

between the sexes.

STRATEGIC ADVANCEMENT OF GENDER EQUITY AND EQUALITY

Strategic advancement toward gender equality and a violence-free society should include sensitizing and empowering men and boys on gender issues. Dedicated professional counselors, psychologists, deans of students, and wardens should work in an organized and structured manner with student peers, executive management, and faculties to offer counseling, sensitization, and open discussions on what triggers sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Coordinating both academic and extracurricular activities such as nature clubs, sports, and games gives opportunities for feedback and keeps young people busy and healthy. Student counselling on social issues, responsible residential life at universities, prevention against diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis combined with a strict institutional culture and gender policy are practical ways to build inclusive, respectful, and diverse academic communities. Consistently communicating, advising, and sensitizing students is crucial. Reversing a nefarious culture requires bold institutional leadership dealing decisively with cases of sexual misconduct, coupled with a rigorous selection of professional staff.

CONCLUSION

Sexual harassment and gender-based violence in higher education are signs of institutional failure. Indeed, victims may see their academic careers stunted or destroyed. The vicious cycle of poverty and moral decadence is perpetuated. Endemic gender-based violence and sexual harassment undermine the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals in the African context. ■

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The #MeToo Movement as a Global Learning Moment

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Most women around the world have experienced sexual harassment, assault, and violence, or have at times been pushed into a zone where they knew it did not feel

right. They have experienced the “same” moment, and yet for each of them it has been a different moment. For some it was an “aha” moment; for some the pain, emotional and physical, may have been unbearable, lasting for days, months, or years. For others still, this moment had to be deeply buried. It could not be spoken about because of its cultural and political context; it was identifiable but stripped of the power that comes from naming. This moment of articulation and recognition may be shaped by women’s age, sexual orientation, trans status, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic position, religion, by broader cultural practices, and by a great many other formative experiences, present and past.

This essay places the #MeToo movement within the context of global learning. Given the global nature of sexual harassment, assault, and violence against women, but also given the common dismissal of such women’s experiences, what responsibilities do we have as international educators? How should we place this particular moment within a larger and broader effort in order to provide our students with global and international understanding? How can we harness this global movement in ways that will advance intercultural and intracultural awareness? How can we engage our students, faculty, and staff members in exploring these spaces of lived experiences that are so full of emotions, fear, and pain, but at the same time are embedded within diverse cultural practices in ways that may well give rise to misunderstandings?

THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE MOMENT

This is a very powerful and yet a very complicated moment. It is powerful because it resonates with women around the world and therefore presents an opportunity to have conversations in different parts of the world and with people representing different cultural experiences and perspectives: this is an opportunity for global learning at home and abroad. As I travel to different countries, I also hear denial, dismissal, and open criticism. #MeToo does not resonate with everyone; for many, it is seen as a matter of a privilege that women living under extreme poverty or in war-torn countries cannot afford.

This is an exciting moment because women are defining what harassment, violence, and assault mean for them. How have these lived experiences affected their own understandings of their bodies or of their positions within the larger society? But it is also a complicated moment because it requires from us a recognition that it is formed by local cultural context, political climate, powerful institutions, class, racial and ethnic privileges, heteronormativity, and many other pressures, exercised by networks of power and domination.

THE GENDERED HIERARCHIES OF POWER

Many research papers, articles, legal briefings, conferences, and seminars have attempted to define sexual harassment, assault, or violence against women. Women have spoken, written, demonstrated, and testified, yet it remains that many definitions and much of the current legal framework has been written by men and decided by men. Male-dominated religions govern, legislate, and control the bulk of cultural practices. Most legislative and executive bodies are dominated by men. The legal profession is governed predominantly by men. Patriarchal standards form the norms.

THE INVISIBILITY OF DIVERSITY

Most importantly, in our quest for a voice and for action we need to acknowledge diversity. Women vary in many ways, in skin color, ethnicity, sexual orientation, trans status, age, cultural beliefs, and/or socioeconomic status. Moreover, their intersecting identity markings make some women more vulnerable than others. All these variations demand that all their voices be heard, acknowledged, and reckoned with.

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Diversity remains a weak point of #MeToo, but also of international education. Too often, we speak in categories—of immigrants, international students, first-generation students, transfer students—and we do so without reflecting on what these categories tell us about those students' identities, their experiences, and their lives. Too often, the appeal of these large-scale categories leads us to a lack of a nuanced understanding that harassment or rape have different meanings in different cultural and national contexts; what for some is a criminal act is for others just a daily incident.

Too often, we focus only on students, while faculty and staff members seem to be left aside. We need to recognize that many men, because of their skin color, their sexual orientation, their trans status, or/and their class, do experience violence. As international educators, it is our responsibility to work with others, on our campuses, to foster a climate where inclusivity matters to everybody.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATORS AS FACILITATORS OF GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS

While, today, women define harassment, violence, and/or

assault based on their experiences, we, international educators, need to understand what this moment means for our institutions and for our strategies and approaches to internationalization. To be pervasive and comprehensive, internationalization needs to focus not solely on what policies and programs we should be establishing, but on creating spaces that are conducive to intercultural learning, conversations that are globally informed, and spaces that acknowledge different experiences and diversity.

What are we hearing from women—including students, faculty, and staff members—and how do we translate these voices into a powerful learning and teaching moment? How do we facilitate recognition of our own socially, politically, and economically formed cultures, so that we can confront and learn from this moment, in order better to understand those with different points of view or beliefs? How willing are international offices and senior international officers to speak out about and embrace this moment? How do we become self-reflective and recognize that international education administrators will represent different points of view? These are not new questions, yet many still await answers. The #MeToo movement started in 2006 but came to be heard and acknowledged only in 2017.

CHALLENGES REMAIN

Many students, faculty, and staff members are today keenly aware of their individual agency and of the complexities of their identities; these are not trivial dimensions of identity. As we rethink our strategies for internationalization, we need to be empowered by the diversity and difference surrounding us. As international educators, we have numerous tools available to us to make it happen: study away and study abroad; joint teaching opportunities with partners in different countries; short-term, theme-focused seminars; collaborative research and internships with NGOs; living and learning communities; annual themes that engage an entire campus in a conversation; staff exchanges; students' global leadership programs; and much more. In such contexts, exploration of what different terms, phrases, actions, policies, strategies, and everyday practices mean will provide our students with opportunities and experiences for broader and more grounded conversations; we must use all the tools we have.

The development of new strategies requires our collective awareness, understanding, and commitment to listening, learning, and engaging in intercultural, but also intracultural, conversations through cross-unit dialogue and action. Most of all, we, as international educators, have to create a sense of belonging regardless of diverse assumptions, beliefs, and practices. ■

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