

## **Addressing the Issue of Gender Equity in the Presidency of the University System in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Region**

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### **Abstract**

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a regional economic grouping of 15 countries whose common vision is to promote economic, social and political development and growth. Arguably, sustainable growth can be realized if there is equal access to all positions of power and influence in the area, but an investigation of 117 universities revealed that while 105 universities (89.7%) are led by male presidents, only 12 universities (10.3%) are led by females. Only 6 of the 15 countries had institutions led by female presidents. This paper postulates that the gender gap in the university presidency is attributable to the theory of hierarchical marginalization—a theory that avers that men predominantly seek to control productive sectors of the economy, while relegating women to the reproductive sectors that have comparatively less influence. The paper concludes by suggesting ways that SADC countries could address gender equity in the university leadership with the goal advancing development in the region.

### **Introduction**

This paper addresses the issue of gender equity in the presidency of the university system in the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The university president, also referred to as vice chancellor or rector by some public institutions, shall refer to the chief executive officer of the university and not the ceremonial position performed by heads of state or their designees in some public institutions. The first section of the paper provides the context—the general broader vision of SADC, and specifically the vision and policy drivers for gender equity in higher education. The second part reviews the literature that calibrates SADC gender equity protocols. The final section examines the study and concludes the paper by suggesting ways that SADC countries could implement gender equity in the university leadership with the view of advancing development in the region. Areas of further study are also identified in the conclusion.

### **Contextual Background of SADC**

Southern African Development Community (SADC) is a grouping of 15 independent countries, namely: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The “vision is one of a common future, within a regional community that will ensure economic well-being, improvement of the standards of living and quality of life, freedom and

social justice; peace and security for the peoples of Southern Africa” (SADC, para. 5). In other words, SADC exists to offer mutual cooperation in economic, social, and political activities among member states through sharing information and experiences, and pooling resources with the goal of building regional capacity.

**Political overview.** Politically, SADC member states inherited different governance systems from a host of different colonizers, i.e., Anglo-Saxon [Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania Zambia, Zimbabwe], Lusophone [Angola, Mozambique], and Francophone [Democratic Republic of the Congo] (Hahn 2005). During the colonial era a dual system of governance was the *modus operandi* with policies that gave access to resources, educational and employment opportunities for the colonizers, while marginalizing the indigenous people, particularly women.

As post colonial states SADC countries face the herculean task of nation building by correcting injustices left by the colonial powers—the main focus being ensuring a decent standard of living through good governance. In this realm, there are many challenges that SADC countries face, including poverty, hunger, disease, discrimination against women, unemployment, environmental degradation, and protracted civil wars, all of which disproportionately affect women (Mama 2008; SADC 2005; United Nations University, 2009). The dysfunction of some member states due to civil war and other problems points to the lack of collective good governance that potentially undermine the broader vision of SADC.

**Economic overview.** SADC’s collective economies are generally agro-based with the majority of the population living in rural areas (SADC 2009). “About 70% of the population in the region lives below the poverty line of US\$2 a day with about 40% below the US\$1 a day absolute poverty line” (SADC 2004, 3). Women are the primary providers for their families and yet they still get lower wages than men, and comprise the majority of the informal sector and lower wage workforce. Women are the majority of agricultural workers and food providers for their families.

Despite high levels of poverty, the region is also endowed with rich minerals: Diamonds and gold in South Africa, Botswana, Angola, DRC, Zimbabwe, and copper in Zambia, just to name a few. Despite such an endowment of resources, the collective SADC economies are shrinking, a problem caused by bad governance and political instability (Hahn 2005). The shrinking economies and bad governance present serious challenges for effective implementation of programs at both the state and regional levels due to a lack of financial resources and efficient systems (Watson, Motala, and Kotecha 2009). Furthermore, member states have disparities in infrastructure such as roads, transport, information and technology, creating an uneven playing field that would make harmonization and integration difficult to implement.

**Social overview.** Not only are the economies shrinking, but the region faces a serious AIDS pandemic. “There are an estimated 14 million HIV-infected people in the SADC region, representing approximately 37 percent of the global total; women and girls being the hardest hit as both the infected and affected” (SARDC 2008, 13). The prevalence of HIV/AIDS is now at a stage that is termed hyper-endemic, i.e., more than 5% of the population infected, and 9 countries

(Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Mozambique, Malawi, Swaziland, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe) have infection rates that range from 14.1%-33.4 (Southern Association Regional Universities Association [SARUA] 2009). In this region, HIV and AIDS pandemic have severely affected the productive population, potentially cutting economic gains of the region (SADC 2004). The welfare of the infected becomes the responsibility of state governments, thereby putting a great deal of pressure on already bleeding economies and overstretched social services.

The political, economic and social crises that girls and women face remain one of the critical challenges in the region (SADC 2006). Leaving women out of the echelons of power, particularly in higher education, potentially jeopardizes SADC's efforts of sustainable growth. Feifers, Christie, and Ferdos advocated for the inclusion of women stating, "Legislators, academic leaders and equal opportunity committees tend to argue that women bring a different perspective to a male-dominated workplace, a fresh way of looking at things and perhaps a more varied way of carrying out the various academic tasks expected of teachers and researchers" (Feifers, Christie, and Ferdos 2006, 17). Inequity in the SADC may be explained using the theory of hierarchical marginalization.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The phenomenon of marginalizing girls and women in positions, where power and crucial decisions are made, has been described as hierarchical marginalization (Henig and Henig, 2005), and vertical marginalization (Gunawardena, et al. 2004). Generally, the under-representation of women in productive sectors is a worldwide issue that is well documented (UNESCO 2000; ILO 2009; SADC 2004).

The dynamics of hierarchical marginalization in the SADC take place in three dimensions—economics, power, and culture. The inequalities manifest themselves in women's limited access to, and control over productive resources, social services and socioeconomic opportunities and low representation in decision making spheres" (SADC 2009, 2). This corroborates the findings of Odaga and Heneveld (1995) who observed that education outcomes for girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are influenced by a combination of factors that are socio-cultural, socio-economic, political, and how schools educate girls. Following Odaga and Heneveld's assertion, one can argue that the hierarchical marginalization of women is embedded in the culture of the region.

In the SADC region, the underrepresentation and marginalization of females in positions of influence starts at a very early age (FAWE 2000). Among poor families, opportunities for attending school are usually given to boys first due to perceived future economic benefits to the family. The reasoning is that educating a girl will not bring economic benefits to her immediate family. Instead, the benefits will be enjoyed by her future husband as she literally becomes his property. Consequently, many uneducated women find themselves in subservient positions and with no legal rights (SADC 2005). This culturally embedded disadvantage creates an uneven

playing field that creates pipeline issues in higher education, politics, and economics, resulting in a dearth of competent, experienced, and qualified women at any leadership positions.

Not only are girls and women's educational opportunities sacrificed for the advancement of males, women also lack leadership opportunities at the political level (SADC 2005). For example, all countries in the SADC are led by male presidents. Currently, there are no women holding the powerful and critical positions of minister of defense, minister of finance, or minister of information. The gender disparities are mostly felt in higher education in the SADC as Kotecha postulated "No where are these [gender] disparities more conspicuous than in higher education in the [SADC] region" (Kotecha 2009, 38).

The need to include and educate girls and women is very critical for any country and critical for developing countries (MacGregor, 2008). Former United Nations Secretary, Kofi Annan, underscored the importance when he stated, "there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls" (as cited in Kotecha, 2009, 38). Education equity improves higher economic growth as society makes better use of its resources. Better educated mothers ensure good care for their families as manifested in good nutrition, reduced poverty, reduced maternal and infant mortality rates, bargaining for resources for families, and ensuring education for the next generation (African Development Forum, 2008). Thus, when it comes to addressing broader gender inequities, higher education ought to be a top priority. Higher education institutions in Africa should take their rightful positions as agents of social change that shape the norms and values that include gender ideologies and identities (Mama 2008).

## **Literature Review**

Gender equity in the university presidency is the central concern of this paper. There is sufficient literature that documents gender gaps in leadership positions in higher education worldwide, such as Australia (Kjeldal, Rindfleish, and Sheridan 2005); the Commonwealth Countries (Morley 2003); (i.e., former British colonies, the majority of SADC being former British Colonies) the United States (Niddifer 2001); and Africa (Mama 2008).

The trend in all of the SADC region higher education governance is the gendering of leadership positions, with women under-represented in middle management and executive positions (Dunne and Sayed 2005; Forum for African Women Educationalists 2009; Kotecha 2009; Mama 2008; Watson, Motala, and Kotecha 2009). The underrepresentation of women in higher education in Africa is alarming, as only 6% of African women participate as faculty (FAWE 2010; Mama 2008). Mama conducted an extensive study of African universities and made the observation that, "no matter what the mission statements may proclaim, universities operate in ways that sustain and reproduce unequal gender relations in both the social and the intellectual life of those inhabiting it" (Mama 2008, 4).

Consequently, higher education is a chilly climate for women, (Niddifer, 2001) and more so in Africa where the university is a microcosm of the patriarchal societies that give very little or no attention to equity issues. The culture on African university campuses perpetuates the fundamental ills that universities are supposed to fight and change. These include violence

against women on campuses, intimidation, sexual harassment, fear (Gaidzanwa 2007) and devaluing the scholarship of women and relegating women to lower academic ranks (Mama 2008).

For any meaningful growth to be realized it becomes imperative to appoint women to leadership positions in higher education who challenge these practices (The Forum for African Women Educationalists 2009). Furthermore, many African nations have made enormous progress with regard to including commitments to gender equality in the constitutions, laws, and national policies since independence (Mama 2008). However, these commitments must be translated into action. As foundational institutions, universities are expected to play an integral part in advancing gender equity in order to bring about democratization and sustainable development.

The path to equity realization will involve the development of a strategy to achieve equality (Dune and Sayed 2002). Dune and Sayed argued that, while equality may mean sameness, equity evokes different meanings, such as *equal access* to resources and opportunities, *fairness* in treatment in the distribution of resources and opportunities, and fairness in taking opportunities and resources from a privileged class in order to meet the needs of the less privileged. This distinction is critical to make in light of the gender differences rooted in the culture and history of Southern Africa, where women have been marginalized in leadership positions (SADC 2005). Dune and Sayed argued that in post colonial states higher education institutions “were established as symbols of the newly found nationhood and as the new engines for autonomous and autocratic development” (Dune and Sayed 2002, 52). In light of their argument, it becomes necessary to identify the SADC policy framework for higher education as it relates to gender equity and to calibrate the achievements of SADC in appointing women to leadership positions.

Momsen (2004) identified at least five approaches to gender and development issues which have evolved over the years. First is the welfare approach, which ended in the early 70’s, and categorized men as the agents of developments, and women as mere dependents whose typical roles were that of a mother and wife. Under this strategy, government policies were enacted to promote and support women as mothers and wives and not as development agents.

The second development strategy is from the international women decade is women in development (WID) which begun in the mid 70’s and concluded in mid 80’s. During that era, the strategy involved women as agents of development through grants earmarked for income generation projects. This approach moved women from being mere dependents to productive people in society, but at a lesser level than that of men. This approach can be categorized as a more benevolent approach to women as it recognized women as equal players, i.e., consumers and knowledge creators in development issues.

The third approach is gender and development (GAD) approach which perceives gender as a social construct. It focuses on the power relations between men and women where patterns of behavior and roles are already prescribed by society. The hallmark of this approach is embedded in the notion that unequal power relations between men and women create an uneven

playing field. Therefore, institutions such as higher education need to create equal access to economic and social resources for both men and women to thrive. This approach does not advocate that women and men are equal, but that access to resources must be equal.

The fourth is the women and development (WAD) approach which recognizes the unpaid domestic work that women do. Issues like maternity leave and child-rearing are critical considerations of this approach. In academia this may mean stopping the tenure clock and paying women full salaries while they are on maternity leave in order to recognize the productive roles that women play in society. The WAD approach that has gained popularity in the SADC region is gender mainstreaming which “refers to the process of identifying gender gaps and making women’s, men’s, girls’ and boys’ concerns and experiences integral to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all spheres of life” (SADC 2007, 4). Mama (2008) noted that after the Beijing conference on women, the WAD approach heightened consciousness among female scholars in African universities. Women started demanding policies and spaces in university governance.

The fifth category is empowerment approach which focuses on giving women the skills and knowledge which lead to becoming bona fide social change agents who do not depend on men and governments for support. This approach does not treat women as recipients of benevolent support from government, but instead, perceives women as equal players with men in terms of employment creation. However, how these approaches have been used to address gender equity and their effectiveness in the SADC region still needs to be investigated.

### **Equity and SADC Protocols**

As noted earlier, gender equity remains a challenge in the SADC region, particularly in higher education. To highlight the gender gap in higher education, the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA 2007) report listed 40 members, only 2 (5%) were female, and the rest 38 (95%) were male.

To correct the gender imbalances that exist in all forms of governance, SADC created a special unit targeting gender issues—SADC Gender Unity, based in Gaborone, Botswana. The unit was established in 1996 with a primary advisory role to the SADC Secretariat on issues pertaining to gender mainstreaming, empowerment, and providing strategic advice on gender issues (SADC 2009). SADC’s efforts in addressing gender are largely informed by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPFA) resulting from the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing (1995). Later, the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, and its 1998 Addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women and Children; and the Millennium Development Goals also helped to redefine SADC’s vision on gender equity.

Several positive outcomes have resulted from the creation of the Gender Unit. Of critical importance is the SADC Consultative Conference on Gender and Development held in Gaborone, Botswana in 2005. Out of this conference came the birth of the SADC Strategic Implementation Framework (SSIF) on gender, which guides member states in planning gender

programs from 2006 through 2010, such as state governance, media, education and training and others (SADC, 2005). The implementation framework on gender was fine-tuned in another document—SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2007).

The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2007) highlights two agendas—gender mainstreaming and gender equality by 2015. The first agenda involves the adoption of gender mainstreaming as the signature strategy of improving access and equality. The term gender mainstreaming was coined at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The over-arching goal is for women and men to benefit equally in all aspects of political, economic, and social spheres of life. UNESCO (2000) summed up the essence of gender mainstreaming “Gender mainstreaming thus underscores the principle that there can be no sustainable development as long as discrimination of one of the two sexes/genders exists” (UNESCO 2000, 5). Implied is the belief that the concerns of all citizens are a priority, and are considered and addressed at the policy formulation and implementation of any decision making body—be it at the political, economic, or social levels.

The second goal was to achieve equality for all, particularly women, including representation in governance at all levels of decision making, providing equal constitutional and legal rights, equal access to employment and productive resources, eradication of gender-based violence, and affordable quality health care. Member states are committed to fighting the HIV and AIDS pandemic by ensuring universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support of people infected and affected. Emphasized is the participation of women in peace building and conflict resolution processes, upholding freedom of expression by all as reflected in the media, communication and information technology. The framework states that in order to achieve gender parity and sensitivity to gender planning, member states shall allocate resources and strengthen regional and national gender machineries. There are several layers of responsibility and reporting that range from heads of states, council of ministers, the integrated committee of ministers, the committee of ministers responsible for gender, the committee of senior officials responsible for gender, SADC National Committees, the Regional Advisory forum on gender and Development, and the SADC secretariat (SADC 2007).

The development of these protocols shows the commitment by SADC to make gender parity a priority and an integral part of achieving sustainable development. Progress has been made where the Gender Unit of SADC works with ministries of member states related to gender issues by advising, guiding, and monitoring the process of gender mainstreaming. What follows is a discussion of gender equity in the governance of higher education since the adoption of the strategy of gender mainstreaming.

### **Gender Equity in Higher Education Governance in the SADC**

Regional efforts to address higher education are contained in the SADC protocol of Education and Training, which was signed by member states in 1997 and became effective in 2000. Following this protocol, many initiatives have been undertaken under the direction of the SADC Gender Unit. According to Hahn (2005), the protocol seeks regional cooperation through

concerted efforts in education and training to equip the region with the necessary competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The protocol adopts three dimensions to achieve efforts in education and training. First is the academic dimension that seeks to establish and promote regional centers of specialization. Second is the institutional and political dimension that seeks to address the sustainability of cooperative efforts, avoiding duplication, involvement of stakeholders, harmonization and standardization to the education and training systems, and acknowledgement of different paces in implementing the protocol. The third dimension focuses on promoting equality, equitable participation and mutual benefit of all partners. Specific to gender equity are efforts to increase access by widening provision and access of education and training to all. The International Labor organization (ILO) postulated that the “inclusion of fundamental principles and rights in regional economic integration and free trade agreements can play a major role in reducing discrimination at work” (ILO 2009, ix).

It is rather surprising that the protocol does not make mention of anything about strategies to promote gender equity in the university system, particularly the presidency or vice chancellorship. Worse still, according to Hahn (2005), the protocol is not a legally binding political agenda for member states to abide by as it is merely a memorandum of understanding. However, it is still important to evaluate how SADC protocols and rhetoric on gender equity have translated into action.

### **Transformation of Higher Education in SADC**

An interesting development after the SADC protocol on Education and Training in 1997 was the formation of the SADC Vice Chancellors Association in 2004 in Namibia (Hahn 2005). The major function of this body was the advisory role it played pertaining to issues in higher education. In 2007 the Vice Chancellors association changed its name to Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA), an independent institution that has its own chief executive officer. The association represents vice chancellors of public universities in the SADC region with the mission “to promote, strengthen and increase higher education, research and innovation through expanded inter-institutional collaboration and capacity building initiatives throughout the region. [SARUA] promotes universities as major contributors towards building knowledge economies, national and regional socio-economic and cultural development, and for the eradication of poverty” (SARUA 2009, 2).

To date, SARUA has conducted extensive research aimed at finding solutions to problems that higher education faces, such as HIV/AIDS and poverty. SARUA has also conducted baseline studies on higher education, science and technology, regional engineering, and information technology. SARUA has acquired international funds to make this organization independent (SARUA 2007). However, the majority of the vice chancellors, as recorded in both SARUA reports of 2007 and 2008, are male, reflecting a lack of gender equity in the university chancellorship (SARUA 2007, 2008). There are virtually no women in the executive committee of SARUA who are vice chancellors with the exception of the CEO, who is female. In fact,



Mama (2008) posited that generally in African universities, only 6% of women are professors, and there is gross under-representation of women at senior academic and administrative levels.

Since women are the disproportionate victims of poverty and other societal ills in the region, SARUA's ambitious goals can only be achieved if women are included at the decision making process. Continued exclusion of women in university leadership deprives universities of the social capital which women could bring in the form of social networks, values, and beliefs that contribute to institutional climate (Mama 2008). With the SADC protocol on Education and Training of 1997 in hand, and adopting gender mainstreaming as the strategy of choice for achieving gender equity and equality at all levels of governance, it becomes imperative to calibrate SADC's efforts in addressing gender equity in universities, an interest that led to the present study.

### **The Study**

The beginnings of this study were anchored in investigating the progress made by SADC in addressing gender equity in higher education leadership by focusing on gender mainstreaming as the strategy of achieving gender equity and equality. SADC countries are signatories to many protocols that seek to address gender issues. Therefore, it is imperative to document the progress made so far in addressing gender equity in higher education.

Studies by Dunne and Sayed (2002), Watson, Motala, and Kotecha,(2009), and Mama (2008), concluded that universities in the SADC region are predominantly led by males and noted the under-representation of women in leadership in higher education as a serious concern. Universities are supposed to be vehicles of national transformation where opportunities are available to both men and women (Mama 2008). Thus, another aim of this paper is to investigate whether universities in the SADC region are opening spaces for women in the vice chancellorship in order to bring gender equity.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which the strategy of gender mainstreaming, as adopted in 1997, has closed gender gaps in the university presidency of the SADC region. The assumption is that prior to 1997, there was no university in the SADC led by a female vice chancellor.

**Participants and sampling.** The approach mainly consisted of largely an internet search of institutions described as a university in each of the SADC countries. Technical colleges, teachers colleges, polytechnics, and technikons, and institutes, or any specialized colleges were not considered in this research. For South Africa, the number includes all the 23 public universities, but the same could not be established for the rest of the countries as it was difficult to establish which universities were private and public. In cases where it proved difficult to obtain information from the internet, the researcher made telephone calls to embassies in the United States or sent e-mails to the respective institutions. In addition, a literature search that

included policy papers, official reports, and higher education protocols about the SADC were conducted.

**Instrumentation and data analysis.** This study employed a quantitative design by performing an internet search on universities in the SADC region. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, consisting of frequency tables and graphs.

## **Results**

Results of the search yielded 117 universities. What was common across all the SADC countries was the wide gender gap marked by male dominance and under-representation of women in the vice chancellorship, i.e., 89.7% males compared to 10.3 % females. Table 1 below shows the distribution of universities in the SADC region and in each individual country in the current study. Ten (66.7%) of the SADC countries, namely Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, and Zambia did not have women as vice chancellors of universities, while 5 (33.3%) countries had universities led by female vice chancellors. South Africa had the highest number of women leading universities, i.e., 6 out of 23 (26.1%), followed by Madagascar, 25%; Zimbabwe, 18.2%; and Tanzania at 8.7%. Only four countries, South Africa, Madagascar, and Zimbabwe, had figures above the SADC average (10.3%).

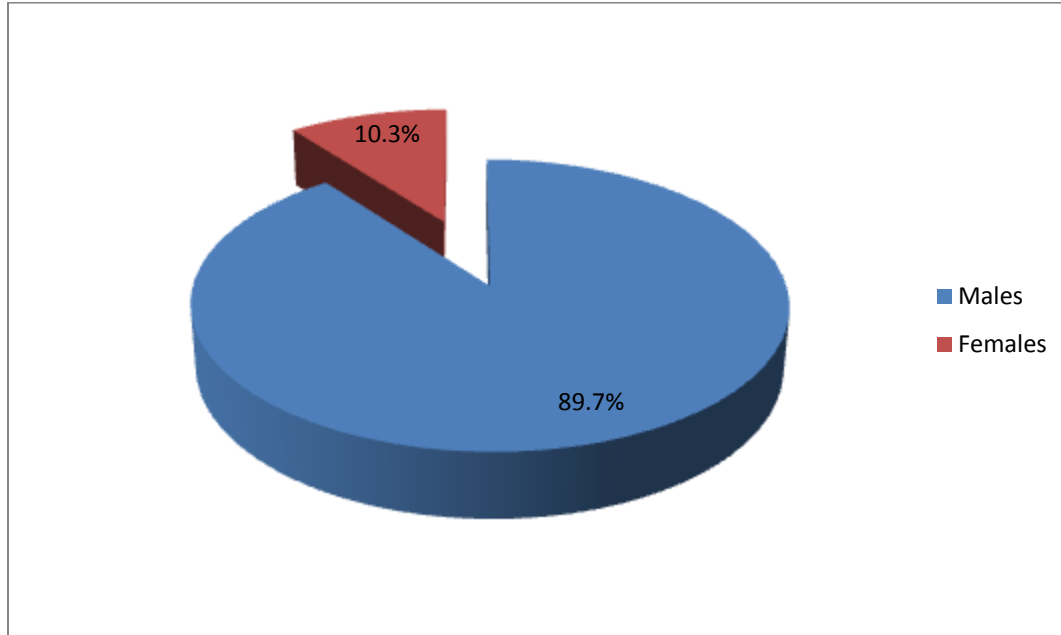
**Table 1.**  
Comparative analysis of the vice chancellorship in the SADC region  
(Number of countries, N=15).

Country	Total no. of Universities	VC*			
		Gender			
		Male	Female	% of Males	% of Females
Angola	12	12	0	100	0
Botswana	1	1	0	100	0
Democratic Republic of Congo	14	14	0	100	0
Lesotho	1	1	0	100	0
Madagascar	4	3	1	75	25
Malawi	4	4	0	100	0
Mauritius	3	3	0	100	0
Mozambique	11	11	0	100	0
Namibia	1	1	0	100	0
Seychelles	1	0	1	0	100
South Africa	23	17	6	73.9	26.1
Swaziland	1	1	0	100	0
Tanzania	23	21	2	91.3	8.7
Zambia	7	7	0	100	0
Zimbabwe	11	9	2	81.2	18.2
SADC Region	117	105	12	89.7	10.3

VC\*=Vice Chancellor

The results revealed that the number of universities differs from country to country, with South Africa and Tanzania having the largest number of universities, i.e., 23 each. Five countries had just one university each, while 4 had universities that ranged from 3 to 7, and the remaining four countries, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique and Zimbabwe had universities that ranged from 11 to 14 (See Table 1)

The trend in the whole of the SADC region is better demonstrated in Figure 1 below



**Figure 1.** Distribution of the vice chancellorship in the SADC region.

### Discussion

Common across the SADC region is the striking male dominance in the university vice chancellorship, suggesting under-representation of women in the vice chancellorship as reflected in Table 1 and Figure 1. It appears that from 1997, that is, 13 years after member states signed the SADC protocol on education and Training and the Declaration on Gender and Development by member countries, the progress made has been slow, considering the time frame of achieving gender parity in all forms of governance is 2015. Assuming that there were no female vice chancellors before 1997, the 10.3% rise over 13 years in the number of female executives implies that the rate at which females were appointed to the vice chancellorship was 0.79% a year. It must be noted that absence of data from 1997 about gender equity in the vice chancellorship makes exact comparisons difficult. However, the absence of female vice chancellors in the executive committee of the vice chancellors association from 2005 to the present (SARUA Annual Report, 2007, 2008), confirms the results of this study that reveals wide gender gaps in the vice chancellorship in the SADC region. The results also mirror the study by Singh (as cited in Gunawardena et al. 2004), that revealed the under-representation of women in the vice chancellorship, which is currently at 9%, in the Commonwealth.

Considering that a goal of SADC is to achieve gender parity in all forms of governance by 2015, it is crystal clear that SADC's efforts in addressing gender equity have not yet materialized in university governance, as revealed by the present study. Ten countries in the study did not have a female vice chancellor leading a university. The apparent under-representation of women, among other reasons, is attributed to hierarchical marginalization, given the historical and cultural heritage. In addition, there are "embedded male patterns of behaviour in academia that operate beneath the façade of policies and rules put into place to counter inequity" (Kjeldal, Rindfleisch, and Sheridan 2005, 431). For SADC universities, the

numbers suggest that women face forms of discrimination, and yet UNESCO (2000, 5) states that “Gender mainstreaming...underscores the principle that there can be no sustainable development as long as discrimination of one of the two sexes/genders exists”

In most Sub-Saharan Africa, SADC included, societies are patriarchal (Lumumba as cited in *Forum for Women Educationalists* 2009). Having men as leaders is an internalized norm that is generally accepted. It is not surprising, therefore, that the continued male dominance in higher education institutions in the SADC has succeeded despite the formal protocols of gender equity on education and training. Sadly, this societal norm leaves women out in the corridors of power, leaving men to address issues that mostly affect women, such as the “five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence” (Young as cited in Morley, 2005, 112). Fighting these forms of oppression requires the efforts of both men and women to achieve equity, equality and economic development. As such, the under-representation of women chancellors remains a big concern in higher education in the SADC, and will continue to seriously undermine the realization of equitability in women ((Watson, Motala, and Kotecha, 2009).

Gender mainstreaming requires strong political will and radical changes to take place in the higher education governance. The wide gender gaps in the vice chancellorship in the SADC region point to questions posed by Morley (2007, 610) about the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming. “When interventions for gendered change enter higher education governance, are they automatically de-radicalised? Do the narratives of the margins and the mainstream combine, collide, co-exist?” Conjectures might explain SADC’s case. First, leadership is framed from a male perspective, therefore, interventions that include women in university leadership sets a collision course with engrained societal norms. Women who choose to be leaders of institutions violate the stereotype and have to be prepared to face societal consequences. However, if gender equity is a priority, radical interventions by states and institutions that work toward co-existence need to be adopted. If the status quo continues unabated, SADC will appear to pay lip service to its commitment of achieving gender equity and equality through gender mainstreaming, despite signing formal protocols. As long as these protocols are not legally binding, according to Hahn (2005), they lack a strategy to achieve the desired equity outcomes. If the protocols are monitored and evaluated, equity in the vice chancellorship may not be achievable in a region that is plagued by poverty, political unrest, distressed economies, illiteracy, and HIV/AIDS.

Because of the value in including women in positions of leadership, SADC universities should appoint more women chancellors to run universities in order to benefit from the different perspectives women bring. The results of the present study reveal that South Africa has the largest number of women vice chancellors. A full half of the female vice chancellors were in one country, South Africa. More than a quarter of their universities are headed by women, better than twice the regional average. Its framework called the National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa (Ministry of Higher Education 2000) specifically outlines the need to recruit blacks and women in senior position in academia. The plan specifically asks higher education institutions to develop equity plans with clear objectives for addressing women in senior positions. The ministry of higher education places accountability in achieving gender equity by monitoring and evaluation of these equity plans. Perhaps the rest of the SADC member states may learn from South Africa or collaborate with South Africa to learn best practices that could be uniformly applied in the region. The African Development Forum (2009) underscored the

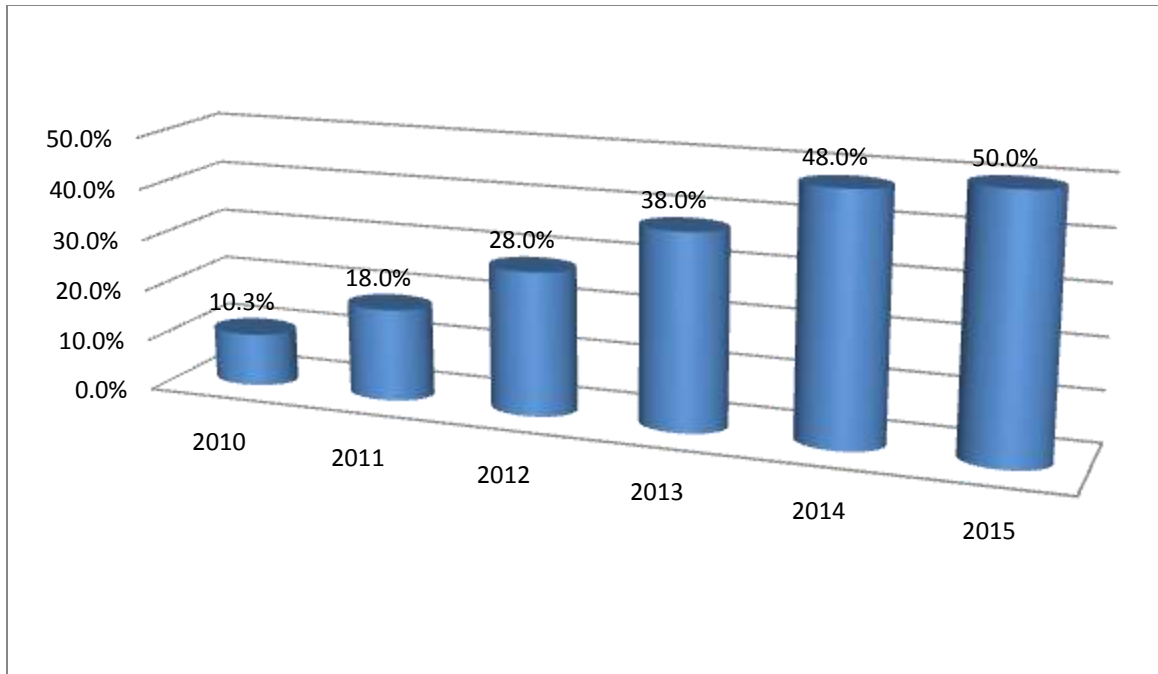
importance of gender equality, women empowerment and ending violence as critical to achieving sustainable development.

### **Conclusion**

While there is no doubt that SADC is committed to addressing gender equity, this study revealed that there are wide gender gaps in the vice chancellorship within the SADC region universities. This is in spite of SADC adopting the gender mainstreaming strategy—a process of assessing the implications of policies on both men and women, as an over-arching strategy to address gender inequities in order to bring about sustainable development 13 years ago. This paper argued that the under-representation of women in university leadership in the SADC region is a function of hierarchical marginalization of women from positions of power. SADC faces challenges that are unique and specific to the region. As a regional body, SADC has to come up with solutions that are germane to the region and futuristic to realize potential growth for sustained regional development. Granted, there are geopolitical constraints that often impede the implementation of policy initiatives, often causing fragmentation of intended policy outcomes. There are redistributive measures, some of which may sound unconventional, that have to be put in place to achieve gender equity. The gender gaps identified in the university presidency in this study require that SADC involves women in all initiatives of achieving sustainable development. Following are the suggested recommendations for addressing gender equity in the university presidency.

#### **1. Apply SADC region affirmative action schemes.**

The formation of the Vice Chancellors Association is a welcome development, but its current composition reflects that women are under-represented, and the first step would be to radically change the male-female configurations in the university presidency to address equity issues. I believe this body has the potential to transform higher education by educating policy makers on the importance of having more women in leadership positions. Affirmative action programs may be initiated by this association and all governing boards of public universities to use SADC's framework of gender equity to ultimately achieve gender equality. For instance, if a country has 10 public universities at least four or five, should be led by women to reduce the under-representation of women. Perhaps SADC could learn from how Sweden and Rwanda (Henig and Henig, 2001; Viefers, Christie, and Ferdos, 2006) have almost achieved gender parity in the composition of their parliaments. The Swedish Equal Opportunities legislation which defines the official Swedish policy concerning gender equality specifies that if one sex is under-represented, the employer should “especially endeavour to recruit applicants of the under-represented sex and shall seek a gradual increase in the proportion of employees of that sex” (Viefers, Christie, and Ferdos, 2006, 17). See Figure 2 below for projected percentages of women that need to be appointed to the vice chancellorship in order to reach gender parity by 2015.



**Figure 2.** Annual projections needed to achieve gender parity in the vice chancellorship by 2015. An annual increase of 10% from 2010 through 2014 is required to achieve gender equity in the vice chancellorship.

## 2. Implement radical gender mainstreaming.

This is a strategy that claims to make women's and men's experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs. It is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs in any area and at all levels (Morley 2005). SADC takes gender mainstreaming as the hallmark approach in addressing gender equity. Since the current data points to male dominance in the vice-chancellorship, perhaps SADC taskforces on higher education should ask themselves the following questions. 1) Can women make a difference in leadership positions? 2) What do university systems lack when women are underrepresented? 3) What do university systems lack when women are represented, but not heard? Nidiffer argued that "Women can bring a different type of leadership to higher education, enabling institutions to respond more effectively to the challenges of the new millennium" (Nidiffer 2001, 113). Gender mainstreaming should become a policy priority to gain some traction in this area. Morley (2007) posed questions of whether gender mainstreaming should be integrationist, i.e., introducing gender perspectives into existing policy, or agenda setting, meaning challenging and transforming policy paradigms.

**3. Invest in training and staff development initiatives.**

Currently, 29% of the academic and research faculty hold a doctorate (Watson, Motala, and Kotecha, 2009). While their data are inconclusive there are probably a larger percentage of women who do not hold doctorates, as women are typically less educated than men in this region. SADC needs to build a pool of credentialed and qualified professionals (women included) to lead universities. For example, South Africa has a program that is aimed at developing women in middle management in higher education. The Commonwealth Secretariat is another avenue where women could be developed as leaders through workshops, such as the Women in Higher Education Management.

**4. Adopt economies of scale in study abroad programs for capacity building.**

To increase the number of doctorates for women, it becomes critical to develop twinning programs or partnerships with foreign universities and associations within Africa and the rest of the world. The advantage would be to pool resources and experiences in order to help countries that are struggling. This may already be happening at micro levels, but universities have to develop critical mass or thresholds that can sustain the research and teaching needs of universities. Traditionally more men than women have been sent to study abroad through grants, scholarships and other funding streams. This trend should be corrected by sending more women to study and train abroad. SADC could use the economies of scale universities could identify potential scholars to be sent abroad to study. SADC's higher education taskforce could scout for partners abroad, work on the logistics, and send scholars under the auspices of SADC and not as individual universities or countries. This approach may ensure that there are no universities left out and that costs of training abroad become cheaper if they are spread over large numbers. SADC should also come up with articulation agreements among universities that allow credit transfer. However, this requires standardization and harmonization to ensure rigor and quality of course offerings across universities.

**5. Use exemplars in the region and abroad.**

Internal collaboration with model systems may be a strategy in the region. For instance, the National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa (Ministry of Education 2000) has comprehensive benchmarks of accountability from which member states can learn. Member states can send teams to go and understudy the South African model where the higher education system is described as "rediscovering Africa as a discursive space for intellectual growth" (Loveland 2007, 25). In addition, SADC can work with other systems such as American Council on Education, The Commonwealth Council on Higher Education and other higher education councils in Europe, Asia, and Australia. The idea is not to replicate foreign systems of higher education but to select elements that work given the challenges and opportunities that exist in the region. The goal would be to come up with a repertoire of initiatives that help to solve problems and promote



sustainable development that prepares SADC to be a global competitor by embarking on Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) (Loveland 2007). Currently, there are efforts to develop post graduate studies in collaboration with The Academy of Sciences for the Developing World (TWAS) according to SARUA (2009). Post graduate students can apply for fellowships that are open to scientists from developing countries and are tenable in Brazil, China, India, Malaysia, Mexico and Pakistan at specific institutions in these countries (SARUA 2010).

**6. Encourage brain circulation and not brain drain.**

SADC faces brain drain at unprecedented levels due to poor remuneration and working conditions among professional and academic staff. Currently 29% of research and academic staff hold a doctorate (Watson, Motala, & Kotecha, 2009). Clearly, SADC has to find ways of increasing the number of research and academic staff by incentivizing the working conditions. Frustrated by poor working conditions, academics and researchers are looking for greener pastures overseas causing a loss of potential academic leaders for the region. Watson, Motala, and Kotecha (2009) and the Forum for African Women Educators (2009) advocated for planning for brain circulation by building a pool through recruiting, training, and retaining the brightest and best in the region. This requires heavy investment to improve the working conditions in order to curb the brain drain.

**7. Develop courses for higher education administration at the regional level.**

SADC has already started working on this front. SARUA in collaboration with the University of the Witwatersrand have developed a short term course to SARUA members in Higher Education Management in Southern Africa. This course can help meet the immediate short term training needs but longer courses that have breadth and scope may need to be developed. Higher education is a complex enterprise that involves a wide plethora of topics and issues that cannot possibly be covered in a crash course program such as the current timeframe of two weeks.

**Recommendations for further study**

This study established that there is gender inequity in the vice chancellorship of universities in the SADC region. The research did not address the reasons for gender inequity in the vice-chancellorship, but made conjectures that possibly explain the reasons for inequity. There is need to build a broader context of gender inequity by looking at other variables and dynamics such as institutional norms, cultural and social factors, and approaches that have been used to address gender equity in the region. There are a number of follow up studies that can be conducted to establish fundamental issues surrounding gender equity in the presence.

1. There were very fewer women who are vice chancellors, and 10 out of 15 countries did not have any university led by female vice chancellor. There is a need for qualitative studies that target current female vice chancellors to establish the unique experiences and challenges they face in their current positions. Male vice chancellors could be

interviewed to establish why there are no female vice chancellors in their institutions. There is need to establish whether there are any gender equity plans and work books, and whether these plans are being implemented or not.

2. There is a need to conduct longitudinal studies that address pipeline issues by tracking women in higher education from undergraduate, graduate education, and post graduate education, and administrative positions. For example what positions do women who hold PhDs have in higher education? What support systems, choices and freedoms do women have that encourage inclusion in university governance?
3. Another follow-up study would conduct climate surveys of universities in the region to find out whether universities are engines of transformation that shape the values, aspirations, and gender equity plans that support sustainable development.
4. A possible study would investigate whether gender mainstreaming is the best alternative strategy to achieve gender equity and parity in higher education governance.

In conclusion, this study revealed that wide gender gaps exist in the vice-chancellorship in the university system in the SADC region. This is a trend that has continued to exist despite SADC signing protocols of gender equity and adopting gender mainstreaming as a strategy to address gender inequity. For a region plagued with many problems that seem to affect women more than men, it becomes imperative for universities in the SADC region to include women in the vice chancellorship so that women can aggregate and articulate issues that affect women for the broader goal of sustainable development to be achieved within SADC. Sustainable growth can only be realized if there is equal access to all positions of power and influence in the region. For SADC, it translates to more inclusion of women at all levels of governance. This study is potentially the first attempt to investigate gender equity in the vice chancellorship in the SADC university system. Follow-up studies are necessary to establish the unique experiences that women face in university governance in the SADC region. There is also a need to conduct impact studies of gender policies in the SADC region.

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