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A gender and diversity inclusion audit at the University of Global Health Equity, Rwanda

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the University of Global Health Equity (UGHE)'s use of a Gender Equity and Diversity Inclusion Audit as a tool to mainstream gender and minority groups' inclusion. The internal audit analysed gender and minority groups' inclusiveness, sensitivity and/or awareness in institutional programmes, projects, plans, practices and policies, and identified the gaps within. This article gives an overview on why and how UGHE (Rwanda) created a single tool for an internal audit covering both gender equity and minority inclusion, implemented by its Center for Gender Equity (CGE) with the participation of students, staff and faculty from both its Butaro campus, and Kigali headquarters, in Rwanda. The tool is based on a four-part methodology that includes a desk review of official university documents, self-assessment questionnaires for employees and students, in-depth interviews, and consultative meetings with selected staff and UGHE leaders. The data collected through this robust audit allowed for the identification of gaps in the mainstreaming of gender and minority inclusion – the main ones are briefly discussed in the article – and this will guide the design of UGHE's strategy to correct these. The gender mainstreaming strategy's ultimate objective is advancing institutional equity.

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Gender-mainstreaming; diversity inclusion; gender equity; gender and diversity inclusion audit; participatory process

Background

The field of gender is ever-evolving, and so are relevant, practical, tools and methodologies for its mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is the 'integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programs, [...] to promote equality between women and men, and combat discrimination' (EIGE, n.d.). A gender audit is a tool used to assess the extent to which gender is being mainstreamed in organizational practices, plans, policies, programs, projects, provision of services, structures, proceedings, budgets and culture to accommodate changing discourses. It is also an important instrument in preparing and monitoring gender mainstreaming strategies and plans. With the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s participatory methodology and InterAction's two-fold gender audit strategy as blueprints, gender audits are continuously being improved to analyse gender-sensitivity and inclusiveness at different levels, and the central role organizations play in this (Moser, 2005).

A diversity assessment ensures a holistic audit process and is an important tool in determining the extent to which organizations are sensitive to different cultural or minority groups. Selzer and Foley (2018) define it as 'a process that reveals how bias manifests within an organization's

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informal and formal practices and cultural norms. It uses the voices of the people to reveal strengths and weaknesses in the culture' (p. 285). A candid diversity assessment takes into account individual needs, cultural and religious requirements, levels of knowledge by minority groups on provided services, and whether issues such as discrimination, harassment and disadvantage on grounds of race, sexual orientation, disability, age and other factors are thoroughly dealt with.

For this reason UGHE's task force conducted a singular audit in 2020, assessing both gender and minority needs to identify the various intersectionalities of the heterogeneous groups found within the UGHE community, as well as their priorities, and challenges, and the extent to which they are explored and integrated institutionally on all levels.

Methodology

Prior to undertaking this study, four practical tools were reviewed: the Diversity Audit Tool (DAT) (Cukier & Smarz, 2012), the International Labour Office Gender Audit Tool (International Labour Office, 2012), the InterAction Approach (InterAction, 2010) and a Gender Audit Tool developed for Higher Education Institutions in Africa by the University of Pretoria (University of Pretoria, 2014). With these references, the Center for Gender Equity (CGE) at UGHE developed its own tools to assess the administrative, academic, community engagement, monitoring and evaluation, communication, human resource and finance departments at UGHE, and the extent to which considerations are made for gender equity and diversity inclusion across all programs and projects.

The study's use of participatory methods started with the formation of a task force, made up of senior and junior staff and faculty, as well as student representatives from UGHE's Masters in Global Health Delivery (MGHD) and Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) programs. The Center developed quantitative and qualitative study tools and engaged the task force in reviewing them. After training the task force on the tool implementation and data collection, all data was analysed, organized in a report and shared with all staff for validation. The consolidated report will guide the ensuing gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy.

Student and staff surveys, with 59 and 50 questions respectively, were among the tools used. The self-assessment questionnaires collected information on: (1) demography of participants, (2) knowledge, experience and/or awareness of staff/faculty/students on gender and diversity concepts, (3) reflection of gender and diversity in organizational vision and strategy, according to respondents, (4) student and staff knowledge on organizational policies and (5) views on organizational culture, resources, and (planning & implementation; monitoring & evaluation) mechanisms. To ensure everyone's participation and remove any language barriers, the surveys – while designed in English – were both translated into Kinyarwanda, the local language.

Individual interviews were carried out to complement staff input. Interviewed staff represented all but one UGHE department. The omitted department felt that their input was represented through their engagement as a member of the audit task force – whereby reviewing and discussing the questionnaires, drafting the audit report, offered them the opportunity to provide feedback throughout the process. The purpose of these in-depth interviews was to further explore practices and gaps in relation to gender equity and diversity inclusion, and collect recommendations for the Centre.

Lastly, a quantitative policy review survey – adapted from the ILO gender and diversity tool – was used. It measured five key grouped variables: (1) conceptual clarity of gender equity and diversity inclusion, (2) use of sex or gender data, gender and diversity-sensitive language, (3) account of needs or objectives of genders and minority groups, (4) outline of interest, commitment and contribution of gender, and minority groups, and (5) indication of gender, and minority capacity building, meeting inclusion and involvement. The survey contained 20 quantitative questions, answered on a scale of 0 to 4, ranging from "no clarity" to "moderate clarity" with options for 'information not available' and 'not applicable'.

Collected via Google forms, policy review was done in a sequential manner, each with 2–4 independent reviewers. The information was downloaded, cleaned and exported into 'SPSS Version 23.0' for analysis, and responses were categorized. To evaluate inter-rater reliability, 'the extent to which two or more raters (or observers, coders, examiners) agree' (Lange, 2016), Cohen's kappa test was used, and descriptive statistics were applied to summarize the data.

The combination of these methods and tools was employed to collect comprehensive data from the stakeholders, triangulate the findings in order to produce valid and generalizable data on gender and diversity inclusion within the organization, and aid in the development of a gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy.

It is within this framework that the gender and diversity inclusion audit was launched at UGHE, to study both its equitable and inclusive practices, through this participatory audit tool that was contextualized to fit the needs and culture of the university and its community.

Lessons learnt and limitations

Before starting the audit, an initial orientation session was conducted for the task force members. The aim of the session was to ensure that they had the necessary knowledge and skills with gender and diversity concepts to accurately perform the review of policies and other official university documents, and adequately undertake general data analysis and discussion. This is recommended for all subsequent audits – which are necessary in order to determine and reflect any changes in perception, knowledge and practices. However, as a staff pointed out during the validation process, the fact that gender and diversity concepts were mostly found to be 'not applicable' to the majority of the reviewed policies, could be indicative of the need for a more in-depth training of the reviewers.

Determining which groups consist as minorities is crucial for the audit process. Some literature includes 'women, visible minorities, aboriginal people, persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people' (Cukier & Smarz, 2012, p. 49), while others, such as, the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner insist on defining the term 'minority' to fit the context. As their website (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, n.d.) states, 'The absence of consistency in understanding who is a minority is a recurring stumbling block to the full and effective realization of the human rights of minorities'. Organizations conducting audits need to identify and define 'minorities' in their own local contexts, with a consistent special consideration for the gender and disabilities dimensions, because of the importance and similarities of these two groups in all cultures and nations. While the audit collected participants' thoughts on which groups consisted as minorities at UGHE, the Centre, along with UGHE Leadership, need to agree on these groups and ensure they are included in the planning, budgeting and implementation of institutional goals. This will ensure that targeted actions are accurately monitored and evaluated for their intended impact.

In this same spirit, it is advisable to include in subsequent audits input from all those living and working with UGHE, such as contractors, and members from the surrounding community. They can provide relevant information on how UGHE mainstreams gender and diversity in its organizational structure and functioning, as well as avenues for changes and improvements.

In this first audit, efforts to collect input from as many different groups as possible included a 50/50 gender representation in the taskforce, 59% female representation among the interviewees, UGHE students engaged throughout the process and all UGHE's departments involved either as interviewees or as members of the task force. Despite this, input from junior female staff was at

a low 37%. In one of the first gender audits conducted in Africa, Moser (2005) suggested allocating time during work hours to encourage staff and faculty to complete surveys and other audit components.

Emerging results and ways forward

Wherever possible, organizations should start working on identified gaps, even if the audit process is not yet finalized. While the audit was still ongoing, the Center began implementing some of the recommendations coming out of it. The first recommendation carried out was to have regular training – based on staff and students' identified needs, and including Butaro community members – to increase knowledge and skills in different gender equity and diversity inclusion concepts, and provide regular opportunity for open discussions, as well as correction of personal biases. The Center now oversees a committee organizing monthly town hall meetings, and has created an online documentation centre with resources on gender and diversity; health; social justice; sexual and reproductive health; history.

A major gap highlighted was the lack of appropriate sexual harassment reporting mechanisms to complement the extensive UGHE sexual harassment policy. Following the audit, the Center worked on a Gender and Diversity Policy, as well as a Sexual Harassment Incident Form. Although it is not the mandate of UGHE to address such issues among its contractors, the institution realized the need to include accountability mechanisms in its contractual agreements in order to protect contractors not directly hired by UGHE. In line with this, it was recommended to create an environment where constructive feedback between junior staff and their supervisors can be easily shared and received. The Center plans to organize trainings focusing on this.

Another recommendation was to include gender and diversity inclusion mandates in all policies, and to integrate them better in organizational practices. While use of gender-sensitive or neutral language was found to be adequate in UGHE's policies, use of diversity-sensitive language was limited, and 34% of reviews indicated the need to review and refine policies to reflect equity. Along with improving use of inclusive language, the Center will work with UGHE's Monitoring & Evaluation team to develop other indicators and tools to plan, monitor, and report inclusive and mainstreaming efforts, many of which currently go unreported.

Formalizing equitable and inclusive hiring processes through policies and including a quota for female representation in all departments were other suggestions made in order to tackle the gender imbalance in the staff composition. In preparation to implement this, the HR department has been in training on, and is hiring a focal person for, the Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment (PSEAH) who will join a committee that includes the Center for Gender Equity staff. This committee's work will be to revise the HR Manual, existing policies and create new ones in line with the audit recommendations and reflect new knowledge acquired from recent training.

Another recurring recommendation was to explicitly state equity and diversity goals in all institutional documents, starting with the University's 5-year strategic plan, and including policies, manuals, departmental plans and budgets. Whether these goals are aimed internally towards the institution or externally for the community, it was advised to conduct needs-assessments to hear from the beneficiaries themselves on which gaps to prioritize, and their input on the appropriate measures. Along with this, staff requested guidelines on how to practically integrate and implement the concepts of 'gender equity' and 'diversity inclusion' in their departments' work.

Although UGHE's infrastructure was commended for being a wheel-chair friendly campus, increased accessibility was recommended in order to accommodate wider physical and learning disabilities in the classroom, such as hearing disabilities and ADHD. In addition to the mothers'

rooms on both UGHE campuses, a suggestion was made to improve on family-friendly services and policies, for example by facilitating child-care services or virtual work for parents. This suggestion is among those that the previously mentioned committee will review for integration within the organizational culture, and to ensure its implementation does not go against national labour law.

Following the validation meeting, staff's thoughts and recommendations on the process and content of the initial report were incorporated into a final report, which can be found <https://ughe.org/ughes-gender-and-diversity-audit-report> which will be used to develop the gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy, gender and diversity inclusion documents at UGHE – with the aim of creating sustainable changes.

Conclusion

This participatory gender and diversity inclusion audit prioritized the contribution of all student, faculty and students at each step of the audit, from its design to the validation meeting. It proved instrumental in finding gaps and areas of improvement at the University of Global Health Equity, and will shape the upcoming gender and diversity mainstreaming strategies and plans. As the first of its kind, it will also serve as reference for future departmental plans, and act as a starting point for subsequent audits, which UGHE hopes to conduct every 3–5 years.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Tsion Yohannes, Chair, Center for Gender Equity, is responsible for mainstreaming gender in the academic, research, and community development projects of UGHE. Before this role, she was engaged with UGHE as the chief organizer for Women Leaders in Global Health Conference of 2019. Prior to joining University of Global Health Equity in Rwanda, Tsion was engaged in the production of a Preliminary Gender Profile of Ethiopia and a National Assessment on Accessibility and Availability of Rehabilitative and Reintegration Services for Survivors of Violence for UN Women Ethiopia. She has also been working for 16 years as a gender expert and consultant with a number of international and local non-governmental and government organizations through participating in community engagement projects, conducting research, evaluations, gender analysis, audit and impact assessments in relation to various thematic areas such as reproductive health, child rights and other development issues. Her roles also included giving training on gender-based violence, gender equality and gender mainstreaming to schools, university students, community members and technical staff in international and local NGOs. Some of the organizations she has previously worked with include Addis Ababa University, World Bank, UNWomen Ethiopia, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), Women in Self-Employment (WISE), Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (DED), Menschen Fuer Menschen, Mary Joy Aid Through Development, USAID- ATEP, Oxfam Canada and Novib, British Council etc.

Deborah Umucyo (she/her), is the Coordinator for the Center for Gender Equity. She is a graduate from California Baptist University, with a B.A. in International Studies, a minor in Anthropology, and a concentration in International Business. Prior to joining UGHE, she taught at the Guangxi Normal University for Normalities, Chongzuo, Southern China. Umucyo is passionate about all things gender and Pan-African, as well as past and current works being done to actively dismantle systems of oppression against marginalized groups, specifically in relation to women, and girls, LGBTQIA+, people living with disabilities and the socioeconomically vulnerable. As an Impact Officer for the Kigali Global Shapers Hub, an initiative of the World Economic Forum, she evaluates the outcomes versus intent of the hub's projects in the community. She hopes to challenge power dynamics in gender and socioeconomics.

Prof. Agnes Binagwaho, MD, M(Ped), PhD, is the Vice Chancellor of the University of Global Health Equity (UGHE); a Rwandan pediatrician who completed her MD at the Université Libre de Bruxelles and her MA in Pediatrics MA at the Université de Bretagne Occidentale. She was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Science from Dartmouth College and earned a Doctorate of Philosophy from the University of Rwanda College of Business and Economics. She worked for 20 years in the public health sector in Rwanda in high-level government positions, first as the Executive Secretary of Rwanda's National AIDS Control Commission, then as Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health, and then for five

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