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Gender and Higher Education in African Universities: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Key Policy Mandates in Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda

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Abstract: In this comparative project, we analyze three policy documents that have guided gender-based higher education initiatives in Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda. Two research questions guided our work: (1) How do key policy documents conceptualize gender equity? and (2) How is gender equity discussed in relation to economic priorities and sociopolitical realities in each country? To address these questions, we conducted a critical discourse analysis of the following: Kenya's Education and Training Gender Policy in Kenya, Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018/19–––022/23, and Uganda's Gender in Education Policy. Corroborating the work of other scholars, we found that all three documents shared (1) an increased commitment to gender equality, (2) persistent underrepresentation of women in higher education despite increased participation of women over

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time, and (3) markedly low gender parity in STEM disciplines. Our findings are significant because they confirm that there is a disconnect between stated policy goals and actual student outcomes, which limits institutional success and economic development. Additionally, our analysis highlights differences in the strength in commitment to gender equity in policy mandates in these three countries. This is a key issue which warrants further research attention.
Keywords: gender equity; higher education; Kenya; Rwanda; Uganda

Género y educación superior en universidades africanas: Un análisis crítico del discurso de mandatos políticos clave en Kenia, Ruanda y Uganda

Resumen: En este proyecto comparativo, analizamos tres documentos de política que han guiado las iniciativas de educación superior basadas en el género en Kenia, Uganda y Ruanda. Dos preguntas de investigación guiaron nuestro trabajo: (1) ¿Cómo conceptualizan la equidad de género los documentos clave de políticas? y (2) ¿Cómo se discute la equidad de género en relación con las prioridades económicas y las realidades sociopolíticas de cada país? Para abordarlos, llevamos a cabo un análisis crítico del discurso de lo siguiente: la Política de Género en Educación y Capacitación de Kenia en Kenia, el Plan Estratégico del Sector de Educación de Ruanda 2018/19–––022/23 y la Política de Género en Educación de Uganda. Corroborando el trabajo de otros académicos, encontramos que los tres países compartían (1) un mayor compromiso con la igualdad de género, (2) una subrepresentación persistente de las mujeres en la educación superior a pesar de una mayor participación de las mujeres a lo largo del tiempo, y (3) una paridad de género marcadamente baja en las disciplinas STEM. Nuestros hallazgos son significativos porque confirman que existe una desconexión entre las metas políticas establecidas y los resultados reales de los estudiantes, lo que limita el éxito institucional y el desarrollo económico. Además, nuestro análisis destaca las diferencias en la fuerza del compromiso con la equidad de género en los mandatos de política en estos tres países. Este es un tema clave que merece mayor atención en la investigación.
Palabras-clave: equidad de género; educación superior; Kenia; Ruanda; Uganda

Gênero e educação superior em universidades africanas: Uma análise crítica do discurso dos mandatos chave políticos no Quênia, Ruanda e Uganda

Resumo: Neste projeto comparativo, analisamos três documentos de política que orientaram as iniciativas de educação superior baseadas em gênero no Quênia, Uganda e Ruanda. Duas questões de pesquisa orientaram nosso trabalho: (1) Como os principais documentos de política conceituam a equidade de gênero? e (2) Como a equidade de gênero é discutida em relação às prioridades econômicas e realidades sociopolíticas em cada país? Para abordá-los, realizamos uma análise crítica do discurso do seguinte: Política de Gênero de Educação e Treinamento do Quênia, Plano Estratégico do Setor de Educação de Ruanda 2018/19–––022/23 e Política de Gênero na Educação de Uganda. Corroborando o trabalho de outros estudiosos, descobrimos que todos os três países compartilhavam (1) um maior compromisso com a igualdade de gênero, (2) sub-representação persistente de mulheres no ensino superior, apesar do aumento da participação de mulheres ao longo do tempo e (3) paridade de gênero marcadamente baixa nas disciplinas STEM. Nossas descobertas são significativas porque confirmam que há uma desconexão entre os objetivos políticos declarados e os resultados reais dos alunos, o que limita o sucesso institucional e o desenvolvimento econômico. Além disso, nossa análise destaca diferenças na força do compromisso com a equidade de gênero nos mandatos políticos nesses três países. Esta é uma questão-chave que merece mais atenção da pesquisa.
Palavras-chave: equidade de gênero; ensino superior; Quênia; Ruanda; Uganda

Gender and Higher Education in African Universities: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Key Policy Mandates in Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda

As African higher education systems continue to expand, many countries have prioritized gender-focused equity and diversity initiatives. As governments, universities, and non-governmental organizations grapple with the best way to advance gender equity in higher education,[1] multiple gender-related policies have been created, including Kenya's Education and Training Gender Policy, Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018/19–2022/23, and Uganda's Gender in Education Policy. These policies are expected to address the issue of the lack of gender parity and make higher education institutions inclusive, safe places for female students to attend. In this paper, we interrogate the language of the aforementioned policies more deeply. It is important to note here that the focus of our project is on state-wide/national educational policy documents, rather than specific institutions in these countries. Thus, in lieu of discussing examples of higher education colleges or universities in Africa that have attained some specific gender policy mandates, we deconstruct the language of federal policies in Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda.

Our work was guided by two research questions: (1) How do key policy documents conceptualize gender equity? and (2) How is gender equity discussed in relation to economic priorities and sociopolitical realities in policy documents? In the subsequent sections, we first offer a discussion of gender as a discourse and the sociopolitical context in each country. We describe country contexts to show why the gender policy documents are necessary. Next, we describe our method of conducting a critical discourse analysis of policy documents and qualitative findings. We then discuss how these policy documents can be understood in conversation with extant higher education literature. We conclude with recommendations for higher education leaders committed to advancing gender equity.

Review of Scholarship and Similar Policy Documents

Gender as a Discourse

As a discourse, gender can be understood as a set of relationships (Baki, 2004; Cranny-Francis et al., 2017). Inherent to these relationships is the accumulation, transfer, and negotiation of power. The way we dress, how we speak, and our patterns of consumption can suggest and express gender. In African contexts, including the ones highlighted in this paper, binary gender is widely accepted and encompasses universal roles, such as father/mother, husband/wife, brother/sister, and so on (Mama, 2019). Within the scope of this paper, gender as a discourse is inextricably tied to economic development. The connection between gender and economic development reveals a power dynamic between local and international actors; that is, local African policies are shaped largely by the priorities established by international and Western governments/agencies. Discursively then, we identify two levels of power distribution in the context for our analysis: men/women (in the higher education landscape) and local African education systems/international Western education systems. To take this a step further, we argue that gender can be a metaphor that is conceptually structured by a center and periphery relationship (Altbach, 1981). We posit that the Western/international "center" holds masculine power, and the local African "periphery'" has less influential, feminine power.

This broader discourse about gender is important to keep in mind because our analysis shows that policy documents are sites where these power dynamics are enacted and unenacted. For any given document, the authorship, funding source, and language used all provide us with greater insight about

[1] We define *gender equity in education* as the conditions in which a university or higher education system facilitates fair outcomes for people of all genders. Equity is distinct from equality due to its focus on recompense—that is, the uneven distribution of power, resources, or support in order to adjust for historical unfairness.

the power being (un)enacted in and through a policy. More pointedly, the language about gender equity is used as a way to reproduce the stratification of power between center and periphery in all three country settings. In the Kenyan policy document, there is a *reproduction* of power due to the salience of international NGOs that set the agenda for how gender inequity is dealt with. In the Rwandan policy document, there is a *maintenance* of power due the commitment of the federal government to maintaining order in civil society, and because of the government's adherence to guidelines set by international NGOs. In the Ugandan policy document, there is an *evasion* of power because the federal government tends to homogenize women's experiences and places the onus of equity on women who should become more assertive. Overall, across documents, gender as a discourse varies according to differences in the strength of commitment to gender equity policy mandates in the three countries.

Sociopolitical Context for Each Country Setting

There are similarities (Table 1) and differences (Table 2) in the higher education landscape of Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda. Similar geopolitical forces exist, such as climate change and similar vulnerability to terrorist activity (Kahsay & Hansen, 2016). In all three countries, urbanization and massification of higher education are increasing postsecondary enrollment (Hudani, 2020; Mohamedbhai, 2014; Mukwaya et al., 2010; Potts, 2017). The governments of these countries also position higher education as a driver for economic growth (Bloom et al., 2006). A shared history of European colonization has also shaped education organization and governance in each country (Teferra, 2008). In this section, we provide a few policy outcomes, including enrollment data and the issue of STEM in each country.

Table 1

Similarities in Tertiary Education Among Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda

Key Features of Higher Education Landscape	Countries		
	Kenya	Rwanda	Uganda
Location	East/Sub-Saharan Africa	East/Sub-Saharan Africa	East/Sub-Saharan Africa
Proportion of women in the population	About half (50%)	About half (50%)	About half (50%)
Expansion in higher education	High	High	High
Quality of Higher Education	Low	Low	Low
Quality of STEM infrastructure	Underdeveloped	Underdeveloped	Underdeveloped
Gender disparity in enrollment in higher education	High (in favor of men)	High (in favor of men)	High (in favor of men)

Key Features of Higher Education Landscape	Countries		
	Kenya	Rwanda	Uganda
Gender disparity in enrollment in STEM	High (in favor of men)	High (in favor of men)	High (in favor of men)
Gender disparity in faculty employment	High (in favor of men)	High (in favor of men)	High (in favor of men)
Trend in women enrollment	Increasing	Increasing	Increasing
Commitment to gender equality	High (included in multiple government laws and policies)	High (included in multiple government laws and policies)	High (included in multiple government laws and policies)

Table 2

Differences in Tertiary Education Among Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda

Key Features of Higher Education Landscape		Countries		
		Kenya	Rwanda	Uganda
Number of universities	Public	38	3	5
	Private	36	37	24
	Total	74	40	29
Flagship university		University of Nairobi	University of Rwanda	Makerere University
Female enrollment (gross%)		41% (CUE, 2019)	45.24% (The World Bank, 2018)	43.2% (The World Bank, 2021)
Women enrollment in private institutions		High	High	High

Key Features of Higher Education Landscape	Countries		
	Kenya	Rwanda	Uganda
Level of commitment to gender equality	- Establishment of the National Policy for Gender and Development in 2000, which included a commitment to building further gender-related policies in different sectors. - Affirmative action provides a reduced one-point entry score for women to enroll in HED	- 50% seats reserved for women at universities -"Flexibility" (e.g., in enrollment, degree completion) is a key strategy to enhance women participation	- 35% seats of the parliament is taken by women - Gender equality is considered as a "human right"

Context of Higher Education in Kenya

From 2013 to 2018, Kenya's economy increased by 88% and is among the fastest growing digital economies in the world. Since 2010, the GDP growth rate has been on average 5.6% (Ministry of Education of Kenya [MoE] 2017). Kenya's human development index score has increased from 0.55 (2013) to 0.59 (2017) and the public higher education sector has also expanded (MoE, 2018). Cumulatively, these indicators suggest that public Kenyan universities are economically well-poised to offer high-quality education. However, gender disparities in enrollment and graduation are evident at every academic level of higher education. For example, overall only 40% of students enrolled at bachelor and master level programs and 38% of students enrolled at doctoral level programs are female (Commission For University Education [CUE], 2019). Meanwhile, 81% of higher education students are enrolled at public universities. Moreover, only 41% of students at public institutions are women, and female enrollment is higher at private universities (48%) compared to public universities (CUE, 2019). The data also show that in spite of the policies stipulating gender equity in higher education, a higher percentage of male students are sponsored by the government (52%) than female students (48%), and the portion of government funded students at private institutions is only 20% (compared to 57% at public institutions; CUE, 2019). Thus, the lower academic quality at private universities (McCowan, 2018) and the economic burden on female students due to the inequitable government funding puts female students in a disadvantaged position.

In recent years, the number of universities has also increased. In 2012, there were 57 institutions and by 2021 there were 74, and 38 of which are public (CUE, 2020; MoE, 2018). Along with the fast-paced increase in enrollment and number of universities, concerns have arisen regarding the quality of Kenyan higher education. The expansion of the higher education sector happened at the expense of quality, as the expenditures on higher education have not increased. Even with the establishment of 16 new public universities, and an almost 50% increase in student enrollments, the public expenditure on higher education has increased by only 7.2% (from 15.5% to 22.7% between 2013 and 2018; Charo et al., 2019; McCowan, 2018).

The disparity between the enrollment of male and female students is even more pronounced in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Data show that only 11% of

female students are enrolled in STEM programs, compared to 34% of male students (CUE, 2019). The GPI in STEM is the lowest (0.44) as compared to other fields where this indicator ranges from 0.80 to 0.91 (e.g., GPI in Arts and Humanities is 0.83, in Social sciences 0.85, in Education 0.89; CUE, 2019). Additionally, the national education sector strategic plan for 2018–2022 highlights that the quality of STEM programs at Kenyan universities is underdeveloped compared to other fields. Some of the major issues impeding the development of STEM programs are insufficient qualified academic staff, higher costs needed for the delivery of STEM programs, and poor secondary education that does not equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge in these disciplines (MoE, 2018).

Kenya's commitment to increased gender equality has been reflected in various policy and legal documents, including the 2010 Constitution of Kenya. The Government of Kenya established the first National Policy for Gender and Development in 2000, which included a commitment to building further gender-related policies in different sectors. The national policy itself has been revised and updated in 2019. The document includes a section on education. In 2007, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology established the "Gender in Education Policy," which was revised in 2015. The National Education Sector Strategic Development plan for 2018–2022 also includes a section on enhancing the equity and inclusion of higher education. However, despite the progressive policy documents addressing the gender issue, the scholarly literature suggests gender disparities in education still remain worrisome (Akala, 2019; Odhiambo, 2016; Onsongo, 2009).

Moreover, the scholarly literature emphasizes that the policies are not specific enough to support elimination of the gender gap in higher education. Besides, the implementation of gender policies is not appropriately monitored to foster increased opportunities for female students in STEM (Onsongo, 2009). The literature also highlights that the current policies do not consider factors that prevent female students from participating in educational or work capacities. For example, women lack financial independence, live in poverty, and are exploited in the agricultural sector (Akala, 2019). Additionally, research emphasizes that affirmative action policies in Kenya do not necessarily help achieve gender equity. While affirmative action provides a reduced one-point entry score for women to enroll at university, this incentive does not apply to STEM programs (Onsongo, 2009). Ultimately, this discourages female students from choosing STEM programs. The literature also signals that sexual harassment at educational facilities prevents female students from participating in higher education and from enrolling in STEM disciplines, where they need to work in labs (Muasya, 2014).

Context of Higher Education in Rwanda

After the 1994 genocide against Tutsi people, the government of Rwanda has been committed to repairing the social fabric of the country, along with economic and social transformation (Russell, 2016). The violence, marginalization, and oppression faced by women, historically and during the genocide, has motivated the Rwandan government to have a strong commitment toward gender parity across various parts of nation-building. This has also led to an impact on higher education policies regarding enrollment, retention, pedagogies, and pipelines (Russell, 2016). Rwanda's higher education philosophy emphasizes preparing citizens who are free from discrimination and removing obstacles to gender parity (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, 2018b). The operationalization of this philosophy is evident in Rwanda's policies focused on gender, such as Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018/19–2022/23.

Rwanda's population was 12.95 million in 2020 (The World Bank, 2020), with women representing 51%. In 2018, the total enrollment across higher education institutes was 89,000, with 57% enrolled in private institutions (World Education Services, 2021). Interestingly, there are 37 private and only three public institutions, suggesting that each public institution is much larger in its accessibility and enrollment. Private institutions are often partially subsidized by the government, receiving money for faculty salaries and operational expenses (World Education Services, 2021). In

2013, women represented 44% of the total enrollment in public and 53.3% in private institutions (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, 2015). This suggests private institutions provide more flexibility for degree completion to attract students. Meanwhile, women represent 36% of students enrolled in STEM programs at the University of Rwanda (Malimba, 2020). Overall, there are gender disparities between male enrollment at 57%, and female enrollment at 42% (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, 2018a).

Rwanda's commitment to gender parity is reflected in the following policies: Girls Education Policy (2008), National Education Policy (2010), and the University of Rwanda Gender Policy (2016). While there are multiple Education Sector Strategic Plans, they largely do not focus on gender parity. However, it should be noted that parity as a concept forms the background of all policy making within documents. Another concept that is crucial to policies in Rwanda is "mainstreaming," which seeks to integrate practices that promote gender parity in the structure of administration. For example, there is a policy agenda stating that pedagogy needs to be evaluated to ensure girls' education is not inhibited at any level (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, 2018b). The National Gender Policy speaks of ensuring gender parity as a philosophy that is "mainstreamed" into all budgets, policies, and programs. These policies also suggest reserving 50% of student university positions for women, holding remedial classes for women at risk of dropping out in high school, and creating gender-sensitive institutional capacity, pedagogy, and curriculum to reduce big gaps in gender equality (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, 2008). The Education Sector Strategic Plans highlight flexibility as a key component to ensuring female participation and suggest that private universities may be more flexible than public universities, contributing to the difference in enrollment percentages. While the Girls Education Policy and National Education Policy have actionable frameworks, there is still need for research on how to implement structural change in higher education.

A review of the literature indicates that the strategies presented by the ESSP are responsive, if limited, to the problems faced by women in Rwanda. Yi et al. (2018) suggested that the way to develop interest and retain women in the pipeline to surgical careers would be through the creation of role models, changing social norms and stereotypes about work/family balance, as well as the capabilities of women, and increasing numbers in the pipeline. Meanwhile, Huggins and Randell (2007) argued that while poverty is a limiting factor for female education, violence in classrooms, inadequate facilities, and historic marginalization are also factors that prevent women's participation in higher education. Randell and Fish (2008) recommended flexibility, support structures outside the classroom, affirmative action, strategic interventions, and detailed research as ways to retain women students in higher education. Still, Nkurunziza et al. (2012) specifically noted that expectations to contribute to household chores, poverty, and pedagogy contributes to gender disparities that cause girls to trail behind boys. This has a ripple effect across the pipeline, leading to women attending private universities, which are both expensive and of poorer quality.

Context of Higher Education in Uganda

Uganda's population is 44,269,587 in (United Nations World Population Prospects, 2019), and women account for 50.7% of the population (The World Bank, 2020). According to the global Gender Inequality Index, Uganda ranks 121 out of 159 and 131 out of 189 countries assessed in 2019, indicating relatively low rankings for human development (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020; Njenga & Tanzarn, 2020). Moreover, women hold only 35% of seats (Njenga & Tanzarn, 2020; Watera, 2018) in the Ugandan parliament. Despite these disparities, attaining gender equality in education is broadly discussed as a human right in government documents (Gender in Education Sector Policy, 2016; National Strategy for Girls' Education in Uganda 2015–2019, Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013). Additionally, the promotion of gender equality has been at the forefront of the nation's education sector. We find this inconsistency to be troubling, because such

declarations seem to be largely symbolic: in practice, such declarations seem to have limited impact on day-to-day student realities for Ugandan girls and women.

Uganda's National Gender Policy aims to guide other sectors and levels, and conceptualizes gender as important for the implementation of development programs. Ultimately, its aim is to transform Ugandan society into gender-informed citizens (Gender in Education Sector Policy, 2016). Developed in 2004, the National Strategy for Girls' Education in Uganda focuses on primary and secondary sub-levels (although now broadened to include all education sub-sectors) and aims to design and harmonize implementation strategies for the Ministry of Education and Sports and its partners in the promotion of girls' education as a form of affirmative action (Gender in Education Sector Policy, 2016). The Gender in Education Policy was developed to guide gender mainstreaming in the education sector, and we chose to focus our analysis on it because it focuses on gender, all education sub-levels, and covers gender issues more extensively.

Gender disparities also vary by level of education. In 1997, after the adoption and implementation of free tuition, Universal Primary Education (UPE), there has been increased enrollment of children from poor families, which helped eliminate the gender gap in access to primary education (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017). For higher education, Uganda's gross school enrollment is 5%, indicating the low capacity of the country's higher education system (The World Bank, 2020). In 2014, the gross enrollment ratio in tertiary education for Uganda was 4.8%, an increase from 1.1% in 1990 (Knoema, 2020). In the same year, female students accounted for 43.6% of the total in tertiary education for Uganda, an increase from 28.2% in 1990. Thus, although the overall enrollment ratio in higher education was low, there has been an overall improvement in student enrollment in tertiary education across years. For instance, the enrollment of men and women in all levels of education increased across all academic years (2007–2016). During the same years (2007–2016), however, there has been consistent gender disparity in enrollment across all levels of education, especially in higher education favoring men. Uganda engaged in a massive expansion of higher education where the number of universities grew from 12 in 2001 to 34 (5 public and 29 private) in 2012 (Bisaso, 2017).

Although enrollment in tertiary education of female students increased from 43% in 2008 to 44.2% in 2015, there is considerable variation among institutions and majors. For example, men tend to participate in STEM-related majors at higher rates than women (Odaga, 2020; Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016; Watera, 2018). Moreover, Ugandan women's underrepresentation in STEM-related disciplines has been attributed to a continued "phobia of science and mathematics-related subjects" in lower schooling (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020, p. 140).

Extant academic literature also shows that despite increased women enrollment in higher education in Uganda, gender disparity in tertiary education persists, especially in STEM (Clesensio et al., 2020; Odaga, 2020; Watera, 2018). Although gender disparity and measurable objectives are reflected in the GEP policy, detailed, intersectional (Crenshaw, 1990), and context-specific information of this disparity is largely absent. Odaga (2020) showed that there is a significant disparity in educational access and outcomes among Uganda's regions explained by poverty.

Fewer women from geographically disadvantaged regions are admitted to universities. Datzberger and Le Mat (2018) also note that there is no "critical and socio-historical approach to gender . . . and a clear conceptualisation of the role of education" (p. 62). Furthermore, women encounter barriers during the transition to higher education and entry to different colleges and majors (Odaga, 2020). There is an absence of substantial interventions to address gender inequity, and gender equity receives a soft focus, often mentioned in passing (Begue-Aguado et al., 2018). Faculty and students have limited awareness and skills in gender responsive pedagogy (Kagoda, 2019), and top management reflects the low political will to

implement gender policies (Begue-Aguado et al., 2018; Kagoda, 2019; Odaga, 2020). Although these broad and diverse gender related issues are analyzed in the literature, gender issues examined in the GEP policy are limited to gender disparity in enrollment (in higher education and/or STEM majors) and gender disparity in completion rates. According to the UN, countries with high female enrollment in higher education have much higher levels of economic productivity, thus suggesting gender equality as a strategy to reduce poverty (Odaga, 2020). This gap, between the call for a structural, intersectional (Crenshaw, 1990), and context-specific approach to issue analysis, planning, and interventions, as well as GEP's generic approach, show a disregard for the insights in the literature.

Summary of Policy Mandates on Gender and Education in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwandan Higher Education

In this section, we present a bulleted list of highlights that provide key ideas about the policy mandates on gender and education in the three countries.

Kenya's Education and Training Gender Policy in Kenya (2015)

- Funded by the Government of Kenya and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- Authored by the principal secretary of the State Department of Education and the State Department of Science and Technology
- Contains eight chapters, featuring an introduction; access; equity; quality education; safety, security, and gender-based violence; nurturing and mentoring; governance and management; strategies for gender empowerment and an implementation framework
- Explicit aim is listed as: "The general objective of the Gender Policy is to eliminate all gender disparities and inequalities in education, to create a gender responsive learning and work environment, and to enhance gender sensitive and responsive governance and management in the education sector" (Ministry of Education of Kenya, 2015; p. 6)
- 34 pages in length, inclusive of all tables and figures.

Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018/19–2022/23

- Funded by the government of Kenya, and various development partners, including the government of Netherlands, Sida (Sweden's international development agency), and the World Bank
- Authored by multiple ministry of education representatives, including the permanent secretary, the director general of education, the director of planning, and education advisor (The chief of education at UNICEF was also consulted and listed as a key stakeholder.)
- Contains six chapters, featuring an introduction, an overview of the education sector, a strategic framework, implementation plan, a monitoring and evaluation plan, and a description of the cost and financing of the ESSP
- Explicit aim is as follows: "The impact expected from successfully delivering this ESSP is to ensure Rwandan citizens have sufficient and appropriate skills, competences, knowledge and attitudes to drive the continued social and economic transformation of the country and to be competitive in the global market" (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, 2018b; p. vi)
- 128 pages in length, inclusive of all tables and figures

Uganda's Gender in Education Policy (2016)

- Funded by the government of Uganda
- Authored by the minister for education and sports
- Contains seven chapters, including an introduction and background section, a description of the guiding legal and policy framework, a description of the implementation of the policy, the objectives and principles of the policy framework, the implementation strategy for the second gender policy, implementation framework for the second policy, and a plan for monitoring and evaluation
- Explicit aim is "to achieve equitable access to relevant and quality education and training that enhances efficiency and effectiveness at all levels for all Ugandans" (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016; p. 1)
- 50 pages in length, inclusive of all tables and figures

Similarities and Differences of Policy Mandates on Gender and Education in Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda

Cumulatively, these policies are expected to broaden access to educational opportunity and support the process of educational attainment for girls and women. Across countries, these policies address the issues of the following: the harms of gender-based violence, a keen interest in regional and global engagement, and the spillover effects of gender inequity on economic development and the labor market. As a whole, the policies propose the following strategies: curricular reform, establishing mechanism for reporting sexual harassment and gender-based violence, budget allocation, infrastructure development, teacher preparation, and community dialogue. Furthermore, the policies are evaluated in the following ways: through gender-focused/planning focused government directorates and via annual data summaries. In terms of differences, the policies vary in their discursive focus. Language is used to reproduce power in Kenya, maintain power in Rwanda, and evade power in Uganda. Overall, these policy documents demonstrate how gender is a plane through which governments can advance their political agendas and reveal subtle differences in priorities.

Methodology

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a qualitative approach that many scholars across disciplines have used to critique texts. Fairclough (1995) defines CDA as a method of interrogating the semiotics of language, especially as they relate to power. Fairclough (1995) identified CDA as a tool for social change, whereby critical discourse analysts assess the dialectical relationship between the discourse (the semiotics) and the elements of social practices and social events. Furthermore, Van Dijk (2001) explains that CDA rejects the notion of value-free inquiry, and instead recognizes that discourse is "influenced by social structure, and produced in social interaction" (p. 2). As a methodological approach, CDA explicitly addresses social inequity, power, and dominance. Moreover, Van Dijk (2001) explains how discursive influence may emerge as dominant groups steer public discourse as an abuse of power. As Anderson and Holloway (2020) have suggested, discourse can be analyzed from the frame of theory, epistemology, and method in education policy studies. Above all, CDA is concerned with the analysis of discourse to expose and unpack power structures within those discourses (Johnson, 2011; Kaveh et al., 2022). Specifically, CDA can shed light on how the sociocultural, political, and economic narratives and assumptions are embedded within language and how they need to be examined.

In this section, we start with a general analysis of general gender-related themes within the three aforementioned policies. We then dive into a CDA of the policies by including actual policy text

and the analysis of that text with respect to underlying power structures and dominant discourses that promote inequality. We accomplish this by focusing on the language used in the policies and analyzing the language so that our audience is able to understand how/why the language is problematic. We also articulate the assumptions behind the arguments related to language; that is, we will unpack our argument about language use in the policy documents.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

We conducted a CDA of the following policy documents: (a) Kenya's Education and Training Sector Gender Policy (2015), (b) Uganda's Gender in Education Policy (2016), and (c) Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018/19–2022/23. We choose these documents because they are key agenda-setting policies established by the government of each country. While our selection of only three policy documents may seem too narrow of a scope at first glance, we believe that this number is appropriate because it is manageable enough for in-depth comparative analysis. We identified these policies after scouring various government websites, international databases, and research articles, realizing that these policies appear multiple times in conversational and policy conversations. In this section, we provide clearer steps and justification in the methodological approach for why (a) Kenya's Education and Training Sector Gender Policy (2015), (b) Uganda's Gender in Education Policy, and (c) Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018/19–2022/23 was selected. Additionally, we summarize this information in Table 3. Drawing from the CDA studies of George Mwangi et al. (2018) and Gándara and Jones (2020) as our examples, we developed a two-stage process to analyze these documents to understand how social (in)equity, power, and dominance were expressed through the discourse.

In the first stage of analysis, we engaged in deductive analysis by reading and annotating the policy documents based on our two research questions: (1) How do key policy documents conceptualize gender equity? and (2) How is gender equity discussed in relation to economic priorities and sociopolitical realities in each country? We read the policies closely and annotated the documents individually based on the following policy frames: goals, rationale, strategies, outcomes, facts, and statistics. We thus captured what is explicitly mentioned in the data sources and established a clear understanding of the main themes. We conducted a line-by-line analysis of the policies and individually created codes that applied to emerging topics and concepts that addressed our research questions. This required an analysis of language, and our topics were based on specific language from the policies themselves.

Second, we conducted an in-depth, inductive analysis of our notes looking for relationships between discourse and the population of interest: women. We analyzed policy language to see what is both said and unsaid about women and gender in these policies. We paid special attention to how women were discussed and portrayed—for example, as helpless, passive actors; or alternatively, as capable, agentic adults. We examined the relationships of these depictions with other codes, such as economic development and social policies (Gándara & Jones, 2020) that affect other marginalized groups in each country. Following the model of George Mwangi et al. (2018), we "considered the conditions that led to the production" (p. 151) of these policy documents and then analyzed how different stakeholders might read and evaluate these documents.

Table 3

Similarities and Differences between Key Policy Mandates

	Kenya's Education and Training Sector Gender Policy (2015)	**Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018/19–2022/23**	**Uganda's Gender in Education Policy**
Main similarities	Acknowledging the harms of gender-based violence; a keen interest in regional and global engagement; and the spillover effects of gender inequity on economic development and the labor market		
Main differences	*reproduction* of power	*maintenance* of power	*evasion* of power
Data used	Policy document titled, "Education and Training Sector Gender Policy" (ETSGP)	Policy document titled, "Education Sector Strategic Plan" (ESSP)	Policy document, titled, "Gender in Education Policy" (GEP)
Data source	UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning website: https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/kenya_education_training_gender_policy.pdf	UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning website: https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/rwanda_esp_2018-19-2023-24.pdf	UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning website: https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/uganda_gender_in_education_sector_policy.pdf
How data was obtained	Publicly available for download through UNESCO's website	Publicly available for download through UNESCO's website	Publicly available for download through UNESCO's website
What the data shows	ETSGP seeks to eliminate all gender disparities in learning environments and education governance.	ESSP is a major document for all levels of education with one sub-section devoted to gender parity.	GEP is a document that focuses on efficiency and effectiveness related to gender.
Ethical consider-ations	Partially funded by UNESCO, which may shape priorities.	Partially funded by external governments and the World Bank.	No readily apparent concerns.
Methodo-logical limitations	Evaluation instruments not explicitly defined.	Requires additional triangulation and cross-sectional analysis using other policy documents.	Evaluation instruments not explicitly defined.

Results, Data, and Analyses

Here, we present data and evidence to support our analysis. The three policy documents in our data set are the Education and Training Gender Policy in Kenya (2015), Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018/19–2022/23, and Uganda's Gender in Education Policy. In terms of similarities, we found that the three countries shared (1) an increased commitment to gender equality, as documented in policy documents, (2) persistent underrepresentation of women in higher education, despite their increased participation over time, and (3) markedly lower gender parity in STEM disciplines. In terms of differences, we noted how the strength in commitment to gender equality varies, with Rwanda in the lead by reserving 50% academic positions reserved for women. Additionally, we found flexibility as a key strategy noted for enhancing women participation, e.g., in degree completion and enrollment in Rwanda. In the case of Kenya, underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, including in the higher education sector, is notable (Odhiambo, 2011). In Uganda, the higher education leaders consider gender equality as a "human right," yet the capacity of Uganda's higher education system is low. Despite the increased number of universities (12 in 2001 and 34 in 2012), and improved gross enrollment ratio (1.1% in 1990 and 4.8% in 2014), student participation at the tertiary level remains low. Uganda has shown an increase in commitment to gender equality and women enrollment in education. Nevertheless, gender disparities, especially in tertiary education and STEM disciplines, remain high, in favor of men. In the remainder of the Findings section, we present the in-depth findings of our deductive and inductive analysis for each country.

Policy Document 1: Kenya's Education and Training Sector Gender Policy (2015)

Findings from Deductive Analysis (Stage 1)

The Education and Training Gender Policy in Kenya (2015) is the second edition developed and adopted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) with the technical support of UNESCO. The initial document was established in 2006, and the current document consists of eight chapters. The introductory chapter references national legal and policy provisions and various international policies, such as the Constitution of Kenya (2010), the Sessional Paper No. 14 (2012), and various parliamentary acts, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and The Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination Against Women (1979), all declaring the commitment of the Kenyan Government to achieve gender equality in the education sector. The document also claims a positive impact of previous interventions addressing the gender gap, such as establishment of the National Gender Equality Commission and a unit at the Ministry coordinating gender equality issues in education. The introduction also describes the state of the gender equality issues in education, emphasizing the particularly wide gender disparity gap in STEM higher education in favor of men and gender-based violence at educational facilities. The authors note that the reason for having to revise the previous gender policy in education from 2007 was persistent gender disparity and the need for "more strategic and targeted interventions" (Ministry of Education of Kenya, 2015; p. 6) and alignment with the new legal framework. It includes goals and objectives of the gender policy which focus on eliminating " all gender disparities and inequalities in education, creating a gender responsive learning and work environment and enhancing gender sensitive and responsive governance and management in the education sector" (Ministry of Education of Kenya, 2015; p. 6).

Chapter two to chapter seven cover six thematic policy areas, including: access, equity, quality education, safety, security and gender-based violence, nurturing and mentoring, and governance and management. Each of these chapters includes the policy goal, background information, policy statement, and strategies for their achievement. The final chapter introduces the implementation framework, describing the roles and responsibilities of different units of the Ministry of Education, semi-autonomous agencies, and constitutional bodies in implementing the gender policy.

Findings from Inductive Analysis (Stage 2)

While the goal of the Education and Training Sector Gender Policy is to eliminate gender disparity in the education sector, the language of the policy objectives, statements, and strategies repeatedly highlights that equal opportunities should be provided for "women, men, girls and boys." The document provides various evidence and arguments substantiating the existing gender gap in education in favor of men. For example, the introductory section highlights that the gender gap widens at each higher level of education and it is particularly evident in STEM fields. It also provides evidence of significant increase in the rate of enrollment of male students compared to female students (42.6% and 25% respectively, from the 2012/2013 to 2013/2014 academic years), stating that it is "a clear indication of disparity in favour of males" (Ministry of Education of Kenya, 2015; p. 4). The document states that achieving gender equity is an "uphilling task due to persisting gender disparities . . . against the female gender" (p. 10). Additionally, the document also emphasizes that the female students are particularly affected by gender-based violence, which is a key factor in enhancing gender inequality in the education sector.

Moreover, the document portrays women in Kenya as being powerless and unskilled to face "personal challenges . . . to facilitate decision making and problem solving" (p. 18). It stresses the low female literacy rate in Kenya, which in some districts is below 10%. The document also emphasizes that gender disparities in education, in favor of men, is conditioned by socio-economic and religious beliefs and acknowledges the role of education (curriculum, pedagogy, and learners' attitudes) and healthcare (HIV, child pregnancy) issues in reproducing the patterns rendering gender inequality.

Considering the strong emphasis on portraying women as a disadvantaged group in terms of educational opportunities, dissonance between the policy goals and the language of policy statements and strategies is evident. For example, the document underlines that "the policy adopts a wide perspective of equality, that includes girls, boys, women and men, rather than a focus on girls and women" (p. 1), arguing that "gender should not be used to determine access to education and educational outcomes" (p. 1). Adherence to this principle is evident in describing the strategies for each policy theme (access; equity; quality education; safety, security, and gender-based violence; nurturing and mentoring; and governance and management). Notwithstanding, while all policy statements and strategies aim at increased participation and gender empowerment of "women, men, girls and boys," the document does not provide any argument or evidence demonstrating how male learners are discriminated against or disadvantaged based on their gender.

The background description of the chapter on equity issues mentions "persisting gender disparities . . . against female gender" (p. 11); however, the policy strategies do not indicate supporting female students. Instead, the policy statement related to promoting equity in education includes the provision of equitable resources and opportunities "for all learners regardless of age, gender, culture and disability" (p. 11). One of the policy strategies calls to "enhance gender equity through affirmative action for provision of grants, scholarships, loans and other awards"; however, there is no indication on a specific disadvantaged group who should benefit from the aforementioned benefits.

The strategies related to the quality of education include institutionalization of a gender-responsive curriculum of high quality and capacity building of instructors in gender responsive pedagogy. According to the UNESCO gender-responsive pedagogy and curriculum, "the learning materials, methodologies, content, learning activities, language use, classroom interaction, assessment and classroom set up are scrutinized to respond to specific needs of boys and girls in teaching-learning process" (UNESCO, 2017b, p. 6). The document also underscores the policy related to safety, security, and gender-based violence (GBV). The policy statements note the urgency for creating gender-responsive safety and security measures, enforcing legal redress mechanisms, and strengthening guidance and counseling units. GBV is the only policy area which, according to the

document, affects both genders. Still, it is important to note that the reported cases are particularly high in the case of women, and thus significantly contributes to gender inequality.

The policy area on nurturing and mentoring aims at developing gender responsive mentorship programs "for all learners" language of the policy. It is notable that this is the only policy area that specifies the strategies for female students. It underscores that girls and women need support and mentoring to acquire skills for decision-making and problem-solving to face daily challenges. Thus, the policy document emphasizes the lack of skills among female students that limit their decision-making and problem-solving capacity and disregards the societal and cultural norms that diminishes decision-making power of women and girls. The strategies emphasize the mentoring of female students in STEM areas to ensure that at least one third of enrolled students in STEM are female. Thus, even the target objective for the enrollment of female students in STEM is not aiming at achieving gender parity for enrollment in the STEM programs. Also, it is noteworthy that the policy document emphasizes that female students in STEM programs are particularly underrepresented and stresses the importance of increasing female student enrollment. Nevertheless, the mentorship remains the single policy area that indicates female students as the main target group. All other policy statements and strategies target "all learners" or "women, men, girls and boys." The policy document does indicate specific actions or targets that it aims to achieve as a result of its implementation (e.g., affirmative action targeting specific disadvantaged group of learners based on gender, target index of gender parity in terms of student enrollment, academic attainment and graduation rates, and targeted actions for changing socio-cultural practices).

While the document clearly articulates the female learners as a disadvantaged group in terms of access, equity, and equality in the education sector, the policy statements for each policy theme avoids emphasizing the need for policies and actions toward promoting female learners. Instead, the document several times emphasizes equal treatment, participation, access and even empowerment of all "girls, boys, women and men." Thus, although the document is claiming that it promotes gender equality and equity in education, the policy statements and strategies solely focus on equal treatment and opportunities for "girls, boys, women and men." Such wording seems egalitarian at the surface. However, the issue of gender equity, which in the same document, is defined as "practice of fairness and justice in the distribution, access to and control of resources, responsibilities, power, and opportunities and services" is disregarded in the policy statements and strategies of every policy theme, including the chapter on "Equity" itself. Tackling the issue of gender equity and equality, where gender disparities are evident in favor of men, through the policies of 'equal treatment' for all men and women, means that the policy strategies, in fact, stay blind to the historical, socio-economic and cultural context that disempowers women. Thus, paradoxically, instead of attaining the policy goal to eliminate the gender disparities, it sustains the inequitable power structure and unequal educational opportunities for females. In short, there is a reproduction of existing gendered power dynamics.

Policy Document 2: Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2018/19–2022/23

Findings from Deductive Analysis (Stage 1)

The Rwandan Ministry of Education has identified three strategic goals to achieve its mission of development and competitive training: "Promoting access to education at all relevant levels, improving the quality of education and training, strengthening the relevance of education and training, all aligned to meet labour market demands" (p. Foreword). The ESSP aligns itself to various agendas, such as the National Strategy for Transformation (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, 2017), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the East African Community Vision 2050 (Ministry of Education, 2015). The ESSP also aligns to gender-based policies in Rwanda, such as the Revised National Gender Policy (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, 2021) and the University of Rwanda

Gender Policy (University of Rwanda, 2016). The report is divided into six chapters: Chapter 1 introduces the context and purpose of the Education Sector Strategic Plan, which includes developing Rwanda to become an upper-middle-income country by 2035 and high-income country by 2050. Chapter 2 describes an overview of the education sector, paying special attention to the re-making of the social fabric after the 1994 genocide of the ethnic Tutsi peoples. The goals, in summary, refer to creating a citizen who is free from discrimination; to promote an environment of peace, self-reliance and dignity; to remove obstacles to parity in all areas; and interestingly, to create a competitive workforce and build human capital. The chapter also discusses the state of equity, access, and quality across different levels of education, emphasizing that while access and equity progress steadily, quality and relevance of education remain a problem. Chapter 3 outlines the strategic priorities detailing nine focus areas: (1) enhanced quality learning outcomes, (2) strengthened management of teachers, (3) strengthened STEM across all levels of education to create greater relevance and market linkages in urban areas, (4) greater use of ICT to transform teaching and learning, (5) access to education programs, (6) strengthened modern school infrastructure, (7) equity in opportunities for all Rwandan children and young people, (8) responsive research and development to solve community challenges, and (9) strengthened governance and accountability (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, 2018b; p. 16). Chapter 4 details the implementation arrangements and chapter 5 the monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Chapter 6 lays out budget allocations.

The use of the term "human capital" and the push for education to be relevant in urban and rural markets suggest an alignment with the world economy, as these ideas are reflected in several World Bank reports of the 1990s as an aim for education across the world (Becker, 1995). The education policy aims to aid Rwanda to move away from an "agrarian based low-income economy" (ESSP, 2018, p. vi) to a more industrialized economy integrated with global markets by 2035. In terms of higher education, there has been an 18% increase in GER from 2012-2016. However, only 15% of the academic staff have PhD degrees, making meaningful research difficult. Eight percent of employers are, however, satisfied with the training received by the students. The gender parity index, however, has declined from 0.79 to 0.74. It has increased in private HEIs (1.08 in 2016) which may reflect the flexibility offered by private HEIs. The primary challenges continue to be a lack of a skilled workforce to offer the content and pedagogy necessary for current times, low investment in education, lack of ICT skills, and dissociation between ESSP and other regional plans for education improvement. The issue of translating access to learning is highlighted in the lack of skilled instructors.

ESSP is a comprehensive strategic document for education planning. However, it only refers explicitly to gender parity in Strategic Priority 7.1, where it focuses on gender parity in participation and achievement. In the next section, an analysis of the ESSP, including higher education related strategies with gender related strategies, will present a fuller picture of policy creation on issues of gender in higher education.

Findings from Inductive Analysis (Stage 2)

The nine strategic priorities outlined in the ESSP have detailed outcomes creating a comprehensive document on all areas that need support. Strategic Priority 7 focuses on "Equitable opportunities for all Rwandan children and young people at all levels of education" (p. 33). Gender parity and gender-based outcomes are listed specifically in Outcome 7.1: "Ensure gender parity in participation and achievement at all levels of education" (p. 33). It should be noted that this is the only place in the ESSP where equity related to gender in education has been highlighted. The focus on gender parity in the ESSP is rather limited. However, it aligns with the goals of the National Policy on Gender (2021), wherein gender policies are to be implemented across all development planning. These goals in the Revised National Policy on Gender (2021) are highlighted in the important definitions in the policy document: "Gender mainstreaming: It is a strategy for making girls' and women's, as well as

boys' and men's, concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes so that girls and boys and women and men benefit equality, and inequality is not perpetuated" (p. 10). The policy also clearly stated in Priority Area 1 for the National Policy on Gender (2021): "Priority area 1: Engendering national planning frameworks, sector policies, strategies as well as programs and initiatives in public and private sectors. The overall objective is to strengthen gender mainstreaming and accountability across national planning frameworks, sector policies and strategies in public and private sector" (p. vii).

The document notes that social norms in Rwanda are still skewed against the education and empowerment of Rwandan girls and women, leading female students to start their formal education later than men, dropping out faster when faced with challenges, and finding participation and integration in the classroom more difficult. It notes that many girls pass a key secondary school exam but are not seen in higher divisions (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, 2018b; p. 33). Due to the intense competition in securing public university spots and lower learning outcomes for women, they often attend private universities. However, in less wealthy households that is often not an option, leading to an intersecting disadvantage based on gender and class. This underrepresentation of women has been considered a major issue by the ESSP, hence the mitigation strategies outlined, which focus on public awareness, teacher development, increasing numbers, adoption of gender related policies. The discussion of public awareness in the policy refers to an understanding of the different barriers faced by boys and girls in access and participation in the education system at all levels, especially at the secondary school level in Section 7.1.

The ESSP focuses on the issues of the pipeline from secondary school. For example, when describing activities planned during this ESSP, document authors state:

> This ESSP, with its focus on learning, will promote improvements in girls' learning outcomes and ensure their representation in the higher divisions of examination results. Public communications campaigns will raise awareness of the different challenges boys and girls face in succeeding in education, whilst breaking down traditional stereotypical attitudes to gender subject choices and work opportunities. (Ministry of Education of Rwanda, 2018b, p. 34)

However, the specific gender subject choices and work opportunities themselves are not sufficiently described. Thus, the ESSP demands to be read alongside other more specific gender policies in Rwanda to provide frameworks for schools and universities to follow. The lack of details surrounding these commitments suggest a maintenance of power expressed through this document.

Policy Document 3: Uganda's Gender in Education Policy (2016–2030)

Findings from Deductive Analysis (Stage 1)

The Gender in Education Policy (GEP) was developed to guide gender mainstreaming in the education sector. The GEP II (2016–30) was the outcome of the review of its predecessor, National Gender Policy (2009–2015). GEP II was developed to serve for 15 years (2016–2030), with mid-term and final evaluations to be conducted in 2025 and 2030, respectively. It was developed in line with the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2007–2015) to guide gender mainstreaming in Education and Sports nationally.

The vision of GEP II is an inclusive and equitable quality education and participation in sports opportunities for all people, women and men, in Uganda. To bring this to fruition this, GEP outlined a corresponding purpose ("to guide effective mainstreaming of gender throughout the Education and Sports Sector"), goal ("to achieve gender equality in education and sports learning outcomes"), and guiding principles (gender equality and non-discrimination, gender mainstreaming, inclusiveness, partnership and collaboration of all stakeholders at all levels, utilizing a gender analytical framework,

and positive and supportive learning) (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016; p. 9). GEP considers other national and international policies and stakeholders. GEP notes that despite achievements, there are wide gender gaps in retention, transition, performance, and completion at all levels that continue to disadvantage women, thus new strategies and targets are required to address them (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016).

Findings from Inductive Analysis (Stage 2)

Uganda's Gender in Education Policy has some positive aspects. Development of the policy included consultation of multiple stakeholders at different levels: nationally with the Gender in Education Technical Working Group, Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group, Education Sector Policy Management Committee, top management of the Ministry of Education, and regionally with district and local government level meetings with education professionals, local government officials, school management committees, civil society organizations, and religious institutions.

Despite these strengths, GEP also has multiple limitations. One of the limitations of GEP is its emphasis on numerical goals and disregard for structural issues. This is especially true in higher education. Many of the policy's analyses of gender issues, particularly corresponding planning and interventions, focus on gender disparity in enrollment and completion rates (quantitative goals) over qualitative ones, such as gender disparity in performance, gender responsiveness of curricula and pedagogies, socio-economic barriers to gender disparity, regional and area (rural-urban) disparity in gender equality, and limited women role models and mentors in faculty and leadership positions.

In the case of Kenya, the policy is to eliminate gender disparity between all men, women, boys and girls, even when it highlights other factors that cause disparities (e.g., "Increase participation in education for disadvantaged girls and women, boys and men including Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC), people with special needs, people living in Arid and Semi-arid Lands (ASALs), and the rural and urban poor." In the Ugandan case, a unidimensional approach disregards (women) students with multiple challenges, perpetuates gender inequity, and makes the ultimate goal for gender equality challenging. Tackling gender inequity requires a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the diversity and heterogeneity among the target population and devising corresponding diverse and heterogeneous interventions.

Another limitation of GEP is the limited presentation of gender disaggregated data. The policy presented some numerical data, mostly enrollment and completion rates, but lacks other meaningful gender disaggregated data. If presented, preferably visually, this form of data could help to have baseline data as a reference to measure the achievements of this plan. Additionally, GEP focuses on the policy development process instead of analyzing gender issues and designing meaningful corresponding objectives and targets, as well as intervention strategies. This is particularly true at the higher education level, where it provided just a couple of pages to cover gender issues in higher education, but then dwelled on justifying the legitimacy of its development process—how inclusive, participatory, and democratic it was.

In Uganda, achieving gender equality in education is treated as "a human right" (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016; p. 2). However, the policy's justification for addressing gender equality issues underscores economic rationale. This is evidenced in the policy's objectives that "prioritize gender-responsive teaching and learning of science-based disciplines and subjects which are critical for national development" (p. 16). The focus on STEM discipline is another evidence that the GEP prioritizes economic rationale to gender equality efforts. That is, although Uganda's GEP rhetorically considers gender equality as a "human right," the widespread economic rationale in the document suggests that the country addresses gender inequity primarily for economic return. The rhetoric ("human right") and the practice (policy objectives and strategies) do not match; the economic rationale to resolving gender inequity is more widely cited.

Arguably, the GEP also exaggerates progress in enrollment and claims the progress that might have occurred due to progress in other sectors. For instance, in higher education, in about 8 years (2008-2015), women's enrollment increased by just over 1%, from 43% in 2008 to 44.2% in 2015 (Gender in Education Policy, 2016). In secondary education, in over seven years (2008-2014), there was an increase in girls' enrollment in just 1% (from 46% to 47%) whereas boys' enrollment actually decreased by 1%: "enrollment into secondary schools has changed from 54% for boys and 46% for girls in 2008 to 53% for boys and 47% for girls in 2014" (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2016; p. 1). Combined, these features of the policy suggest an evasion of power as it relates to gender equity.

Comparative Discussion of Gender and Education Policy Mandates

In this section, we present an intertextual discussion of all three policy documents. To better understand how gender equity discussion could impact the region, each document is put in conversation with the extant literature about higher education development.

Acknowledgement of Gender-Based Inequities

Kenya's Education and Training Sector Gender Policy (Ministry of Education of Kenya, 2015) emphasizes the commitment of the Kenyan government in addressing gender inequity in education and training and endorses the positive impact of previous action to narrow the gender gap. Therefore, the policies should provide financial support for female students to promote their enrollment and educational achievement. However, the policy strategy does not provide for such support. Additionally, while the document dedicates a separate chapter to gender-based violence, the policy still avoids specific strategies and measures for eradicating gender-based violence against female students.

Similarly, Rwanda's Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018/19–2022/23 acknowledges gender-based inequities. ESSP, in line with the National Gender Policy (2021), acknowledges the issues raised in the literature and recommends changing stereotypes, increasing numbers, and improving female education so they can competitively secure spots in public universities. ESSP does not adequately address the issue of flexibility, despite hinting at barriers to access and participation for women. ESSP addresses this concern through the recommendation of gender responsive pedagogies. While the topics of role models, changing social norms and stereotypes, and ensuring participation in STEM education (through breaking stereotypes) are addressed, ESSP does not sufficiently focus on affirmative action or strategic interventions specifically for women in higher education.

Meanwhile, Uganda's Gender in Education Policy (2016–2030) speaks to persisting inequities. By highlighting economic rationale as a justification for gender equality, GEP makes heavy reference to international policies and global priorities over local needs. Although local policies may need to be informed by global policy context, the over focus on international developments may compromise inward looking ability to generate context-specific and home-based solutions.

Strategies to Address Inequities

This work helps us arrive at various recommendations for future policy development. Kenya has been trying to implement gender policies in the education sector since 2007. The scholarly literature is critical about implementation and the achieving of results, especially in higher education in STEM disciplines. Thus, the gender policy in education should specifically focus on the gender gap in STEM higher education, as it remains the area with the largest gender disparity in favor of male students. Specifically, the policies should be clear and transparent about providing financial support specifically for female students intending to enroll in STEM programs. Affirmative action should include specific directives for female students intending to enroll in STEM programs with a

proportional incentive, to promote women's access to and equity in STEM programs. Such policy should provide clear procedures and criteria for its application. The Kenyan government should carry out an active campaign against gender-based violence in general and especially in educational environments and facilities. The implementation of gender responsive policies should focus more on qualitative change in the educational system and institutions, in contrast to focusing on establishing various governing structures.

Meanwhile, the Rwandan government has been focused on gender-related policymaking since the 1994 genocide. It has made great strides and continues to make progress. Rwanda's commitment to gender parity in education and social transformation is evident through its plethora of gender-based policies. However, what is most important is the understanding that all policies relating to work and society must integrate gender-based strategies to create structural changes within institutions and change gender-based perceptions and stereotypes in the larger society (Revised National Gender Policy of Rwanda, 2021). In line with this view, a review of ESSP and research literature reveals two major gaps. First, there needs to be detailed research commissioned by policymakers on the actual barriers faced by women to participating fully in education, especially at higher levels (e.g., the issue of inadequate facilities; Huggins & Randell, 2007) needs to be further explored. Second, there is need for more research and interventions within the classroom, that is, addressing questions regarding what causes women to be unable to participate fully in the classroom, the extent of gender-responsive teaching, and what stereotypes are being perpetuated. Only then will gender responsive pedagogy be truly effective in creating an inclusive space for women. The lack of women in public universities needs further examination, as expensive and poorer quality private universities present an intersectional problem of class and gender, leading to further complications for women's education (Crenshaw, 1990).

Finally, Uganda's gender policy analyzed limited numerically oriented gender issues, such as disparity in enrollment ratio and completion rate. Thus, the country needs to be more comprehensive in gender issue analysis by including qualitative and structural gender issues. In contrast, the government may need to introduce gender disaggregated data as the default means of reporting quantitative data. The policy may need to consider qualitatively captured gender issues, such as experiences of men and women during educational transitions; entry to universities, colleges, and majors; and post-entry experiences on campus. It may also need to emphasize structural gender issues, such as curriculum, pedagogy, and leadership. Generally speaking, Uganda has no shortage of gender related policies. However, there is a lack of substantial and responsive policies. Despite a call for tailored interventions, Uganda's gender policies (e.g., the 1991 Gender-Based Affirmative Action, which added 1.5 bonus points for women in admission to higher education) neglect the differences in students' background and continue to apply a blanket policy that benefits privileged women (Odaga, 2020). Part of responsive interventions is acknowledging the heterogeneity of students, women included, and the diversity of contexts. Women students from rural and lower income households may encounter different and more severe challenges than those from urban and wealthier families. Thus, the types and levels of interventions should correspond to students' characteristics. GEP's approach to gender issue analysis and interventions should be more specific and intentional, mindful of the diversity and heterogeneity among students, hence the intersectionality and multidimensionality of challenges faced by different student groups. In some instances, GEP policy identifies gender issues but falls short of planned intervention. The Ugandan government needs to ensure that every issue is outlined, and corresponding intervention actions are planned.

Conclusion

Women's participation in the workforce is a necessary component to economic prosperity for each of the three countries discussed in this paper. Given the three countries are economically in the same category, "developing nations" that aspire to be among the middle-income countries, we do not argue that the prioritization of economic growth is necessarily wrong. We argue that economic rationale should not be cited as the only, or emphasized as a major reason, to combat gender inequity. Increasing educational attainment for women at the tertiary level will contribute to economic empowerment and growth. Over the past 50 years, educational attainment accounts for about 50% of economic growth (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012). While gender equality has not been reached for the majority of women in these countries, economic development and prosperity will continue to be stalled until the entire eligible workforce is engaged (UNESCO, 2021). These three countries may benefit if they devise and practice a balanced approach to addressing gender inequity from both social and economic benefits. The commitment to gender equity in education is clear in Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda. National policies shape what happens at the public universities in these countries; therefore, the language and ideas in these policies, both implicitly and explicitly, may open or foreclose opportunities for women.

Ultimately, our analysis matters because it draws attention to policy deficiencies with respect to clearly identifying gender-based issues in education and clear and effective strategies to address these issues. Our use of CDA was a fitting methodological approach to undertaking an examination of the ways in which gender-based issues in education are often addressed in superficial and vague ways, perhaps more to "check boxes" than to authentically address real inequities in higher education. We conclude that our analysis pushes forward the area of gender and higher education.

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