Empowerment through the GESI Policy: Evaluations of the implications of GovPNG GESI Policy on students and staff of DWU, Madang Campus.

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1. Introduction

o   Shift in gender focus is on equal rights and opportunities for all people - Gender Equality and Social Inclusion.

o   The Government of PNG GESI Policy was formulated and influenced by a number of international and national policies and priorities.

o   While the policy is committed to address GESI issues in the public service its also gives provision for private organizations to either adopt or adapt the policy.

o   Thus, the focus of this study was to try to assess whether or not DWU - a private institution of higher learning – has incorporated (adapted or adopted) the GESI policy throughout the university lifecycle, aligning it with; Christian ethos, vision and mission, core values and graduate attributes (puts greater emphasis on gender values) and what implications in terms of practice this has on staff and students.

1.1 Research questions and objectives

Aim:

o Re-emphasize the importance of the GovPNG GESI policy in implementing good governance and gender equality inclusion at all levels of DWU governance structure.

Main research question:

o What are the impacts of the GESI Policy on the staff and students of DWU?

Supporting questions:

o What ways has DWU tried to incorporate the GESI Policy into the DWU governance structure and existing policies?

o What are the impacts the GoPNG GESI Policy on students and staff of DWU?

o How has DWU been dealing with GESI issues at the Madang campus?

The objectives are as follows;

o Investigate the impacts of the GESI Policy on the staff and students of DWU

o Explore ways in which DWU has tried to incorporate the GESI Policy into its governance structure and policies.

o Analyze the impact that GESI Policy has on students and staff of DWU.

o Determine how DWU has been dealing with GESI related issues on the Madang Campus.

2. Literature Review

Government of Papua New Guinea GESI Policy

Rise up, Step up, Speak up, Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Policy (2013), National Public Service, Department of Personnel Management.

The PNG GESI Policy of 2013 was developed in support of a number of National policies and priorities as well as international agreements including the National Constitution; the Vision 2050.

Largely influenced by the guiding principles articulated in the National Policy for Women and Gender Equality 2011-2015, the White Ribbon Day Activities in 2011, and the commitment made as part of the launch of the "Kirapim Wok GESI."

- emphasis on addressing gender issues in workplaces.
- roles of women and men are valued equally *(equal opportunities, equal treatment and equal entitlements)* and how this is translated into the home/society.

2.1 Importance of GESI for organizations and groups

The framework of equity is both an important and urgent one to consider, given that it covers all demographics: environmental, political, economic trends and highlights the need to at least consider the strong possibility that inequalities may be significantly contributing to our own destruction as organizations or groups. (Alcalde et al, 2019)

There are three points that are critical in the struggle for equality for any organization;

1) the structure, culture and leadership of organizations

- policies and programs needs to have leadership support

2) the role of policy in transforming institutions

- Policy interventions and programs must be supported by sufficient and credible data on the nature and scope of campus related GESI issues.

3) Politically uncomfortable or profitable in the short term however, it is seen as the way forward economically, socially and politically.

- In occurrence with findings, campus policies and programs are there to minimize GESI related issues must be comprehensive, integrated, multi sectoral and long term.

2.2 Challenges and opportunities of gender in the Pacific and PNG

Pacific Islands nations share similar challenges when it comes to addressing GESI issues dues to socio economic status. (The World Bank, 2019)

- The current shifts in socio-economic, political and cultural context is further complicated by long existing **negative forms** of cultural practices and beliefs systems that are associated with forms of discrimination, inequity and exclusion for vulnerable, marginalized groups in our societies.

- The opportunities are vast; looking back into our cultural values and principles have shaped our societies and bringing together knowledge sharing of how we create a hybrid gender system contextualized to **our ways of knowing, seeing and being – indigenous knowledge.**

- Employing a continuous system of comparing what was to what is and making clear amalgamations that suit our current contexts.

2.3 GESI in Higher Education Institutions

For GESI to be effective in workplaces, we've first got to prepare those who are going out into those workplaces, therefore, the need to address inequalities, inequities, and social exclusion and to provide avenues or programs for positive change to happen, especially in institutions of higher learning (Integral Leadership, 2019).

Recent years have proved that the operational aspect of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion have been put into practice and have brought about a mushroom of homegrown movements for schools and institutions of higher learning such as the Voice Inc, Equal Playing Field among others that are now having a positive impact preparing young people for workplaces - focused on;

- The importance of have a greater understanding of gender, respect and inclusion of all members of society through education.

- being one collective voice to address inequities in society and especially in our own spaces of influence, beginning in the school/workplace setting and creating a rippling effect into our street/homes.

These great initiatives cannot work in isolation, they need strategic planning of institutions that are guided by inclusive policies – internal and external.

2.4 Gender Mainstreaming in Higher Education

Institutional Barriers: structures, processes and systems

- **Gendered professions and careers.**

When it comes to a good education course for women it is not so much to do with their work and career choices after High School and/or university however, also their environments. Thus, the notion that gender equality issues in education have not been resolved as the gendered profession and careers continues to a norm. (Lempesi, 2019)

- **Equity problems of the marginalized groups such as people living with disability**

The main forms of institutional barriers is the misinterpretation of equality and inclusion. In most instances, this does not include equity problems of the marginalized groups such as people living with disability (PLWD) which would require a more responsive set of actions. For the most part, PLWD are highly likely not able to meet the eligibility criteria of most higher education institution especially those offering special trades than an able bodied individual. (APTC GESI Framework, 2019, p. 17)

- **Security and safety of women and girls on campus**

Institutions of Higher Education still need to have GESI response mechanisms and affirmative actions, which would play a crucial role in reinforcing the gendered and exclusionary norms and functions on policies and procedures. This will include all functions from academic to administration or the overall university lifecycle.

3. Methods of data collection and analysis.

- The philosophy underlying this study was interpretivism.
- This research employed qualitative method for data gathering.
- Instruments used for data gathering were semi-structured interviews.
- All data were gathered in DWU Madang Campus from July-September 2020.
- The research involved 15 participants (staff and students).
- Data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis approach.

4. Key Findings

The key findings were in response to the main research questions.

There were three main categories that came out of this research through the data collected.

What are the impacts of the GESI Policy on the staff and students of DWU?		
1. Ways in which DWU has tried to incorporate the GESI policy into the DWU governance structure and existing policies.	**2. Impacts of the GovPNG GESI Policy on students and staff of DWU.**	**3. Ways DWU is dealing with GESI issues on the Madang Campus.**
1.1 Understanding of GESI Policy.	2.1 Gender gap among teaching students and staff.	3.1 Dealing with GESI Issues.
1.2 Mainstreaming of GESI in DWU.	2.2 Social inclusion in the workplace and dealing with GESI issues.	

4.1 Ways in which DWU has tried to incorporate the PNG GESI policy into the DWU governance structure and existing policies.

4.1.0 Understanding of GESI Policy

o GovPNG GESI Policy believes that the development of a common understanding of what GESI is will improve coordination and harmonization between key stakeholders.

o When people understand what GESI is all about, there will be more effective support in the implementation and delivery of positive development in areas that PNG needs to improve in, especially where most of our customary practices still dominate.

o The general understanding of the GESI Policy was consistent among staff and students mainly because most of the participants that took part in the study already had a prior understanding of GESI – staff who worked in projects and students from the Arts faculty.

Cont.…

"my department offers several gender studies units, and yes, I think I understand a little about the GESI policy in class. Just recently, we did a presentation and touched a bit on the GESI policy. So my current understanding on this policy is that, GESI policy applies to people in the workforce."

Student (female)

"the policy was developed to address a number of issues for individuals who are directly or indirectly being disadvantaged or discriminated in the workforce. Those individuals are those who are living with disabilities, HIV Aids, those who are being discriminated because of their sex, race or their gender, particularly in the workforce."

Staff (male)

4.2 Mainstreaming of GESI in DWU

It was noted that students who take up Gender courses in their curriculum do awareness on GESI issues as part of their assessment; but to a certain extent, usually when there is available specialized lecturer(s) in the field.

"mainstreaming might be indirect whereby, gender, social inclusion, HIV Aids, disability, child protection are some of topics that are being thought or incorporated into the curriculum of some faculties. In another context, mainstreaming can also be seen indirectly applied whereby the institution's ethos also includes clauses on gender and equal participation. However, for direct awareness about target groups, this has not been fully incorporated. For instance, the workplace manual/handbook does not include a direct policy that puts more emphasis and describes how to handle domestic violence or harassment cases on campus. Usually cases such as these are swept under the rug, not effectively dealt with which in most cases leads to employer dissatisfaction therefore resulting in attrition."

Staff (female)

4.3 Impacts of the GovPNG GESI Policy on students and staff of DWU

o   Higher education institutions have an important role to play in creating change, especially in gender equality, which is fundamentally critical to Papua New Guinea as it is one way of pushing against problems that are endemic across all areas of life.

o   The sustainable future growth of PNG must be based on the right principles, practices and policies.

o   Gender can be integrated to the way business, economics and public policy are taught in PNG higher education institutions to bridge the gaps between traditional and the realities of today.

"the gender gap is still a concern where there are more male teaching staff to females. Currently there are only two female staff members however; one is away on study leaving one female staff among all men. An initiative to address the gender gap between staff and students was set up by one of the female staff members called the 'Health Management and Systems Development Women's Initiative.' This initiative was created as a platform for female staff to guide female student transformation especially in leadership and vice versa for the male staff members to male students."

Staff (male)

"there are more males in my class than females. From observation, more males are interested in math and science courses than social science courses hence this could be one major factor to the gender gap among students. This could also vary from one faculty to another."

Student (female)

4.4 Disability and Social inclusion on campus

o   There is relatively little accurate official data on the incidence of disability and few services for people living with physical or emotional impairments admitted into education institutions.

o   The study notes that PLWD are unfairly represented socially, economically and publically.

"the university used to have a project office on campus that dealt with disability issues. This was an advisory body that worked on the effective implementation of disability issues. The project has since come to end due to lack of funding. Because of this, the university now has to come up with alternative ways for implementing its policies that would incorporate disability and the types of advice received from other donor agencies on how to deal with these issues on campus. This would only be effective based on the number of people living with disabilities we received each year (both staff and students) and their contributions to what was already established from the last project."

Staff (female)

"there is need to have an existing office such as a GESI office that addresses or works with this issue in order for the creation of policies on social inclusion in the university. This would provide mechanisms that are more effective rather than the university only ticking off boxes especially in the acquisition of funding from donor agencies."

Staff (female)

4.5 Dealing with GESI issues on campus

o In 2020 UPNG become the first institution of higher learning to develop a Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) policy and mechanism for it to be enforced incorporated from the bigger GoPNG policy.

o They have come up with best practices and drafted a policy specific to the organizational context - including disability, work place harassment, gender based violence, sexual harassment, and safety and security.

"have a section within the university that targets GESI issues and to help the organization incorporate GESI cross cutting issues with other already available projects or avenues for staff and students to sought assistance from. GESI issues is not only about violence against women, or reserves space for women, it's the general mindset of how we preserve women, men, children and youth including people living with disabilities."

Staff (male)

"Dealing with GESI issues such as GBV and FSV on campus has become more challenging in the recent years, for those who are in authority. The university has the disciplinary board for students and Human Resource that deals with staff issues but only to a certain extent."

Staff (female)

5. Importance/relevance of findings.

The findings support a number of existing concerns;

1. Understanding of the university lifecycle and engaging best practices.

Look at how best a university is equitable in terms of addressing gender issues on campus however also liable to its customers (parents and guardians) – that's a holistic approach of education, preparing students to be good citizens, whether it be at home or workplace.

2. Availability of a gender desk – enforce policy and deal with gender issues

Works closely with HR, Student Services and is made up of trained councilors, partnerships with external pathways to seek help, could also set p safe houses on campus for staff and students experiencing FSV or GBV, and more importantly be an advocating body within the institution.

3. Gender as not just a theoretical subject but a way of life.

Just as Ethics is a mandatory foundational unit, gender should also be taught as a mandatory unit or could also be incorporated into various stands; such as; understanding the business value of Gender or gender and health etc…

6. Conclusion

- Despite the strong focus on gender parity 50/50 intake of female/male students annually, there are still notable gaps for GESI education and pro-active measures.

- Adopting or adapting PNG GESI Policy as a guide for inclusion is the **RIGHT** and **SMART** thing to do!

- Not taking a firm stance could result in potentially adverse results that may include;
  - Compromise of reputation
  - Downtime due to inactivity
  - Bottom-line suffer because productivity and efficiency decreases.

7. Recommendations

In order for DWU to achieve its strategic goals and objectives, it needs to reevaluate some of the things that are not working within the organization, this includes policies that have not served their purpose or the formulation of polices and mechanisms that suit the current times, one of which is the GovPNG GESI policy.

There are six recommendations;

1. the adoption/adaptation and implementation of a GESI policy that suits the PNG and DWU context.

2. due to the increase widespread of GESI issues that continue to affect both students and staff, it is recommended that DWU creates a GESI office to improve and implement new and existing gender policies.

3. Conduct termly internal organizational gender audits – such as assessment of the university life cycle and the organizational enablers.

4. Consider safe spaces on campus where staff and students experiencing sexual harassment, FSV are able to seek help or be directed to seek help outside of campus.

5. Improve counselling services to include mental health

6. Conduct more awareness and educational sessions around gender issues/healthy relationships on campus. Further more, have gender thought along side professional ethics as a compulsory perquisite foundational unit across all faculties.

8. Summary

- The PNG Government GESI Policy of 2013 was influenced by guiding principles in the National Policy for Women and Gender Equality 2011-2015, the White Ribbon Day activities in 2011 and the commitment made as part of the launch of the "Kirapim Wok GESI."

- It has since been adopted by the Public Service and slowly moving into the Private Sector.

- Likewise, for any organization that needs to move forward, strategic planning is mandatory, thus intentional planning through such policies could be used to bring together recognition of marginalized or unrepresented groups in any thriving organization.

- Although DWU – a private corporate institution incorporates the gender lens in its ethos, core values, there still needs to be a separate GESI policy for the organization (one that guides both staff and students), that means the organization still needs to either adopt or adapt the PNG Government's GESI policy.

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