

## BOOK REVIEWS

JOY C. KWESIGA. *Women's Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda's Experience*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers (2002). 326 pp. US\$34.95. (ISBN: 9970 02 295 4).

*Women's Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda's Experience* is a timely and expert addition to the growing collection of literature intended to fill the dearth in scholarship on gender equity in higher education in developing, and particularly African, nations. Spurred by personal experience and an acute perception of the underlying causes of educational inequalities faced by African women, Professor Joy C. Kwesiga of Makerere University, Uganda presents a comprehensive argument for accelerated action to eliminate disparities in access to education and to promote overall African social development.

Addressed to academics, students, policymakers and those generally interested in women's advancement, this book answers pervasive questions regarding equal educational opportunity for women in African countries. The book is divided into two parts: the first six chapters carefully construct a conceptual framework for discussing women's current status in African, and particularly Ugandan, societies, and prepares the reader for empirical evidence from a study conducted in Uganda that follows in the second half. Chapter by chapter the focus of the book strengthens and ultimately sets upon the specific case of Uganda and the results of the research.

The third chapter poses a rhetorical, yet central, question, "Why Educate Women?" Chiefly, Kwesiga regards education as a human right, but furthermore accounts the nearly boundless advantages educated women bring to society through their participation in the economy, agriculture, health and social development. A key section of the third chapter focuses on the specific benefits of higher education. Kwesiga argues here that though basic education provides women with skills to carry out important everyday tasks – usually instructed or managed by someone else – higher education produces independent thinkers and decision-makers and increases women's opportunities and ability to share power. Additionally, beyond the tangible social returns created through basic education, in the age of globalisation,

information technology, and knowledge-based economies, basic education does not provide sufficient skills for active participation in international markets and for movement into the later stages of development.

Kwesiga is writing about improving overall regard for women in Ugandan and similar African societies and sees this best done through higher education. She adds that since the women's movement in the 1970s, increasing women's access to higher education has become important as a means of improving women's social status. African women should be a part of this trend, regardless of their lack of economic resources. Basic education ensures survival, but higher education fosters equality, influence and empowerment.

The fourth chapter, and the crux of the book, spotlights the difficulty African women are having in obtaining access to education. Blocked by cultural, familial and societal factors along with weak infrastructures, women have historically been left behind. Through statistical reporting, this chapter clearly demonstrates that access to education is the central issue and is where research and redress should take place.

Between 1992 and 1993, the author surveyed and interviewed 643 Ugandan students in secondary school and higher education; parents; and other stakeholders. Additionally, documentary and statistical data were analysed to supply the empirical evidence reported in the second half of the book. Based on the information collected in Uganda, Kwesiga offers three major factors affecting women's access to higher education: the influence of the family, society and institutions. Common to all three is the diminished value placed on girls and women relative to boys and men. As these issues are complex, equally multifaceted solutions, including transformations at the international, governmental, societal and individual level, are essential. In closing, Kwesiga meticulously lays out suggestions for African women's future in higher education.

*Women's Access to Higher Education in Africa: Uganda's Experience* is an innovative and thorough volume that gives unique and careful attention to the specific benefits of higher education for women in the context of developing nations in Africa. It is aligned with much of the new thinking emerging from international and donor agencies working in gender, education and development. The findings of this study are likely to generate and guide further research.

Though the intention was to highlight African women's access to higher education, the author laid such extensive groundwork and history to platform the discussion that the actual text goes beyond the limited expectations suggested by the title. This is a book concerned with women's access to all levels of education. Here, though, higher education is given unprecedented, but deserved, attention.

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