

## Gender Mainstreaming in Educational Leadership Policy in Fiji

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### *Abstract*

Gender mainstreaming is now increasingly recognized as a critical strategy for promoting gender equality. This paper provides a conceptual understanding of gender mainstreaming and draws implications for educational leadership policy and practice in Fiji. Using a participatory learning and appraisal workshop on gender mainstreaming, a phenomenological study on the challenges women headteachers in Fiji encounter in accessing and retaining school leadership, was carried out. The findings of the study indicate that gender mainstreaming remains an invisible strategy at the Ministry of Education; there is no visible policy on gender mainstreaming. Leadership and training programmes and planning documents and programmes also lack the mainstreaming of a gender perspective.

### Introduction

Studies of women in educational leadership have gained impetus globally. A number of them indicate that women are grossly underrepresented in educational leadership and senior management positions across the globe (Blackmore, 1989; Shakeshaft, 1989; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Court, 1997; Brunner, 1999; Strachan, 1999; McCrea & Ehrich, 2000; Oplatka, 2001; Coleman, 2002; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Kariuki, 2006; Akao, 2008; Sperandio & Kagoda, 2008; Shah, 2009; Strachan, 2009; Hussain, 2012). A similar trend has also been observed in Pacific Island countries such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu where women do not advance as rapidly as men (The Fiji Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment Report 2007; Akao, 2008; Strachan, 2009 and the Millennium Development Goals 2nd Report, 1990-2009). Although policies and organizational and structural changes in educa-

tional leadership in many countries have been implemented, women's advancement to educational leadership and management is considered sluggish. Even in countries where women numerically outnumber their male counterparts in the teaching profession, women are continuously underrepresented in educational leadership.

If under representation in leadership is indeed an issue, then there would be a profound need to examine appropriate intervention strategies to redress this. What is certain is that harnessing the potentials of women through empowering them on the basis of a level playing field would yield dividends for all.

The presence of women in educational leadership is critical to creating socially just, sustainable and democratic societies. Gender equitable educational leadership is needed so that both genders are actively involved in leading educational change and progress. As Sperandio and Kagoda (2010) argue, women need to effectively participate in the change and development processes. They must also be provided with the necessary skills and knowledge for educational leadership and policy making, both at school and at national levels. Women accord leadership a host of distinct female advantages, which include the ethics of care, emotional intelligence (Moore, 2007; Daft, 2008), the increasingly sought-after soft skills (Fondas, 1997), collaborative and democratic leadership styles, effective communication, time management, multitasking and organizational skills, financial literacy and management skills, intrinsic motivation for improving school instruction and making a difference in the lives of the people. In retrospect, women cultivate leadership skills and attributes through the process of enculturation and socialization into the rich and diverse array of the feminine communal and domestic roles. Hence, they are more adept in multi-tasking and naturally synchronize into the humane roles (educational) that leadership in contemporary times demand.

Women have the potential to catalyze enormous power and progress. As Va'a (2006) posits, women are increasingly the peace builders, voters, intellectuals, advocates of change, community and nation builders in both the Pacific region and around the globe. Therefore, women's choices and voices should be acknowledged and heard. More women need to be visible in both the school and higher echelons of leadership in order to level the playing field and create socially just, sustainable and democratic societies. However, the need to attain parity must be cognizant of the need to increase women leaders who understand and contribute to the empowerment of women and girls.

The discussions that follow provide conceptual understandings of the term gender and gender mainstreaming and draw implications for

educational leadership policy and practice. The discussions emanate from the findings of a two-day participatory learning and appraisal workshop that was conducted at one of the districts in the western province of Fiji to examine gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve equity in school and educational leadership.

### Gender Terms Defined

The term 'gender' may be used interchangeably to refer to sex in many. For many people it is quite often difficult and confusing to differentiate between the terms gender and sex. Gender is usually taken to refer to women's problems and is most often used as a code word for female (Oakley, 2000; Oshagbemi & Gill, 2003; Harding, 2004 and Shakeshaft, Brown, Grogan & Ballenger, 2007, Shakeshaft, 2010). Consequently, this has produced misconceptions about the term gender. When the term gender is associated only with women, it is problematic because it has the propensity to reproduce antagonism and scepticism for gender related initiatives and issues among both men and women, as well as the hegemonic male streamed organizational structures. As such, any effort to systematically address gender issues may evaporate or even take a back seat.

Gender has been defined as the 'psychological and social conceptions of what it means to be a man or woman' (Draulans, 2003, p. 69). According to feminist scholarship (for example, Oshagbemi & Gill, 2003; Harding, 2004; Shakeshaft et al., 2007; Shakeshaft, 2010) gender is defined as a cultural and social construct. Gender symbolizes women and men depending on social factors (social role, position, behaviour or identity). In a similar vein, the *Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women*, also known as UN Women, define gender as the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female which are learned through the socialization process. It also includes the relationships between women and men, and girls and boys as well as between women and between men. These attributes are context-specific and changeable. Hence, gender determines what is expected, permissible and valued in a man or woman in a given context. Gender embodies a dynamic process that is open to change because gender roles are determined by the social construct. Inevitably, these roles and relationships can and do change over time with evolving needs and opportunities (Hijab and Lewis, 2003). Feminists argue that although biological differences are fixed, gender differences are the oppressive results of social interventions that dictate how women and men should behave. Hence, gender is thought to be mutable and alterable by political and social reform that

would ultimately bring an end to women's subordination.

While the term gender generally refers to men and women, the emerging constructs in the gender discourse also include transgender identity. This covers less commonly represented gender categories which are collectively referred to as gender queer identities and includes either a combination of female and male categories (two-spirit identity) or a rejection of both female and male gender categories (Tate, 2012). This includes gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual groupings. Sex, on the other hand, refers to the biological and physiological characteristics (chromosomes, sex organs, hormones and other physical features) that define men and women. Sex differences are categorized on the basis of reproductive functions. The terms 'male' and 'female' signify sex differences while the terms 'man', 'woman', 'masculine', and 'feminine' are reserved for describing culturally defined gender (Draulans, 2003: 69; Harding, 2004: 3). For instance, men generally have more massive bones than women, is a sex characteristic while women generally do more housework than men is a gender characteristic.

Gender empowerment has become central to the development agendas globally. Hence, achieving equality and empowering women have become synonymous with terminologies such as gender equality, gender equity and gender mainstreaming. These are increasingly appearing in every policy or programme. However, as Hijab and Lewis (2003) argue, there remains considerable conceptual confusion between the terms gender equity and gender equality even though gender proponents are striving for equality and women's empowerment. The real meaning eventually diminishes, creating a gap between rhetoric and action; between commitment and implementation. Hence, in order to generate authentic equality and empowerment, it is critically important to distinguish between these gender related terms.

Generally there is no consensus on the distinctions between the commonly used terms gender equity and equality. Educators usually prefer to use the term equity because it implies the concept of fairness. The term 'equity' is considered more comprehensive and flexible than the term 'equality'. As such, the terms gender equality, gender equitable and gender equity will be used interchangeably in this paper. Gender equity is defined as 'attaining parity between men and women in the quality of life, academic and work outcomes valued by our society, without limitations associated with gender stereotypes, gender roles or prejudices' (Klein, et al., 2007:2). It is also defined as the fairness of treatment for women and men according to their respective needs. This may entail equal or differential treatment. However, it must be equivalent in terms of rights, bene-

fits, obligations and opportunities. Given this, the development and intervention policies directed at achieving gender equity ensure that women have a fair share of the benefits. They are also directed towards achieving parity among women and men, both economically and in terms of social responsibility. In addition, gender equity legislations ensure that women have equal treatment before the law, equal access to social provisions, education and equal pay for the same work.

Furthermore, gender equity outcomes are attained when differentiation by gender in jobs, roles, expectations and achievements are minimized and/or eliminated. Both men and women acquire and/or are presented with equitable opportunity to attain the most socially valued characteristics and skills. Hence, it is important to mention that the outcomes of gender equity can only be fully realized when gender stereotypes and sex segregation in decision making, education and society are reduced or eliminated.

Gender equality, on the other hand, eliminates discrimination on the grounds of a person's sex in the allocation of resources, benefits or access to services. It is defined as 'insuring that different behaviours, aspirations and needs of men and women are considered, valued and favoured equally' (Klein et al., 2007: .2). However, this does not imply that women and men need to become the same. Rather, women's rights, responsibilities and opportunities should be the same and must not be discriminated against on the basis of their sex. Given this, gender equality may be measured in terms of equality of opportunity or equality of outcomes.

In advancing the agenda for achieving gender equality and equity, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women adopted the mainstreaming of gender as a major strategy for promoting gender equality. Gender mainstreaming has been depicted as a global tool for achieving gender equality and empowering women. While it is increasingly becoming the buzzword in the global development agendas, gender mainstreaming still arouses a lot of ambiguity and remains elusive in many countries and contexts. This necessitates the need for greater conceptual understanding of gender mainstreaming.

### **Conceptualizing Gender Mainstreaming**

The mainstreaming of gender is seemingly an eloquent process that compels the focus on women and their status. By making gender equality issues central to the development activities, gender mainstreaming automates the inclusion of more women and women perspectives. In retrospect, women continue to bear the historical legacy of subordination and

the repercussions of patriarchal cultures as well as the many *women-excluded* development programmes. Gender mainstreaming basically involves the 'process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels' (Platform for Action, 1995; UN Economic and Social Commission, 1997: 2). It is a transformative process of promoting gender equality that involves the systemic modification of gender infrastructure. Subsequently, this compels organizational and institutional changes which include the formulation and implementation of gender policies, establishment of gender focal units, allocation of supplementary resources for women's programs and increment in the number of female staff, managers and leaders.

Because gender equality is central to all mainstream development plans and activities, the establishment of gender focal units is perceived to be the most essential step in effectively translating gender mainstreaming into practice. The roles of gender focal units encapsulate all that is crucial to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming. These include the collection and dissemination of sex disaggregated data and information on gender issues, development of gender-sensitive policies and programmes, development of gender mainstreaming tools and methodologies and monitoring and evaluating the progress of gender mainstreaming as well as the budgetary allocations. Apparently, the absence of gender focal units hinders the planning, implementation, outcomes and evaluation of gender policies and programmes in many countries.

Gender mainstreaming can subsequently procure equal benefits for both men and women. This is because it embodies a just and sustainable approach to achieving gender parity in all political, economic and societal spheres. Because it compels the influence, perspectives and participation of both men and women, gender mainstreaming necessitates the equal representation of both men and women as actors in policy and programme design, implementation and outcomes. It also proffers the opportunity to evaluate and address the negative impacts of development on men. This is important because men are often overwhelmed by gender equality propaganda and, ironically, feel threatened that women may surpass them in advancing to higher echelons. Conversely, the elaborate inclusion of both men and women is useful in abating misconceptions surrounding the terms gender and gender equality and also has the propensity to alleviate the perpetuation of inequalities. On the other hand, the mainstreaming of gender also implicates potential risks. Firstly, gender mainstreaming could be used only as a strategy to achieve other developmental goals

(Hannan, 2003). This is problematic because when the focus deviates from the goal of promoting gender equality to merely accomplishing development, it will undermine the transformative process of gender mainstreaming. For this reason, linking the goal of gender equality in the context of mainstream development policies and programmes is perennially important.

Secondly, gender mainstreaming could merely imply the creation of gender balanced workplaces and the increment in the number of women. Hence, this misconception may diminish the real meaning of gender mainstreaming and jeopardize its full institutionalization. As a result, appropriate recruitment and training of specific personnel, formation of evaluation and accountability mechanisms and the establishment of gender focal units at sectoral areas may altogether be eliminated. This is problematic because the lack of appropriate gender infrastructure will impede productive change and further aggravate inequalities. The ultimate goal of promoting gender equality should not be compromised at the expense of the misconceptions that generally surround the mainstreaming of gender.

Thirdly, the lack of political will and commitment may become the overarching risk to gender mainstreaming. Hence, it will eventually result in the evaporation of gender mainstreaming policies and programmes. Considering that political will and commitment is the bright red line between rhetoric and action, a clear political will is needed for the successful translation of gender mainstreaming into practice. This also means that the allocation of additional human and financial resources will only ensue if these two pertinent qualities are visible.

### **Gender Mainstreaming in Fiji**

The Government of Fiji is committed to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women. This is reflected in its commitment to the International and regional treaties and conventions such as the *Beijing Platform for Action 1995*, the *Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, the *Jakarta Declaration for the Advancement of Women in Asia and the Pacific* and the *Pacific Platform for Action*. The *Women's Plan of Action 2010-2019* reiterates the government pledges to uphold the mainstreaming of gender and women's concerns in the planning process and to ensure that all policy areas and gender balance partnership at all levels of government recruit women on merit as appropriate and encourage the same in the private sector. Hence, the state recognizes the need for ensuring gender-balanced partnership at all levels

of decision making, equal partnership in political, economic and social development, promoting equal opportunity in employment and integrating women's concerns into all planning and policy areas. However, like elsewhere, Fiji falls short of achieving gender equality in the workforce (Kaumaitotoya, 2003).

Nonetheless, Fiji has recently achieved some milestones in its commitment to advancing gender equality and addressing gender related issues. For instance, from the year 2010, it has become mandatory for all government ministries and departments to incorporate sex disaggregated data into their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs. As such, ministries and departments are required to establish sex disaggregated database. In addition to embracing this first crucial step towards gender mainstreaming, Fiji is to launch the inaugural home grown *National Gender Policy* in 2014. While it appears that the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming will take its roots in the not too distant future, the extent to which these policies and ground breaking initiatives are translated into practice remains to be seen.

### **Leadership Status**

Data from Public Service Commission was obtained from 1990; except for the years 2006-2007 where no data was available, Table 1 shows the trends in school leadership. School leadership is defined as primary school head teachers and assistant head teachers, and secondary school principals, vice-principals and assistant principals. Data shows that while there is a preponderance of males in school leadership positions, female density in school leadership has been gradually and consistently rising.

A detailed examination of data on gender density of school leaders and differentials is the subject of a subsequent study. For the present, the issue here concerns mainstreaming of gender in school leadership.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted the qualitative design which is underpinned by feminist theories. Qualitative research is subjective and predominantly inductive in nature. The researcher begins with an observation and pursues this to unravel the realities. H/she explores a social or human problem as experienced by individuals in the real world and in doing so, captures the individual perspectives and attests meanings and understandings. Consequently, these specific occurrences are used to draw conclusions about a population (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

**Table 1: School Leadership, 1990-2012**

Year	Teachers (Primary & Secondary)			School Leaders*		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1990	2992	3448	6440	879	249	1128
1991	3017	3508	6525	896	267	1163
1992	3096	3586	6682	882	274	1156
1993	3084	3661	6745	907	298	1205
1994	3180	3877	7057	914	306	1220
1995	3323	3590	6913	821	303	1124
1996	3181	3850	7031	949	327	1276
1997	3208	3923	7131	946	345	1291
1998	3377	4411	7788	938	374	1312
1999	3510	3924	7434	889	344	1233
2000	3478	4122	7600	830	364	1194
2001	3635	4270	7905	849	345	1194
2003	3660	4330	7990	825	366	1191
2004	3688	4289	7977	815	358	1173
2005	3636	4155	7791	798	361	1159
2008	4800	5243	10043	684	334	1018
2009	4407	5077	9484	420	162	582**
2010	4676	5060	9736	793	393	1186
2011	4722	5271	9993	779	398	1177
2012	4714	5283	9997	726	351	1077

\* School Leaders are defined as Primary School Head Teachers and Assistant Head Teachers, and Secondary School Principals, Vice-Principals and Assistant Principals.  
 \*\* The data for 2009 are as per the Civil List. There is an obvious gap in this.

### The participatory learning and appraisal (PLA) workshop

The PLA workshop is a visionary and transformative approach underpinned by ideologies of interactive learning, shared knowledge, usefulness and significance. PLA is premised on transcending values of empowerment, social justice and full participation in decision-making, the new developmental buzz words (Cornwell, 2000). Therefore, it has be-

come a significant vehicle for transmission of essential initiatives such as gender development and advocacy, citizenship and rights, children's participation and critical reflection from practice.

The primary aim of the PLA is the transformation of 'conventional development into a process of engagement *with* and *by* local people, rather than to use expert knowledge to dictate interventions' (Cornwell, 2000: 7). Therefore, PLA recognizes people as valuable and active actors who need to be empowered collectively to transform their lives. PLA can be modified to suit the context and cultures of the participants. Underpinning this people-oriented approach, is the fundamental belief that people can and must overcome the subjugating forces and power differentials that marginalize the underprivileged. PLA echoes feminist concerns for representation, agency and voice and resonates deeply with critical feminist research because it strives for equal representation through participatory approaches. Given these, PLA approaches augment feminist research methodologies in that they share a number of common epistemological, ethical and political principles.

For studying the issue of gender mainstreaming in the teaching profession in Fiji, a two-day participatory learning and appraisal workshop on gender mainstreaming in the district of Ba was organised. Fourteen primary sector educational leaders from the Ba Education District, comprising both genders, participated in this workshop. They were aged between forty and fifty one; except for one who was a twenty seven year old head teacher. Both genders were included in order to increase the authenticity and trustworthiness of the workshop. The workshop was underpinned by two major themes: the challenges faced by the women head teachers and the appraisal of gender mainstreaming. The forum for shared and interactive learning was facilitated by the group learning processes and strategies such as the *placemat*, *gallery walk*, *Plus/Minus/Interesting (PMI)*, *problem tree* and *group discussion*. At the end of the workshop, the participants submitted a one-page reflection. Data emanating from the workshop was qualitatively analysed.

The participatory approaches challenged the educational leaders' perceptions on why women are underrepresented and provided them with the opportunity to realize the stark realities of women's oppression and marginalization. It identified new frontiers, challenges and envisioned opportunities for transforming inequalities. The findings of the PLA workshop indicate that, in the context of the education sector, the process of gender mainstreaming largely remains as elusive as its conceptual premise. The need for more PLA workshops on gender mainstreaming was also echoed by the participants in this study.

The findings indicate that there is no visible policy on gender mainstreaming as well as the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in leadership and training programmes and other planning documents and programmes. The participants strongly expressed the need for a visible and active gender mainstreaming policy at the Ministry of Education. They reiterated the need for equal representation and affirmative action. They also echoed the need for gender policies and gender sensitizing programmes. The participants proposed that there is a need for the implementation of an affirmative action policy to fast-track the advancement of women into educational leadership. The most favourable quota emanating from this study was a fifty percent representation of women in the different hierarchies of educational leadership. The appraisal of gender mainstreaming and proposed intervention strategies for achieving gender equity in educational leadership is summarized in Figure 1.

### Implications for Educational Leadership Policy and Practice

The government of Fiji is embracing a stronger political will and commitment to the empowerment of women; this will lead to the launching of a National Gender policy during 2014. This necessitates the swift adoption of gender mainstreaming at the Ministry of Education. In retrospect, gender mainstreaming has barely permeated the echelons of the Ministry. The notable absence of gender policy, gender focal unit, and gender disaggregated data and tools such as gender analysis at both the national and local levels point to the fact that apparently, gender mainstreaming remains an invisible strategy. Needless to mention that equal participation in decision making emerges as one of the major areas of concerns that are outlined in the National Women's Plan of Action 2010-2019.

Given that gender mainstreaming arouses a lot of ambiguity, largely remains an invisible strategy and implies a complex and comprehensive process of promoting gender equality, it emphasises the need for conceptual understanding at all levels. The lack of conceptual understanding and gender mainstreaming at all levels of the education sector implicate the need for strategic PLA workshops to foster deeper conceptual understandings as well as provide a platform for policy and decision makers at the macro levels to converge, consult and disseminate relevant information pertaining to gender issues. Partnership and collaboration with the Ministry of Women would provide the necessary training for the selected Ministry of Education personnel. The PLA workshops could later trickle down to the micro levels of educational leadership. It is important to note

that PLA workshops will not only increase the conceptual understanding of gender mainstreaming among the educational leaders but it also offers opportunity for gender-sensitizing the male stream population.

**Figure 1: Gender mainstreaming and proposed intervention strategies**

#### *Perceived Strengths of Gender mainstreaming:*

- Compels focus on women and their status.
- Makes gender equality issues central to the development activities.
- Procures equal benefits for both men and women.
- Proffers an excellent, timeless strategic intervention for generating gender equality.
- Compels the influence, perspectives and participation of both genders.
- Necessitates the equal representation of both men and women as actors in policy and programme design, implementation and outcomes.
- Will gradually disintegrate patriarchal norms and cultures at workplaces.

#### *Perceived Limitations/Risks of Gender Mainstreaming:*

- Can be used as a strategy to merely achieve other developmental goals.
- Misconceptions that gender mainstreaming implies the creation of gender balanced workplaces and the increment in the number of women.
- The lack of political will and commitment.
- Gender mainstreaming remains virtually a mysterious concept.
- It is another one of the Eurocentric propositions imposed by the UN.

#### *Gender mainstreaming provides Opportunities for:*

- Gradually disarming the potent effects of the manifestations of patriarchy.
- Procuring the much needed institutional and organizational support for women.
- Aligning Ministry of Education's developmental plans and policies to government's commitment to international treaties such as the Beijing Platform for Action (1995).
- Evaluating and addressing the negative impacts of development on men.

#### *Proposed intervention strategies for achieving equity in educational leadership:*

- The formulation and implementation of gender mainstreaming policy.
- The establishment of gender focal units.
- Sex disaggregated data.
- Situational surveys.
- Affirmative action policies.
- Gender sensitizing programmes.

Hence, in keeping pace with the national developmental plans and policies on women empowerment and development, the MoE needs to embrace the mainstreaming of gender perspective in all policies and programmes to ensure gender equality in educational/school leadership and management and the empowerment of women teachers. The prerogative is theirs to encourage positive action in order to increase the participation of women teachers in decision making and to ensure the promotion of gender equality at all levels. Although women have been added to the higher echelons of the Ministry of Education administrative cadre, merely 'adding women' (Harding, 2004: 20) diminishes the underlying transformative agendas of gender mainstreaming. More delineated and sustained efforts are needed to embrace strategies recommended by the Economic and Social Council and the Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio Economic Development 2009-2014. With the imminent adoption of the National Gender policy, gender mainstreaming looks promising. However, the Ministry of Education needs to swiftly embrace the mainstreaming of gender at the ministerial and department levels to advance gender parity in educational leadership.

In Fiji, assumptions of gender neutrality generally preside in the echelons of educational leadership. The PLA participants strongly recommended that the Ministry of Education adopt an active and a visible gender mainstreaming policy which takes its premise on the principles and recommendations outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This means that the Ministry needs to modify its gender infrastructure by facilitating institutional and organizational changes, formulating and implementing a gender policy, establishing gender focal units, allocating additional resources for women's programmes, and increasing the number of female educational leaders (through the appointment of a particular percentage of women to educational leadership at all the sectors and levels).

As mentioned earlier, the establishment of a gender focal unit is most crucial in translating gender mainstreaming to reality. Hence, a Gender Focal Unit (GFU) at both the national and district level of the MoE is strongly advisable. The responsibilities of the GFU may include but not be limited to those outlined in the *Beijing Platform for Action 1995* and the *United Nations Economic and Social Council Report 1997*. For the GFU to be an effective vehicle for transmitting gender mainstreaming, the contextualization of the recommendations should take precedence over mere adoption and implementation. For instance, the GFU should support the development of *culture sensitive* policies, pro-

grammes and strategies in order to advance gender equity. It should also provide *culture-sensitive* gender sensitizing training for women and men to promote non-discriminatory working relationships and respect for diversity of work and leadership styles. Apart from collecting and disseminating sex disaggregated data and information on gender issues and best practices, the GFU needs to monitor and evaluate progress on the representation of women in educational leadership through regular collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative and qualitative data on women and men. It is also important for the GFU to establish database (with consistent data protection) on women and their qualifications for use in appointing women to senior leadership and management positions in order to bridge the insurmountable gap between the two genders.

The findings strongly implicate the formulation of a gender policy that stipulates specific strategies and special quotas for the advancement of women into educational leadership. Special quotas ensure representation of women. Hence, it provides an excellent opportunity for increasing the number of female role models in educational leadership. Gender mainstreaming cannot miraculously alleviate the current gross under representation of women in educational leadership. Therefore, assuming that the implementation and institutionalization of gender mainstreaming may not immediately eventuate, it justifies the implementation of an affirmative action that will put women teachers on equal pedestal in terms of school/educational leadership. Justifiably, at this point numbers are important in creating a balance in educational leadership and opening more spaces for women. In this way women can contribute in the same way as men have. Then only one can truly proclaim that the dynamics of gender are being addressed appropriately and hopefully one can witness changes that have occurred elsewhere.

Moreover, it only seems appropriate that the Ministry of Education formulates a Women's Plan of Action to complement gender mainstreaming. The Plan will complement the proactive and strategic approach to addressing women teachers' development. In addition, it would also reaffirm the political will, secure budgetary, technical and resource allocations and facilitate deeper and specific commitment to enhancing equity in educational leadership and related areas. Arguably, the proposition for a Women's Plan of Action indicates a significant predisposition towards the female gender. However, the persistent trend of blatant gender disparity in educational leadership is equally contentious and as such compels the implementation of proactive strategies. It is further envisaged that the proactive measures will manage the existing gender disparities and alleviate the reproduction of future discrepancies. Needless to mention the ab-

sence of proactive strategies mask the true cost of future anomalies.

The extent to which gender mainstreaming is institutionalized will determine its ultimate success and continuity. For the successful institutionalization of gender mainstreaming, the adoption of gender mainstreaming policies and the formation of specific gender mainstreaming strategies, the use of institutional directives which include incorporating gender perspective in report writing, the improvement of tools for gender mainstreaming such as gender analysis, the use of gender disaggregated data by sex and age and sector-specific gender surveys, the establishment of instruments and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation such as gender-impact analysis methodologies and the creation of accountability mechanisms for gender mainstreaming (UN ECOSOC, 1997) is paramount.

The conceptual understanding of gender mainstreaming is a significant precursor to its implementation and success. Gender mainstreaming entails a comprehensive and complex process of a transformative agenda and it necessitates the implementation of specific tools and mechanisms. Conversely, it also demands greater political will and solemn commitment to fully realize the gender equality goals enshrined in its conceptualization and principles. Notwithstanding these, it is important to note that change cannot arrive miraculously. It takes a firm decision and it takes action!

## Conclusion

Although policies, organizational and structural changes in educational leadership in many countries have been implemented, women's advancement to educational leadership and management is sluggish. The equitable presence of women in educational leadership is critical in fostering socially just, sustainable and democratic societies. Not only are women needed to be actively involved in leading educational change, but they also need to effectively participate in the change and development process. Women must be provided with the necessary skills and knowledge for educational leadership and policy making, at both the micro and macro levels. Gender mainstreaming is conceived to be a highly acclaimed universal strategy which proffers the ultimate panacea for achieving and promoting gender equality in the workforces. The gender mainstreaming appraisal workshop resulted in several proposed intervention strategies for achieving equity in educational leadership in Fiji and elsewhere. These include the formulation and implementation of gender policy; sex disaggregated data; situational surveys; affirmative action; gen-

der sensitizing programmes and specific women-targeted empowerment programmes. Given the combinations of all these, the findings deeply exemplify and provide support for the conceptual premise of the mainstreaming of gender. It is envisaged that the rhetoric effectively translates into practice and benefits are accrued across a rich diversity of women population in the education sector.

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