

CHUSS Holds Research Dissemination on the place of Men and Boys in Gender equality

The School of Women and Gender Studies, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, under the Early Career Scholars research programme has held a conversation on *Rethinking the place of men and masculinities in feminist activism in Uganda*. The study was sponsored under the Andrew W Melon Foundation.

The conversation was informed by the research conducted by Dr, Amon Ashaba Mwiine under the mentorship of Assoc. Prof Josephine Ahikire on the Feminist Activism and its encounter with notions of Men and Masculinities.

The blended event was held on Wednesday 15th December, 2021 in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHUSS) smart room and attended by the Principal and Deputy Principal CHUSS, the Dean School of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere staff, prominent Ugandan women activists and public servants among others.

Dr. Amon Ashaba Mwiine who teaches critical studies of men and masculinity at the School of Women and Gender Studies said the study was investigating activism around women's rights and how that activism engages with the quest of men and masculinity.

The purpose of this study, Ashaba said, was because of the way society understood gender from time to time where it seemed as if, it was about women and girls issues yet gender involves the understanding of relations between men and women.

Dr Ashaba explained that there are cases in which men can occupy positions of vulnerability, domination and create inequalities and thus the study wanted to look at how men have been part of the activism and gender equality. This motive he said, was also generated by the current increase in organizations but also strategies that are working with men to promote gender equality.

“We have seen many questions in the public raising concerns about the boy child. That there has been a lot of focus on women and women's rights plus girls' rights and there has not been a conversation on what boys and men stand to gain from gender equality.

So we wanted to look at the place of men in gender equality and what we have found out is that, men's behaviors and practices are not universal as we tend to represent it. We tend to think that men represent power and privilege and that they cannot be vulnerable and disadvantaged but we have seen many cases where men have found themselves at a disadvantage either not knowing how to contribute to gender equality or occupying the positions of vulnerability", Dr Ashaba reported.

Dr. Ashaba gave an example of COVID - 19 and the lockdown plus the kind of stress that was put on men when the public was closed and told to stay at home.

"It was a very big struggle, we also met cases where women in the household would be telling men "*baako gyogenda*" meaning, "also have somewhere to go", So it is as if men are never expected to stay in a home. So we wanted to look at what the role of men could be in promoting gender equality whether they are working with women or it involves seeing the experience of men just like we have seen with women and girls".

The study gives two major recommendations. From the academia, the study recommends the need to start researching about gender by looking at both men and women experiences.

Currently Dr. Ashaba said, there is a strong concern on girls who stayed out of school during COVID -19 lock down with no mention about what the boys could be going through.

Dr. Ashaba noted that it may be a bigger assumption that boys are better, but if academia went into research about gender and looked at both men and women, it would be easy to know where the problem and disadvantage is and respond to that rather than assuming and focusing on girls as ones in the position of disadvantage.

The other study recommendation is to create awareness and training amongst men to make sure that gender trainings that are given are not necessarily focusing on women because while a man is expected to change and be a good man, he needs to know how he will be able to be positive and benefit from gender equality.

"Otherwise, if certain activism expects me to be forward looking and progressive man, but the only knowledge I have with me is what culture teaches what a man should be, physical, aggressive and etc. I may not have the knowledge of the other alternative ways of being a progressive man.

We have seen cases of men who show progressive behavior challenged by fellow men, they are laughed at. We want to create a comfortable position in which trainings and gender can involve men so that they can know what inequality means, how it comes about and how to challenge it”, Dr. Ashaba said.

Dr. Ashaba also said there is that general thought that because men hold a certain position of power in the household, they are the ones at the end of persuading violence but, they do also receive the violence and because of that general expectation it becomes hard for them to open up.

“So what we are saying here while we are interested in interrogating domestic violence for instance is that, let us be open and ask what falls and kind of violence are happening in this society, who is experiencing it and why rather than go with the minor and ask which woman has experienced domestic violence because the assumption that men cannot experience violence may also stop them from reporting it whenever it happens”,

The Principal CHUSS Prof. Josephine Ahikire who is also Dr. Ashaba’s mentor expressed gratitude that the people who have participated in the college best projects especially the early career scholars have been able to execute projects and through the research endeavors have made impact on the scholarship.

Prof. Ahikire said the argument behind early career scholarships was that when people finish their PhD’s they remain in abeyance as if they are not arriving or leaving and this gives a boost in creating a contribution of the generation of African scholars.

She thanked the Dean for promoting scholarships at the school level and also thanked the project team, Dr. Julius Kikooma, Dr. Edgar Nabutanyi and Dr. Lewis Mugumya for having supported the scholars in all possible ways, implementing and perusing through scholarship endeavors in a timely manner.

Prof. Ahikire said her first encounter on the issue of masculinities on this project and the need to think critically was when she worked on post war northern Uganda where a broad majority of men were socially displaced and when they did a study on domestic violence and encountered for the very first time the prominent role of male champions from where Ashaba derived his PhD thesis and argument.

Ahikire said the journey has been long since around 2014 and until now Dr. Amon got an opportunity to deepen his thoughts on critical masculinities hence this project.

“So as scholars there is need to actually constantly question and problematize what it is that we are dealing with. So as a college, we are really gratified and would like to see more publications coming up.

I would like to thank Dr. Amon Mwine for the multiple spaces that he has taken this work and the kinds of arguments that have enriched this work. He has spread the wings deep and wide and that’s what exactly we are looking at in terms of supporting scholarships of early career”.

The Dean School of Women and Gender Studies Dr. Sarah Ssali described the conversation as great and one that is going to farther the discussion and the role of the school of women and gender studies not only in Makerere university but also in the academy and in Africa and globally.

Dr. Ssali said, the school and the discipline of gender studies has come a long way noting that as the university celebrates 100 years, the school is also celebrating 30 years of growing from an initial focus on women in development to gender and development, moving from the inclusion of women to focus on power relations and right now to a level focusing on institutional drivers of gender inequality.

She reported that there are different research themes or groups around the issue of identities, norms, culture and many things because of the realization that beyond the inclusion of women and focus of power relations between males and females, is a whole structural platform that makes these kinds of behaviors predictable and reinforces their occurrence.

“So, on the issue of identities, we are here today to look deeper into masculinities and to focus on the place of men in feminist activism. We have also moved from the level where men were seen as the violators to now a point where we think actually men would be allies and as we are coming to discuss today with Dr. Amon Mwiine, we shall be asking how then do we develop critical relationship between females and males so as to combat gender inequality in the different ways in which it manifests”, The Dean said.

She said the college has a number of grants that are capacity building in nature, for PhD students, post docs and for early career researchers like those who have recently received there PhDs like Dr. Ashaba Amon.

She thanked the leadership of the college for making this possible and Prof. Josephine Ahikire for mentoring Dr. Ashaba and for the good stewardship of the college as well as the staff managing the Andrew W Melon scholarship.

Report compiled by
Anyango Jane
Principal Communication Officer CHUSS