenda and policy makers as an outreach mandate.

Methodology

The study used qualitative methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation to find out how the SWGS has over time, continued to fulfill its mandate of supporting the women movement agenda and policy making since its establishment in 1991. Data was collected from purposively selected twelve (12) key informants through in-depth interviews. These included stakeholders who were actively involved in the establishment of the SWGS as well the current staff. The other stakeholders were from the civil society organisations. From the school of Women and Gender Studies, five research participants were interviewed. These included two males and three females. While in the civil society seven research participants were interviewed who included only females, two of whom were the lead members in the championing the establishment of the school of Women and Gender Studies. Document review was also conducted to collect secondary data from Makerere University Library and Internet search where only relevant materials were identified and selected for the study.

What Is Outreach?

Within the context of universities, outreach is an aspect of community engagement. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), community engagement in its broad sense means "the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people", (1997, p.9). While Compagnucci and Spigarelli (2020, p.5) define community engagement as "the sum of all activities concerned with the generation, use, application, and exploitation of university knowledge, capabilities, and resources outside of the academic environment". The Carnegie Foundation defines university–community engagement as the collaboration between universities and their broader communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity (Gruber, 2017). In its definition of community outreach, the Makerere University Strategic Plan–2020/30 characterises it thus:

a) …Extension and outreach function as an interface between research and training that would make a University relevant to societal needs or national development.
b) Extension and outreach comprise of internships, consultancy, action research, and short-term non-academic training programmes to a wide-range of clients.
c) Provide feedback for adaptation of curricula, learning approaches and research methodologies for relevance.

d) It is a space for joint learning and change for students, academic staff, the community, the university, and its partners.

e) Highlights the critical areas for training, research, and development interventions.

Through the above definitions and characterisation, community outreach activities manifest in a variety of forms. These may include public lectures, field trips, and internships by the students, consultancy work, and public dissemination of research findings, community-based participatory research; and community or professional workshops, among others. In this regard, communities can be local, regional, national, or international, and these partnerships address these communities' concerns and enhance teaching, research, and knowledge transfer for economic development (Gruber, 2017).

These definitions imply that universities should not only focus on service provision limited to teaching and research within the confines of the university campus (Hearn et al,. 2011) but also include community engagement through outreach programs meant to solve social challenges (Silka et al,. 2013). This is important because, according to Hearn et al,. (2011), previously, university professors were seen as individuals confined to only the Ivory Towers engaged solely in academic work and very rarely with the outside community. Any activity outside the university was seen as unscholarly. However, this changed with the Morrill Act (1862), the Agricultural College Act (1890), and the Smith–Lever Act (1914), when outreach programmes started to connect the university to the outside world (Hearn et al,. 2011). Specifically, the Smith-Lever Act of 1914, which established agricultural extension programs in the U.S., formalised an off-campus service orientation and encouraged faculty to engage in translating scientific research into actual practice (Hearn et al,. 2011). From here, almost all universities across the globe followed this trend, including Makerere University. They realised that scholarly work without positively affecting the outside community was not relevant enough. Currently, almost all universities around the world are no longer Ivory Towers producing knowledge in isolation but also engage with their communities in order to promote regional and national growth (Etzkowitz Leydesdorff, 2000 and Rossi & Rosli, 2015). Universities' traditional roles of teaching and research are increasingly supplemented by community engagement (Murphy & Dyrenfurth, 2019; Theeranattapong et al,. 2021). As a result, university–community engagement has continued to evolve as a dynamic field of scholarship and practice that now carries ever-increasing academic respect (Sandmann & Jones, 2019).

Scholarly work which impacts the community facilitates feedback to the academics concerning best

practices and success stories. Such an exchange of experience between the community and academics has the potential to inform lecture notes, and through research, the development of new concepts would emerge that would give insights into solving the development challenges of a given community. Indeed as Hearn et al,. (2011) emphasised: "faculty outreach activities can accomplish a far more advantageous and identifiable result through local interactions" (pg.2). Outreach programs also increase opportunities for students to engage in experiential learning, thereby benefiting themselves, and increasing the visibility of the institution and the community (Nampala, Kityo, & Adipala 2016). Within this context, university outreach programmes can be conceived as a two-way strategy, framed as engagement. W*hether through research projects, teaching activities, civic engagement, or service learning, the reciprocal nature of outreach and engagement enriches both the academic mission and the communities that are being served (Ibid.)*

Hence, within the context of the requirement of the women's academic arm to fulfil its second mandate, this suited well with the university community engagement. Emphasising the importance of collaboration between the academic arm and the women's movement, Bart et al,. (1999) noted that "women studies without activism were like the ocean without salt" (pg. 258). However, examination of the performance of academic arm in their outreach activities to the women's movement and policy makers has rarely been undertaken. Very often, studies have assessed the performance of the academic arm independently of the women's movement and vice versa. For instance, a UN Women report (2018) that assessed the Uganda women's movement from 1980 to 2018 hardly mentioned the contribution of the school to the women's movement nor the movement's contribution to the establishment of the school. It only mentions the school as a member of UWONET in its end notes. This study, therefore, has taken on this task to examine how the school of Women and Gender Studies at Makerere University has fulfilled the second mandate.

Makerere University and Outreach Programme

Like other universities across different countries, Makerere University has and continues to play a leading role in community outreach. Indeed, one of the objectives in the Makerere University Strategic Plan 2020/30 under goal four (4) – *an engaged university with enhanced partnerships with industry, the community, and international institutions* – states that: to enhance community outreach programmes and revitalise university open days. This goal is fulfilled by her respective faculty in the different academic units they belong. Within the context of the school of Women and Gender Studies, as noted above, the school was a product of women's activism/

movement in civil society and academia. In other words, the women activists demanded that a programme of women studies be established at Makerere University that would not only teach, research, and undertake publications but also perform outreach activities that serve the women's movement in civil society and policymakers. Indeed, during the initial stages of the establishment of the school, a number of academics engaged with the women's movement[1] and policy makers more especially serving as committee members or advisors on various government ministries, board chairs or members of civil society organisations, and often participating in advocacy and demonstration activities along with other women activists in civil society on issues for women. Currently, as some academic staff in the SWGS noted, some civil society organisations such as UWONET continue to have a female staff from the school as a member or board chair of the organisation for specified period. Other civil society organisations where the academic staff have continued to serve as board members include Action for Development (ACFODE), the Uganda Association of University Women (UAUW), and the Federation of African Women Educationists (FAWE-U), among others. During the early 1990s, the school was tasked with conducting research whose findings would be shared or disseminated with some of the civil society organisations and used to justify certain affirmative action policies from an informed theoretical and practical perspective. In other words, research findings from the school, helped the women activists in the movement generate informed debate on issues significant to women. One stakeholder from one of civil society organisation appreciated the outreach programme the SWGS engaged in by noting that:

> The establishment of the Department or SWGS was useful through their research because it helped to explain to the public why things regarding women and girls have to change. For instance, in education, the public needed to know why educating the girl child was important, so as an organisation we would approach the academic staff from the school to conduct research, and we would use the findings to justify and address women and girls' concerns. For us as civil society, we would get down to the people at the grassroots and explain to them the issues important to women's empowerment (female research participant, Civil Society organisation).

Hence, the women's movement acting through civil society organisations would be well equipped to sensitise the populace about the need for women's empowerment and gender equality in education, for instance. With regard to government, several academic staff acted as gender advisory members on

[1] The women's movement was constituted of actors working mostly in women's civil society organisations including women in politics and academia

a number of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) committees. One female academic staff members noted:

> At the time, we wanted to be part of all government programmes to ensure that gender issues were integrated. I remember during the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the government started having the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP) in 1997 as a framework guiding Uganda's socio-economic development, we made sure as academics we had to engage in it as technical people to ensure gender was mainstreamed. In fact, during the PEAP, the government would involve us as stakeholders from academia. We could sit on some of the committees of the different sectors within the PEAP, such as health, education, gender, among others (female academic research participant, Makerere University).

Additionally, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the demand for gender training among women who were in the women's movement and among policy makers in government was high. As one founding member of the school noted, "during the early days of the department, many people in civil society organisations, including government ministries would approach us and ask if we had short courses in gender for either two, three weeks, or a month's training." In order to provide support, the Department of Women Studies started short evening courses. The aim was to provide needed knowledge and skills in gender analysis in their field of work. Some of the short evening programmes, as the respondent indicated, included *Gender and the Law, Gender and Management, Mainstreaming Gender into Project Management, Gender and Health Care Management, Gender and Social Policy, Gender and Politics in Contemporary Uganda*, among others. The respondent further noted that the training would be conducted at the premises of the organisations that needed such training, while some were conducted at the school's premises where the participants from the civil society organisations and government MDAs would be sent to attend.

Besides the above, the school also provided support in the form of research and consultancy for civil society organisation, the product of which could be used to inform the agenda of their activism in the women's movement. Similar support (that is, consultancy) was also offered to government ministries and agencies to inform their policy-making processes. For instance, one academic staff members noted that when FOWODE, an NGO, initiated and championed gender budgeting in Uganda, FOWODE consulted and worked closely with the school to develop training manuals. These manuals were used to train staff in government ministries and district local governments on how to integrate gender into their budgets. Over time, when government embraced gender budgeting, the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic

Development expressed the need to go beyond gender budgeting and include other equity issues within the budget. The Ministry approached the school to develop gender and equity budgeting manuals. The school nominated some staff who worked on this assignment, and the school was further given the assignment of training technical staff in MDAs and district local governments in gender and equity budgeting.

Current Status

Presently, the school academics still engage with the civil society and the government. This time, however, the engagement is not as frequent as it was in the beginning, when the school had just started in the 1990s and up to the mid-2000s. As one academic member in the school noted, "in the early years, whenever there was an event organised by any civil society organisation on issues concerning women and gender, the school would be informed to send an academic member as a representative. Now days only a few organisations still do it. One reason could be that now there are many people with gender expertise who work in most of these organisations. The increase in the number of gender experts is partly due to the school's programme on gender studies at both the undergraduate and master's level, besides the contribution of other public and private universities churning out gender experts. Despite that, currently, some of the academic staff in the school indicated that they participate as board members in some of the civil society organisations either through school nomination or as individuals. Apparently, the women's civil society organisations where the school academics continue to participate as board members or chairpersons include the Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), Action for Development (ACFODE), National Association of Women organisation in Uganda (NAWOU), and Platform for Labour Action (PLA), among others. Here, the staff contributes their technical expertise as well as leadership skills.

The other form of support the staff in the school continues to offer to civil society organisations and the government is through consultancy. The consultancy, however, is often done on an individual basis yet initially civil society organisations would directly contact the school when they needed consultancy services. For instance, one respondent in one of the civil society organisation noted:

> In the early 2000s, there were few gender experts. So the only place you would get them was at the school of Women and Gender Studies. During this time, as organisations, we would directly contact the head of department, and they would send someone whom we would work with on issues of gender or for any consultancy services needed.

From all the above, it is clear that the school has endeavoured to fulfill its second mandate of community outreach, especially supporting the

women movement through actors who work in civil society organisations and government. Such engagement has had benefits for either party, that is, the school on the one hand, and the movement including the government. For instance, in the context of short courses when they were still running from the time the school had started, that is, from 1991 to 2010, participants gave feedback on the kind of gender issues that were needed to be mainstreamed and the challenges thereof. Such feedback enabled the school to review and design more short courses that were on demand but tailored to the needs of a particular organisation or MDAs. For instance, as one academic staff member noted:

> One time, some staff from the Ministry of Finance approached the school when they needed training in gender budgeting and gender and poverty reduction. We had to develop the short courses and have training in the form of a workshop with some of the technical staff of the ministry.

Such feedback echos the nature of the conceptualisation of engagement as reciprocal in nature, which *enriches both academia and the communities that are served* (Nampala, Kityo and Adipala (2016). It is also in tandem with Makerere University characterisation of outreach feedback for adaptation of curricula, and learning approaches, among others (Makerere University Strategic Plan 2020/30). Besides, being advisory or board members also helped academic staff understand how nonacademic institutions operate and raise resources to execute their respective mandates. Additionally, through these outreach activities, the School benefits in terms of maintaining its visibility and the role for which it was established. As one participant noted that:

> Despite the not–so–strong relationship now, some of us who are still collaborating with some of the civil society organisations, we have helped to keep the second mandate alive.

Challenges

Despite the above, fulfilling this second mandate has been met with some challenges. First, as the generation that founded the Women Studies Department became senior and over burdened by work responsibilities, their participation in outreach programmes or collaboration with the Women's Movement in civil society especially involving activism started to wane. On the side of the academicians, as one academic respondent noted, for instance:

> "The school started to focus on her mandate of teaching and research as required by the university, while activism in the public and communities was left to women in civil society and a few female politicians. In line with the university and human resources policy, new academic recruits were expected to have the relevant qualifications, apply for research grants, publish in reputable journals, create

> impact, and be accountable for their intellectual productivity. This took away time to engage in activism and other activities outside academia".

On the side of the civil society, many of the founding members joined politics where they felt an impact in terms of policies on women and gender issues could be influenced. According to Tripp (2000), during the 1990s and early 2000s, many women activists to the movement were appointed in several government ministries. Citing Miria Matembe, a feminist activist, Tripp (2000) states: "Women burst onto the political scene after the early 1990s, subsequently engaging in fundamental struggles against patriarchal control and exclusion, not only as individuals but also as collectivities of identity. This period was indeed the dawn of the Ugandan feminist movement as we know it now […] Women as NRM cadres challenged endless barriers created by colonialists and by dictators, thereby shaping society's perception of politics and the women's role in it (2013 int.)". Hence, when some of the senior women activists joined politics and government, the young generation whom they left behind to manage the organisations, was not oriented to the collaboration between activism and academia that once actively existed. Because of this very few civil society organisations, such as UWONET and ACFODE, continue to collaborate with the school.

Another challenge is the manner in which the women's movement in Uganda was constituted. It was a loose coalition of various women's organisations, and a few vocal women in politics. Citing Kwesiga (2003, p.21), the UN Women report (2018) noted that the movement was fragmented with no overarching coordination body. The failure was a lack of efforts to establish "an all-embracing and wholly acceptable single structure…" (Kwesiga 2003, pg. 21). The National Council of Women (UCW) could not coordinate and/or represent the interests of women's community groups (CBOs). The NCW and its successor, the National Association of Women of Uganda (NAWOU), failed to function as influential umbrella bodies. Fragmentation has negative implications for effectiveness due to the dispersal of effort, loss of a coherent message on policy issues, and sometimes outright internal conflicts (UN Women Report 2018). Additionally, the fragmentation creates a lack of clarity on legitimate interlocutors for the government and partners to engage with (UN Women, 2018). However, on the part of the NGOs, as the report further noted, it is impractical to maintain a single umbrella organisation due to the diverse interests, priorities, and strategic approaches to those issues, the geographic dispersal of activists and their organisations, and the diversities in terms of age, language, and resource availability. Hence, it had no formal structure and/or centerpiece, making it hard to have a clearly defined and agreed–upon agenda. Therefore, the collaboration

the academia depended on when a particular organisation needed the support of the school. In other words, it was the organisations that contacted the school for support, and the school would also invite the respective organisation's support it felt relevant especially if the school wanted to revise their academic programmes, among others. Despite the challenge of fragmentation, one of the founding members of the school said that in the 1990s and early 2000s, civil society organisations were few. So it was relatively easy to coalesce and champion the movement's agenda.

Presently, as one academic staff member from the school noted, the challenge of fragmentation has been made worse by politics, competition, and resources. The respondent noted thus:

> Now days, most women organisations operate as if they are in competition. It appears each organisation is struggling to stay afloat and relevant; hence, some rarely pool resources together to conduct activities; they unite them. For example, when it comes to 16 days of activism, every woman's organisation celebrates independently of each other. You find the school organises its own activities; the ACFODE organises their own, among others. Yet, in reality, we are supposed to work together. But this no longer happens according to one female academic Staff member.

Operating thus, means that the movement has metamorphosed into something else without cohesion, making it hard to come up with a consensus. Accordingly, the respondent further noted "that women lost their solidarity, their connection to each other and most significantly and sadly, their capacity to engage with women's issues collectively. Competition for resources has polarised, most women's organisations". This also explain the fact that, whereas in the past most civil society organisation would write to the school for collaboration on issues affecting women, presently such communication has ebbed. Civil society organisations find themselves in competition for financial resources to remain afloat, which negatively impacts their ability to collaborate with each other, including the school.

Another academic staff attributes the weakening of collaboration to the co-option of most civil society organisations by government.

> The strong relationship that bound the two, that is, academia and the women's movement, has scaled down significantly. It is no longer as strong as it used to be. I think one of the reasons is co-option by the government of most civil society organisations that are part of the women's movement. With such a scenario, it is hard for the school as well to effectively participate the women's movement, as there could be a mismatch between the interest of the government in which

> they co-opted and that of the school (Male academic staff).

This co-option points to the politicisation of the women's movement in Uganda. In other words, when the women's movement raises issues of women and gender to be attended to by the government, they are in effect demanding accountability. One female in one of the CSOs noted:

> "When CSOs start to demand accountability from the government on fulfillment of the promises they made to us as women, we are viewed as dissenters, opponents of the government, etc. This scenario has a disrupting effect on the activities of some of these organisation to the extent that their funding sources are monitored, if not cut off completely. With such intimidation, it has a spiral effect on some of their collaboration partners such as the SWGS.

Hence, in order not to entangle itself with such politicisation, because it is part of the government entity, the school opts to play it safe by not being vocal in support of civil society's demands from the government.

The other challenge was the change in ideology from a focus on women to gender and development. In other words, in the early years of the school, the programme was Women Studies, which resonated well with the women's movement is focus on women and girls issues in the society. Over time, however, the academia was criticised for focusing on only women and dealing mostly with women's organisations. According to Bart et al,. (1999), with the rise of postmodernism, many practitioners disdained the term woman. Gender studies was the preferred term rather than being part of women's studies. With such a change, there was a softening of the radicalism of focusing on women by some female academics in their collaboration with the women's movement. Indeed as one male academic staff member noted,

> The change from Women Studies to Gender Studies is partly responsible for attracting many male students to apply for masters in gender studies. Besides, because there are male staff in the school, it has also enabled many male undergraduate students at undergraduate to major in the discipline of gender and development (GAD). Otherwise, if there were only females as academic staff in the school, very few male students would major in GAD because they would assume it is a women's discipline. Also because the stance of focusing on only women has been challenged to include men, some civil society organisations whose focus is on females, find it rather not worth to collaborate with the school.

Yet on the side of the women's movement, their focus was and continues to be women. Although the school continues to offer its outreach services to some of the civil society organisations, the change in ideology

has added to the limited collaboration between the school and the movement, whose focus continues to be women. This claim is akin to what Bert et al,. (1999) noted that because of the change from women/ feminist studies to gender studies in the US "no "famous feminists" attend National Women's Studies Association meetings anymore, unless they are invited and paid. In fact, almost no women from major universities attend" (p.258). Such a claim serves to show how the change in ideology affects the relationship between the academic arm and the women's movement. This claim also mirrors the situation that has happened between the school and the women's movement in Uganda.

Conclusion and Way Forward to Improve on the SWGS Outreach Programme

From the above, it is clear that the school's second mandate of outreach is still functional, although the vitality with which it began has gradually waned as a result of some change within the school and the focus of the women's movement. Over time, this mandate has been affected by changes beyond the school's control, such as an increase in workload by the staff, the retirement of senior staff, and challenges within the CSOs, such as political interference and competition for resources, among others. However, for the school to rekindle their second mandate, it requires calling upon all the civil society organisations that were active in the establishment of the school to come together and reminisce on the collaborations. Annual conferences/ seminars between the school and the women's movement through a coalition of all CSOs dealing with women's rights needs to be held to reflect on the achievements of the collaborations, and set new agendas for the year(s) ahead.

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