



**FAWE** Forum for African Women Educationalists

**FAWE Research Series  
Vol 2 - 2011**

**STRENGTHENING** gender research  
to improve **GIRLS' and WOMEN'S**  
education **IN AFRICA**



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# Strengthening gender research to improve girls' and women's education in Africa

FAWE Research Series  
Vol. 2 - 2011

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**The full edition of the FAWE Research Series Vol. II is available on the CD that accompanies this abstract.**

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## Introduction

Volume 2 of the FAWE Research Series reiterates our commitment to contribute to girls' education on the African continent by generating strong evidence to inform policy and advocacy efforts.

Through this volume that seeks to address gender issues in formal schooling practices, we recognise that girls' education continues to be plagued by challenges. Closing the gender gap and achieving gender parity by 2015, as outlined by the Millennium Development Goals, will require concerted efforts by ministries of education, development partners, school administrators and advocacy groups.

Gender equity is an essential building block in sustainable development. Women in sub-Saharan Africa not only have recognised and invaluable traditional and local knowledge, they play vital roles in the incubation and transfer of critical, local knowledge on which survival strategies are based. Access to quality learning, training and capacity development is the key to their empowerment and enables their participation in the development of their communities.

Yet many girls attending secondary school are failing to master the skills and competencies needed to succeed in today's labour market. Measured in terms of learning achievement, the quality of educational services in most African countries remains low, while gender inequalities in both learning and earning outcomes persist.

It is against this backdrop that FAWE partnered with researchers across the African continent to promote gender equity through policy-relevant research on education. The research focuses on areas where knowledge is particularly scant; identifies the missing links, data gaps, and key issues; and addresses critical shortcomings.

Through its research activities, FAWE aims to contribute to enhancing girls' education through high impact research projects and publications that will inform policy decisions with research evidence. FAWE also hopes to strengthen research capacity in Africa by collaborating with professors and specialists who, in turn, mentor budding researchers, training them in the latest research methodologies.

By selecting female researchers with affiliations to universities and/or gender research institutes, FAWE widens its engagement by utilising the platforms of these institutions to connect with other stakeholders in education through research. In its collaboration with primarily female researchers and experts, FAWE creates a forum that foregrounds the critical role of women in generating knowledge, creating solutions, and redressing issues in girls' education.

In this volume, while Kenyatta University, Nairobi, looks at the impact of gender equity policies and programmes on the participation of female students in Kenya's public university education, the Centre for Educational Research and Training (CERT) in the Faculty of Education at Chancellor College, University of Malawi, investigates the impact of policies and initiatives that address gender equality in education and female participation in community activities.

The Centre for Gender, Culture and Development of the Kigali Institute of Education analyses the impact of child-friendly schools on girls' education in Rwanda by undertaking research in four schools. The University of Maryland investigates the factors that affect women's choices to pursue a career in primary school teaching in Liberia. Lastly, Covenant University, Nigeria, investigates the gender gap in enrolment and the career choices of accounting students in Nigerian universities.

FAWE would like to thank the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) for providing the funding for the analytic work and papers that constitute the FAWE Research Series Volume 2. Promoting gender equity in education is an uphill endeavour that requires institutional and community-based partnerships. Norad has been an invaluable partner through its generous funding and unwavering support of FAWE's research initiative through the years. FAWE would also like to extend thanks to all the research partners and institutions for their various contributions and for enabling this volume to come to fruition.

Oley Dibba-Wadda  
FAWE Executive Director

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### Financial support and guidance

#### **The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad)**

Norad's commitment to gender equality and education and its generous support of educational research has been the engine behind FAWE's research initiative and the Research Series publication. FAWE is indebted to Norad for its steadfast support for almost 20 years.

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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

6YBE	Six-year basic education
9YBE	Nine-year basic education
12YBE	12-year basic education
AA	Affirmative action
AICPA	American Institute of Certified Public Accountants
AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
ALP	Accelerated Learning Programme
CA	Chartered accountancy
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEO	County Education Officer
CERT	Centre for Educational Research and Training
CESLY	Core Educational Skills for Liberian Youth
CFS	Child-friendly school
CGCD	Center for Gender Culture and Development
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRECCOM	Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation
CSCQBE	Civil Society Coalition for Quality Basic Education
DEO	District Education Officer
DHT	Deputy head teacher
ECSEL	European Community Support in Education to Liberia
EDC	Education Development Center
EDPRS	Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2008-2012
EFA	Education for All
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FGD	Focus group discussion
FGM	Female genital mutilation
GEEF	Gender Equity Education Framework
GM	Gender mainstreaming
GOAL	Girls' Opportunity to Access Learning
GOK	Government of Kenya
GoR	Government of Rwanda
GS	Groupe scolaire (school)
HEC	Higher Education Council
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus

HT	Head teacher
ICT	Information and communication technology
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
IPAR	Institute of Policy Analysis and Research
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JAB	Joint Admissions Board
JAMB	Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board
JCE	Junior Certificate Examinations
JKUAT	Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology
KIE	Kigali Institute of Education
KU	Kenyatta University
LTTP	Liberian Teacher Training Program
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MIGEPROF	Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion
MINECOFIN	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning
MINEDUC	Ministry of Education
MMUST	Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology
MoE	Ministry of Education
MSCE	Malawi School Certificate of Examinations
NCST	National Council of Science and Technology
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NTAL	National Teachers' Association of Liberia
NUC	National Universities Commission
PROGE	Promotion of Girls' Education project
PTA	Parent-teacher association
PTC	Parent-teacher committee
PTR	Pupil-teacher ratio
RTTI	Rural teacher training institute
SACMEQ	Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality
SCT	Social cognitive theory
SMC	School management committee
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TT	Teacher training
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNIBEN	University of Benin
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UTME	Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination
VAWGEDE	Violence against Women and Girls – an Enemy to Development
WAEC	West African Examination Council

## Overview

Women represent a significant portion of every nation's human resources base; together they constitute a pool of talent for the development of their immediate communities and larger societies. How can we ensure women gain better access to quality education so that they can participate in the leadership of their various communities? How are we to incorporate a gender perspective into research agendas, into research and development and into the development of strategies, policies, processes and products to support a gender and development agenda? These concerns have been the focus of discussions in several national and international settings; those addressing women's needs, rights and advancement as well as those focusing on the role of education in supporting sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

An extra year of education increases a girl's income by 10 to 20 per cent and is a significant step on the road to breaking the cycle of poverty. Educating girls gives them a chance to make a better life for themselves and their children and creates a more prosperous community, a better workforce and a wealthier nation. The accumulation of educational endowments not only allows girls to take up economic opportunities and generate income, but also to apply these endowments to take action (agency) to improve their individual and society's wellbeing.

Gender-responsive policies that take into account the environment and the cultural and social realities of the lives of both women and men—while aiming to eliminate inequalities and promote an equal distribution of resources—are the most successful at giving girls such agency. As government and international organisations rely increasingly on research to design, monitor and assess policy interventions, reliable gender-disaggregated data and statistics are crucial for the development of policies promoting gender equity.

FAWE, in its efforts to reduce persistent gender gaps and give women agency—the process by which individuals make choices and translate them into desired outcomes—has engaged in research to generate evidence to support its advocacy and collaborative efforts with governments and international organisations. In partnership with researchers from five institutions, FAWE carried out the following studies that constitute Volume 2 of the FAWE Research Series.



## **The impact of gender equity policies and programmes on the participation of female students in Kenya's public university education**

This study, conducted in collaboration with Kenyatta University, examines structural formal policies and programmes, as well as non-formal, deeply-held institutional assumptions, norms and values that result in gender inequity. While researchers investigate ways in which existing university programmes and policies can be improved to benefit women's participation, the study also documents the gendered enrolment and performance patterns by course specialisation, highlights the impact of gender equity policies and programmes on female students' participation in public university education, and recommends ways in which existing gender equity policies and programmes in Kenyan public universities could be improved.

Research findings reveal a limited number and variety of policies and programmes that redress gender inequalities in access to and retention in the university. Additionally, while policies in place have focused on access to university education, they have neglected retention, student achievement and completion—important components of the equity equation. The research recommends revising the existing policies to make them more holistic, creating awareness by actively disseminating gender policies and programmes to a wider audience and sensitising members of the university community on gender issues.

## **Women teachers in Liberia: Between desire and reality**

This study, carried out in partnership with the University of Maryland, USA, focuses on factors that affect women's choices to become primary school teachers in Liberia. It seeks to expose the factors that account for the male-dominated primary school teaching force, and the barriers that dissuade women from becoming teachers. The research also examines the experience of female teachers and identifies job conditions that render teaching a challenging profession. The researchers conducted qualitative, semi-structured interviews with Ministry of Education officials, in- and pre-service teachers, school administrators and faculty at teacher training institutions, and international development professionals.

The research findings suggest that women face several cultural barriers to receiving an education. Specifically, the patrilineal assumptions that imply a girl is a resource for her husband's family, early onset of sexual activity and teenage pregnancy, pressure on girls to marry early, and low investment in the education system on a national level all seriously compromise a girl's ability to enter and stay in school in Liberia. Few girls completing education means few girls are available to become teachers at any level.

The study offers several policy options for increasing the number of female teachers in the workforce.

### **The impact of girl-friendly school initiatives in Malawi: Evidence from six case studies**

The Centre for Educational Research and Training (CERT) in the Faculty of Education at Chancellor College, University of Malawi, investigates the impact of policies and initiatives that address gender equality in education and female participation in community activities. Using a three-pronged approach, the study conducts a critical analysis of all gender equality policies formulated since 2000. Researchers analysed the effectiveness of the developed strategies and their impact. The researchers also evaluated two projects targeting girls, documented the perceived changes, and assessed the impact of the policies and initiatives on girls' access to, and participation and performance in school. Study findings reveal that initiatives or projects addressing one or two aspects of girls' needs only benefit a limited number of girls and do not have lasting effects on girls' participation in school. The research recommends holistic interventions and solutions to a broad range of issues in gender equity.

### **Gender gap: Enrolment and career choices of accounting students in Nigerian universities**

This study, conducted in partnership with Covenant University, Nigeria, seeks to determine gender gaps in the enrolment of accounting students in Nigerian universities, and examines the factors that influence the career choices of accounting students in Nigeria. The study also investigates students' perceptions of accounting as a career and develops an advocacy programme for an educational policy to influence female career choices and boost female admission to Nigerian universities. Findings reveal that while there has been a gradual increase in female enrolment in accounting programmes in Nigerian universities, enrolment rates have varied in private, government and federal universities. The study provides recommendations on ways to increase female participation in disciplines such as accounting.

### **Impact of child-friendly schools on girls' education in Rwanda**

Rwanda ranks high internationally in gender equality and women's empowerment. Yet there are still gaps between policy and practice in relation to the retention, achievement and transition of girls in secondary and tertiary education. Against this backdrop, this study, carried out in partnership with the Kigali Institute of Education's

Centre for Gender, Culture and Development, analyses the impact of child-friendly schools on girls' education in Rwanda. The research questions were based on the outcomes of the child-friendly school programme in four categories, as set by the Ministry of Education: enrolment, retention, achievement and school management/community involvement. Findings on enrolment indicate that while gender balance has been achieved, gaps in achievement still exist. The study recommends launching a sensitisation and awareness programme to help communities understand the need to educate girls. It also makes the case for the provision of adequate infrastructures and equipment to facilitate learning.

### **Informing policy and advocacy through research**

Education is an engine for development. While great strides have been made to provide girls with educational opportunities, findings from the studies carried out under FAWE's research initiative indicate persistent gaps in access to and retention and achievement in education at secondary and higher levels. Understanding which of these gaps respond to economic development and why they do so, is relevant to policy because it helps shine light on the gender gaps that need attention. Designing appropriate policies is just the first step toward greater gender equality. The goal of FAWE's Research Series is not only to highlight the education issues still in need of attention, but to provide strong evidence to inform policy and advocate for educational programmes that will enable girls to reach their full potential. With the publication of Volume 2 of its Research Series, FAWE stays true to its goal of disseminating pertinent information that is critical for the design and implementation of educational programmes that will not only allow girls and women to become agentive, but will enable them to partake in both their own and their community's development.



## **Basic education:**

**Gender-responsive schooling and the  
role of teachers**

## Gender-responsive schooling and the role of teachers

Building on past research, the papers in this volume draw linkages between gender-responsive schooling practices and girls' achievement in primary and secondary education. The study on Liberia underscores the correlation between factors that affect women's choices to become school teachers, barriers that dissuade women from becoming teachers, and cultural and professional environments in which female teachers operate. In response to the argument that few women enrolling in schools means few women are available to become teachers, the study offers several policy options for increasing the number of female teachers in the workforce.

The studies on Malawi and Rwanda investigate gender-responsive practices in selected schools to examine their effectiveness in keeping girls in schools. While Rwanda highlights teacher quality and sensitivity, and gender balance in leadership positions as critical factors for students' success, the Malawi study underlines the need to adopt holistic approaches in addressing the multiple factors that militate against girls' education.

The common theme in all the studies is the centrality of teachers' roles to students' success. There is thus a need to equip teachers with gender-responsive teaching and assessment methods to make formal schooling environments sufficiently appealing to girls. This will encourage them to stay in school and eventually narrow the gender gap in achievement.



**Higher  
education:** Mainstreaming gender to increase  
female participation

## Mainstreaming gender to increase female participation

Higher education is one of the most important sectors of human resource formation in today's global economy. With the specialised knowledge, skills, research and innovative capacities they impart to learners, these institutions could be considered the primary agents driving social, political and economic progress. The current global economy is knowledge-intensive and requires labourers with high-level skills. Higher education has been charged with the responsibility not only of producing such high-level skilled labour, but also of producing and using knowledge for economic development.

While there has been a push to increase the number of higher education institutions in Africa, there has not been enough visible effort to increase female participation and achieve greater gender equality, despite calls to broaden access and improve the participation of women across all levels of education. Although national policies addressing these issues as well as declarations on gender equality in all levels of education have been adopted, inequalities persist.

Focusing on specific universities, the research in this section investigates problem areas that still require attention and proposes policies to optimise gender mainstreaming in institutions of higher learning. In response to indicators from Kenyatta University in Kenya that challenges faced by women during the course of their studies curtail their learning and achievement, the research proposes solutions and policies to make higher education more inclusive. In like manner, the research at Covenant University in Nigeria investigates female under-representation in such fields as accounting and mathematics, and suggests areas for policy intervention.

The research papers argue for the institution of more inclusive gender policies that will attract and retain women in higher education institutions. If cultivating human capacity necessitates the inclusion of all sectors of the population, it cannot be achieved without the full participation of women.

## Conclusion and recommendations for policy and practice

The research in this volume provides clear evidence that it is possible to improve gender equality in education if the right policies and interventions are put in place, and if the interventions are evaluated on the basis of gender-disaggregated data.

Evidence generated from this body of research also supports FAWE's mission to create positive societal attitudes, policies and practices that promote equity for girls in terms of access, retention, performance and quality by influencing the transformation of African education systems.

### **Gender-responsive schooling practices**

What happens in teaching and learning processes in the classroom plays a big role in determining how well girls and boys participate in education, and whether they stay in school and do well in their studies. Because teachers are central to the teaching and learning processes, their understanding and awareness of gender-responsiveness is key to the effective participation of girls and boys in learning processes.

The research in this volume builds on this notion by addressing gender-responsiveness in selected formal schools in three African countries, and highlights the hurdles that continue to stand in the way of girls' full inclusion in formal schooling institutions.

In Liberia, an examination of the barriers that dissuade women from becoming teachers highlights the patrilineal assumptions woven into the cultural fabric of society. Such assumptions that girls are more resourceful in the home than in public institutional roles lead to fewer girls completing education, and thus fewer girls being available to become teachers. Policies that make schools more gender-sensitive will increase the number of female students in schools, and by extension the number of potential female teaching professionals.

In the same vein, the two analyses on the impact of child-friendly schools argue that girls' achievement in school is not only highly dependent on the quality and sensitivity of teachers, but is also highly influenced by the presence of women in leadership positions. There is now, more than ever, a need to sensitise key stakeholders, to articulate the needs of female students, and to create educational avenues to allow women to take up leadership positions within their various communities.



## Higher education, a site for knowledge production

Higher education systems have been characterised by deeply ingrained gender inequality, yet they are one of the most important sectors of resource formation. While higher education plays a vital role in knowledge production and information dissemination for developmental purposes, the lack of adequate female representation and participation in tertiary education accounts for the absence of women in positions of leadership within their various communities. While African women are key contributors to economic and social production, they have limited opportunities to contribute to or make major decisions. The research papers in this series challenge policy-makers to re-think and re-conceptualise higher education based on a policy of inclusiveness. They do this by developing strategic plans for gender mainstreaming at all levels, and in particular for providing gender-responsive environments to allow full participation of girls in tertiary education. In order for women to play an active role in the social and scientific development of their nations, specific measures have to be implemented to redress the glaring under-representation of women in higher education institutions. Such measures could include instituting gender mentoring and counselling programmes for support and guidance, making the curriculum more gender-responsive to attract and retain female students, and providing safe learning spaces for women to allow them to develop a sense of belonging in these institutional environments.

To influence more inclusive education policies that cater to the needs of girls, FAWE intends to use such evidence in its continuous engagement and dialogue with national governments, institutions of learning, and stakeholders in education. Gender equality matters as an instrument for development. Because education is the engine that drives development, it is critical that women be given adequate space and resources to enable them to reach their full potential to contribute both to their individual development and to that of their societies.





Gender equality in education is an integral instrument for economic growth. In global and national discourses, education is framed as an engine of growth that fuels national economies and sustainable development. Yet gender gaps in education persist as girls continue to lag behind their male counterparts in access, opportunities, and achievements.

This second volume of the FAWE Research Series unpacks issues in girls' education in Africa, and highlights the need to remove barriers that prevent girls from reaching their full potential. In shedding light on some of the hurdles that stand in the way of girls' education, the research looks at gender parity issues from multiple perspectives.

Using the child-friendly/girl-friendly school models, the research focuses on select institutions and their efforts in making formal schooling environments gender-responsive. While it investigates the extent to which schools are endowed with appropriate infrastructure, the research also looks at the policies and support programmes in place that make for safe, nurturing and gender-responsive learning environments.

This volume of the FAWE Research Series also highlights gender-responsive practices in institutions of higher education. Universities serve as sites where knowledge for economic growth and development is generated. How inclusive of women are these institutions that play a crucial role in generating new ideas and in accumulating and transmitting knowledge for sustainable development?

In its continuous dialogues and engagements with governments, policy-makers, and development partners, FAWE hopes to generate research that not only adds to the scant research on girls' education but supports policy and advocacy efforts aimed at narrowing gender gaps in education and contributing towards gender equality in education and development.