



# The TESCEA approach to gender equity

## CASE STUDY

October 2021

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Gender considerations run throughout all the TESCEA approaches. This is important to ensure that higher education transformation benefits all students.

## 1 Introduction

For changes to university procedures, teaching approaches and stakeholder engagement to be effective, they must be inclusive of both men and women. In TESCEA, we have championed gender-responsive pedagogy, undertaken a range of gender sensitisation and awareness raising, as well as considered how policy reform can institutionalise these developments. Gender is highlighted throughout other cases in this series, too.

Gender-responsive pedagogy is an integral element of the Transforming Higher Education for Social Change approach and is pertinent within all aspects of teaching and learning, from lesson planning to assessment methods. It encourages academic staff to acknowledge and, where appropriate, to challenge, the social imbalances within their classes and beyond.

All four TESCEA universities facilitated sessions that focused on gender during their course redesign workshops. These sessions, now formally integrated into the Transforming Higher Education for Social Change toolkits, start by exploring key concepts (for example, the important distinction between gender and sex). They then interrogate how language, resources, and interactions within the learning space have a significant impact on a student's ability to learn and engage.

In the words of Agrace Atwikirize, from Uganda Martyrs University (UMU), *“many [lecturers] confessed to having been gender blind, despite a diverse working experience. Some had never taken into consideration issues like the references they use, why female students don't like sitting in some seats and prefer certain corners, even the language used that unconsciously was discriminative.”*

Indeed, many of the behaviours that prevent equal participation are unconscious but, through these sessions, “...instructors have managed to see how gender bias was practised unintentionally during the facilitation of learning”, as Dr Felichesmi Lyakurwa from Mzumbe University, reflects.

For more information, and examples of how lecturers have adapted their lesson plans following TESCEA training read [How to make gender classes more gender responsive](#) by Mai Skovgaard, the TESCEA project manager, INASP.

Different from biological sex, gender describes the socially constructed characteristics and roles of men and women. Through socialisation when growing up, individuals develop certain expectations, attitudes, behaviours, and biases associated with their gender. This can affect an individual's attainment in education and their access to opportunities.

### TRANSFORMING EMPLOYABILITY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN EAST AFRICA

Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA) is helping young people in Tanzania and Uganda to use their skills and ideas to tackle social and economic problems. With partners in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, TESCEA supports universities, industries, communities and government to work together to create an improved learning experience for students – both women and men. This improved learning experience fosters the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and allows for practical learning beyond the classroom that improves a graduate's employability.

The TESCEA partnership is led by INASP (UK), working with Mzumbe University (Tanzania), University of Dodoma (Tanzania), Gulu University (Uganda), Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda), Association for Faculty Enrichment in Learning and Teaching (Kenya) and Ashoka East Africa (Kenya).

Awareness raising around gender issues has also been conducted with other groups within the project. These include students, university administration/management, and stakeholders from industry and the community. This type of sensitisation is important, as it promotes systemic change.

Taking a step back, the partnership also worked to ensure that the delivery of TESCEA itself was gender responsive. At UMU and Gulu University, for example, faculty members with infants and young children were able to bring childcare support to workshops and were provided with food and accommodation. Other examples can be found throughout the other cases in this series.

## **UMU's approach to gender seminars, and student gender champions and clubs**

*Written by Agrace Atwikirize (lecturer from Uganda Martyrs University) and Josie Dryden*

In 2020, Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) delivered a series of gender awareness raising seminars to students. Facilitated by the university's multipliers, these sessions were designed to develop an understanding of gender-responsive pedagogy and also to inspire further advocacy at the student level. This was, for example, through the nomination of student champions and the development of student clubs.

The intention was initially to only train student leaders, who would then cascade this training down to the rest of the student body. However, the sudden lockdown of all educational institutions in Uganda meant that student leadership would likely finish their studies online and be unable to carry forward activities to other students. As such, the strategy changed to delivering online training to all students. Online delivery also had the benefit of broad participation without the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

To reach as many students as possible, the seminars were advertised through a variety of means. For example, the university's technical team created a promotional banner that was shared on different platforms used by students, including WhatsApp and Facebook as well as on UMU's official media accounts and mailing lists.

Each seminar was delivered on Zoom and ran for approximately three hours. Each topic was managed by two facilitators (multipliers) and included a number of interactive activities (see the 'energizer' appendix in the toolkits for activities to use). The UMU team reported that gender riddles, included in the sample agenda below, were particularly effective at engaging and energising participants.

To support the asynchronous sessions, a space was also developed on the University's Learning Management System (LMS), Moodle. This online space acted as a repository for all the relevant materials and activities, which participants could continue to access after the sessions.

Following the awareness-raising seminars, the election of student gender champions was postponed until it was possible for students to meet physically. This materialised in May 2021, where five gender champions and a gender club were established at each of the six UMU campuses. The approach was as follows:

1. Student gender champions, who would become club leaders, were elected.
2. The gender champions were then responsible for recruiting more students to join the clubs.
3. Additional gender sensitisation was offered to new club members, and gender champions were offered training on making a club constitution.
4. The club constitutions were finalised, and delivery of further gender-awareness activities planned.

When delivering this approach, the team at UMU needed to address two main challenges. First, as delivery was online, poor internet connectivity was a serious issue. On the side of the facilitators, this was mitigated by providing transport to places with better connectivity. As described in the parent case, another challenge was addressing resistance to this type of gender awareness raising in general. However, as Agrace Atwikirize, reflects, "as days went by, [students] realised the need to have a gender-responsive learning environment, pedagogy for all."



## UDOM's approach to gender awareness raising and gender-responsive learning space

At the University of Dodoma (UDOM), a series of workshops have been held to raise gender awareness and to enhance the institution's process of change toward a more gender-responsive learning environment.

The initial workshops were targeted toward the institution's multipliers. Later, multipliers joined the facilitation team and made it possible to deliver this awareness raising to other members of faculty and students. Indeed, the UDOM team stresses the importance of encouraging faculty and students to discuss these topics together, identifying solutions and generating ideas collaboratively. In addition, the sessions included group work activities and role modelling.

The workshops were designed with four specific objectives:

1. To address knowledge gaps in key gender concepts and gender inequalities within the institution (among both facilitators and students).
2. To advocate for a gender responsive teaching and learning space, illustrating why it is relevant to one's personal, educational, and professional life.
3. To critically reflect on teaching and learning practices at the institution and identify immediate actions to ensure that the needs of both male and female students are met.
4. To identify suitable outputs to support facilitators in making changes towards a more gender responsible and equitable learning space.

The main intention of these sessions was to support faculty to deliver their courses in a gender-responsive way. However, a series of other activities have stemmed from these events, too:

- **Student Clubs:** Students have grouped themselves into clubs, some with a direct gender focus and others with an entrepreneurial focus. The gender clubs lead discussions and strengthen the links between the gender unit and the student body. For example, some discussions have focused on supporting students to report gender and sexual harassment concerns.
- **Mentoring:** Multipliers and other members of faculty have volunteered to mentor students not only in the clubs (described above) but also in project work and innovation development.
- **New Multipliers:** Following the workshops, more members of faculty have been nominated or volunteered to become Multipliers, with a strong gender focus.
- **Case Studies:** Following the workshops (and supplemented by other TESCEA events), the team have compiled a series of case studies that support the delivery of further training and awareness raising. The series shares experiences of unconscious bias, stereotyping, and the implications of culturally prescribed gender roles.
- **Management buy-in:** University management is gender aware and supports gender-responsive learning and research space. Gender awareness raising among facilitators and students has been included in the University structure from colleges to the University level.
- **Policy development:** UDOM has a gender and anti-sexual harassment policy in review.

Looking forward, the University's gender unit is now supported by TESCEA multipliers, approaches, and resources. The project has aided the unit in supporting students, both within the classroom and at each college's gender desk. Overall, UDOM reports that facilitators now feel more comfortable discussing gender issues with students, and students feel that their interactions with faculty have been more open and gender responsive. In addition, students feel empowered to interact with the gender desk support teams.



*Participants in a TESCEA 'train the trainer' session in Tanzania in 2019*

*Photo by Mai Skovgaard, INASP*

## 2 Challenges

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During the project, we encountered a number of challenges. These included:

- **Level of Awareness**  
All universities found that initial understanding of key gender terms and concepts was low.
- **Resistance**  
*“There is still a section of staff who view gender issues as irrelevant and uncalled for. They think that gender is for women issues and nothing beneficial to the male gender which is not true.”*  
Agrace Atwikirize, lecturer at UMU
- **Hesitance to contribute**  
Discussions of gender can bring up sensitive topics, and sometimes, people may be hesitant to contribute. During workshops and events, it is the responsibility of the facilitator to create a productive and positive learning space.

Recognising these challenges, the universities offer the following advice:

- **Promote awareness regularly:** This can happen formally, as described above, or informally, by *“...making sure that gender responsiveness is mentioned at every opportunity whether in official meetings or unofficial gatherings.”*  
Professor Flora Fabian, University of Dodoma
- **Resources:** Discussions about gender can be supported with resources. For example, in a workshop with the TESCEA universities’ Vice Chancellors, the BBC documentary ‘Sex for Grades’: Undercover in West African Universities was a powerful conversation starter.
- **Buy-in:** The explicit support of university management is valuable, especially when addressing resistance.

## 3 Beyond TESCEA

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All four universities intend to continue raising awareness and promoting gender-responsive pedagogy.

Gulu University is advocating for the establishment of a Gender Mainstreaming Unit, which would be responsible for ensuring gender is considered in all aspects of the institution’s work, akin to the University of Dodoma’s Gender Coordination Unit. At Mzumbe University, it is the team of multipliers (see other case study) who are leading scale-out by facilitating awareness raising workshops across the different campuses. There are also plans to train the Mzumbe University’s gender group to build more capacity on gender-responsive pedagogy.

To conclude, Professor Flora Fabian reflects that “...if gender awareness and gender responsive pedagogy is embedded in in [the] teaching – learning space, this will bring everyone on board not only in producing employable graduates with equal opportunity but...[raising] the economic power of both women and men and the society at large and as such, the growth and stability of the country as a whole”.

For more case studies of TESCEA approaches see  
[www.transformhe.org](http://www.transformhe.org)

**Contact: TransformHE@inasp.info**

October 2021

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Cover image: Gender exercise in the second course redesign workshop at Uganda Martyrs University

Credit: Tabitha Buchner

Transforming Employability for Social Change in East Africa (TESCEA) is funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) as part of its SPHEIR (Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform) programme.

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