IMPROVING WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

THE CASE OF ABDOU MOUMOUNI UNIVERSITY OF NIAMEY

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INTRODUCTION

Abdou Moumouni University is Niger’s sole traditional-type university. There is also the Say Islamic University which provides training mainly in theology and pedagogy for students graduating from the Franco-Arab high schools. The university is situated in an adverse environment which Mary Robinson aptly described as follows: “Landlocked in the Sahara desert, the country’s ten million inhabitants have to grapple daily with the harsh realities and oppressing poverty”.

Like all Sahelian countries, Niger confronts cyclical drought which has, for decades, led to structural food insecurity and precarious living conditions among the population which is 84% rural with a high poverty rate of 65%.

Concerning education, Niger has a gross school enrollment rate of 42% at the primary level, 13% at the secondary level, and an 83% illiteracy rate. The higher education enrollment rate is 1.9% for the whole country and 0.34% for girls. These are below the average rates for Sub-Saharan Africa which are 57% for primary education enrollment, 26% for secondary, 4% for higher education, and 60% for illiteracy.

In 2001-2002, girls accounted for 44% of primary school enrollment, 39% of students in the first cycle of secondary school and 32% of the second cycle of secondary school (Niger’s Ministry in charge of Secondary and Higher Education). This means that the school enrollment rate and proportion of girls enrolled in school drop with the rise in educational level.

As concerns non-formal education, the country has a national literacy rate of 20%, with men accounting for 30% and women only 11%. This shows that there is an obviously great disparity between men and women. Importantly, 9 women out of 10 can neither read nor write.

Aware that no sustainable development is possible below a school attendance rate of 50%, we can measure the acute challenges with which Niger has to grapple for its development. The foremost challenge is education, considering the Millennium Development Goals, that is, to achieve universal primary education (UPE) for all by 2015. Another millennium development goal is to reduce poverty by half by 2015 and achieve equal access to all educational levels for boys and girls.

Clearly, for the government to achieve these goals, with the backing of development partners and other education sector stakeholders, it necessarily has to pool the energies and resources needed to promote female education at all educational levels. This should help to curb current inequalities and make it possible for women to demonstrate all their potentials and make a total and effective contribution to poverty reduction as well as economic and social development.

In this light, development partners are increasingly showing renewed interest in higher education, given a world context characterized not only by globalization of the market economy but also by scientific and
technological advancements and the building of a knowledge society. Higher education and research institutions are thus called upon to generate the needed skills.

Our study will focus on the case of Abdou Moumouni University. We will start with a brief presentation of the institution, then proceed with an overview of the situation by analyzing data collected according to sex, targeting students and lecturers-researchers. Finally, we will present initiatives taken to raise women’s participation, and then draw some conclusions.

ABDOU MOUMOUNI UNIVERSITY

Abdou Moumouni University (AMU) was set up in September 1971 with a sub-regional mission: to develop the science subjects, thus complementing the University of Ouagadougou which was mainly oriented towards Arts, Social Sciences, Law and Economics. However, within a few years, each university completed the disciplinary branches that it initially lacked.

Like all post-independence African universities, Abdou Moumouni University of Niamey had to train senior staff for the public service and the education system.

Its present set-up is as follows:

- **Five faculties:**
  - The Faculty of Science (FS)
  - The Faculty of Agronomy (FA)
  - The Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences (FLSH)
  - The Faculty of Health Sciences (FSS)
  - The Faculty of Economics and Law (FSEJ)
  - An Advanced Teachers’ Training College which trains teachers for secondary education, pedagogic counselors, primary and secondary school inspectors and literacy personnel.

- **Three research institutes:**
  - The Research Institute for the Teaching of Mathematics (IREM)
  - The Radio-Isotope Institute
  - The Social Sciences Research Institute (IRSH)

All of the faculties award Bachelor’s and “Maîtrise” degrees. The Faculty of Agronomy and the Faculty of Health Sciences have a Master’s program and offer vocational and technical education courses.

The university further contains an African Virtual University (AVU) Teaching Center which offers distance education courses as well as a Francophone Digital Campus (CNF) which also offers distance education courses and includes a resources/incubator center, a computer information library, a training and self-training room as well as a cyberspace for students.

**Student Participation**

Overall enrollment trends show that most students enroll in the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences with 36% to 46% of the total, followed by the Faculty of Law, Economics and Management with about 22% to 29%. The two faculties alone account for more than 2/3 (two-thirds) of students in Abdou Moumouni University. Science and Health Sciences are ranked 3rd and 4th respectively, with Agronomy and Education coming last (Table 1).
Table 1. Student enrollment trends according to Faculty and Sex

<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS</td>
<td>685</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSS</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FA</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSEJ:Law</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSEJ:Eco</td>
<td>586</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLSH</td>
<td>1924</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENS</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>4343</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4690</td>
<td>920</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of student distribution according to faculty and sex shows that more girls enroll in Letters and Social Sciences and Health Sciences. But their representation is very low in pure science, Agronomy and Education. As concerns the Science of Education, the low student intake is accounted for by the fact that entry into the Advanced Teachers’ Training College is by competitive examination.

The spread of student enrollment over time shows a marked increase in the percentage of girls in 2000-2001. This is accounted for by the fact that at the beginning of the 2000 school year, the university took in two batches of high school graduates (1999 and 2000). Following student strikes during the 1998/99 school year, courses that year were not completed and students were evaluated only during the 1999-2000 year. School did not reopen in 1999 and consequently, the following year, almost all faculties had to double their first year student in-take. But the increase concerned mostly girls whose overall number rose by 83% as against 33% for boys. This could be partially explained by the fact that fewer girls than boys enroll in foreign universities, probably because girl students without financial means fear the precarious conditions and consequences of entering foreign universities. Married women generally remain at home.

The 2001-2002 school year witnessed a corresponding sharp drop in girls’ enrollment from 21% to 17%. This drop could be explained by the low success rate registered at the 2001 examinations because of the difficult teaching conditions that prevailed that year, especially among first year students. Because of infrastructure shortages, teachers had to divide the students into two groups and repeat lessons. The fast pace of courses and lack of rest hours for students caused stress and some tension among students and teachers alike, leading to the poor results obtained at examinations. Such situation mainly affected the Faculty of Science and the Faculty of Economics and Law.

The drop in the number of students in the Faculty of Agronomy can be attributed to the low success rate recorded in the second year of Biology in the Faculty of Science, from where successful students are admitted to the third year of the agronomic engineer course.

Another cause for the drop in female enrollment is the expulsion of girls who have reached the statutory number of times a student is allowed to repeat as well as the tendency for students to opt for vocational training in private institutions in Niamey or in other universities of the sub-region.

A close study of female students distribution in other sections of faculties shows other disparities. The proportion of girls registered in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry in the Faculty of Science is as low
as 3 to 8%. Even in the Biology and Geology sections, girls represent only 8% to 11% of total student enrollment (Figure 1). Furthermore, the number of girls tends to drop from the first to the fourth year.

The number of girls registered in the Bachelor’s and “Maîtrise” courses of the scientific branches does not exceed 2 per section. This is attributable not only to the massive failure in the first cycle, but also to the low number of girls with the baccalaureate who enter the university each year. To register in the Faculty of Science, students must obtain the baccalaureate in the C and D series where, unfortunately, the number of girls is very low. In 2000, only 33 girls passed the baccalaureate in series C, representing 9.3% of the total number of successful students. In series D, 200 girls passed out of a total of 4357 successful candidates, that is, 9%.

In the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences, there are very few girls in philosophy. Comparatively, the number is impressive in English, Sociology, Linguistics and Psychology. The relatively high number of female students in these sections reflects the proportion of girls who succeed in the A series, which is required for registration in such branches of studies. In 2000, there were 1,239 girls out of a total 3,178 students who obtained the baccalaureate series A, that is, 19%.

Female students registered in the Faculty of Health Sciences generally opt for medicine. However, relatively few of them specialize in post-doctorate surgery, and virtually none specialize in surgery and senior radiology technician. All the same, there are more women than men in the assistant anesthetist section (Figure 3). All told, women rather tend to opt for fields which do not require knowledge in pure science.

Concerning the science of education, not a single woman is registered in the pedagogic inspectors section, and the same virtually applies for laboratory technicians. Even in the pedagogic counselors and CAPES (secondary school teachers) section with a relatively high number of women, their percentage does not exceed 11% of the total (Figure 4).

In Agronomy, female students prefer the short cycle of assistant agricultural engineers rather than the longer cycle of agronomic engineers. Few of them enroll in the Masters program (Figure 5).

Finally, in the Faculty of Economics and Law, there are more women in Law (21 – 17.6%). This trend can be attributed to the type of baccalaureate obtained: series A for Law and D for Economics (Figure 6).

Analysis of data highlights a great disparity between boys and girls in all faculties at Abdou Moumouni University where girls hardly represent 20% of total student enrollment. The disparity is more striking in the scientific branches, where girls register a high rate of failure and drop-out in the first cycle. The scope of the problem is such that in the 2nd cycle, the number of girls hardly exceeds 2% in the Bachelor’s and “Maîtrise” classes. This sharp drop in the first cycle does not seem to be peculiar to AMU since it has also been recorded in developed countries like France (Broze et al, 2000).

However, in the medical field, the performance of women is similar to that of men. From the 1st to the 7th year, the proportion remains the same.

It seems that women prefer “soft” science subjects relating to life rather than the pure ones (math, physics, chemistry). The same situation prevails in many African universities such as Makerere in Uganda, Dar-es-Salam in Tanzania (Masanja et al, 2001), Cheik Anta Diop in Dakar (Collot 2002), and even in North universities such as those of Quebec (Foisy et al, 1998) and France (Broze et al, 2000).

The low female presence and their decreasing numbers in the second cycle are due to a number of factors, notably:
• The low number of girls in Niger’s whole educational set-up, which tends to diminish from primary to higher education (Poverty Reduction Strategy in Niger, 2002). Enrollment rates in the first year of university seem to confirm this trend.

• Marriage and pregnancy. Many girl students get married during their university studies and some right in the first year of enrollment. In this respect, it may be underscored that marriage confers a respectable social status on girls, protects them and reinsures their parents. Extramarital sex is shunned by society and reduces the girls’ chance of getting married. It further makes them vulnerable to sexual harassment since men are unscrupulous with girls deemed loose. It should also be realized that girl students themselves aspire to marriage since at least 30% of them are aged 24-25 years in the first year of university. Yet it is not easy to cope with the birth of a child or household chores and studies, all the more since some husbands who did not attain post-secondary education do not encourage their wives. Furthermore, Muslim religion and tradition which greatly influence Muslim social life are intolerant to unmarried status for women of that age.

• The low development of short vocational and technical training courses which women prefer. Actually most women leaving the first cycle of university enter establishments offering 2-3 year vocational training either in Niger or abroad. Such branches have the advantage that they award certificates which readily attract jobs.

• The institutional and social crisis. For a decade, student enrollment in Abdou Moumouni University far exceeds its in-take capacity. Existing facilities are often dilapidated, while equipment and documentation are often outdated. The number of teachers and researchers is not enough and consequently they are overburdened. The recurrent budget is pathetic, and the State subvention hardly covers 40% of needs. There is virtually no funding for research, thus leading to a fall in teaching quality and efficiency. Socially, the university hostels offer only a limited number of rooms whereas many students come from the hinterland; hence the problem of transport. The combination of these factors has discouraged several girls, some of whom have given up their university studies.

• Instability caused by the frequent student strikes starting from the 1990s. They resulted in two blank school years, 1995-1996 and 1999-2000. This is further compounded by the cancellation of the 1989-1990 and 1992-1993 first cycle results in several faculties following the upheavals, especially since students in this cycle started late. This aroused some mistrust towards the university, especially among poor girls who were eager to earn a living and help their parents.

Briefly speaking, poverty and the lack of a social policy to promote gender in higher education seem to be the main causes of the low participation of girls.

Female teachers-researchers

Only 27 out of 284, or 9.5% of (Table 2), full-time teachers and researchers at Abdou Moumouni University are women. Most of them are in the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences (9), and the Faculty of Science (5). With only 2 women, the Faculty of Economics and Law has the least number, followed by the Institutes. The female/male disparity is thus more striking among teachers than among students. This is understandable since the certificate required for the recruitment of teachers and researchers is the doctorate degree, which is awarded in the 3rd cycle where there are very few girl students.
Table 2. Distribution of teachers-researchers according to Faculty and grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>FS</th>
<th>FA</th>
<th>FLSH</th>
<th>FSS</th>
<th>FSEJ</th>
<th>ENS</th>
<th>IRSH</th>
<th>IRI</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof. and CRO</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP and SRO</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L and RO</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL and RA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pr: Professor       CRO: Chief Research Officer
AP: Associate Professor  SRO: Senior Research Officer
L: Lecturer       RO: Research Officer
AL: Assistant Lecturer  RA: Research Assistant

As concerns grades, there are only two (2) female professors and 2 female associate professors, that is, 4 female teacher-researchers who are qualified to supervise research work. All of them are in the science field. Actually, about 2/3 (two thirds) of women are senior lecturers. The Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences has the greatest number of senior lecturers as well as 3 assistant lecturers out of a total 6. All grades combined; most women (13 out of 27) are in soft science which women generally prefer.

Men and women put together, there are few professors and associate professors as compared to senior lecturers. The distribution according to discipline is similar for both sexes.

The male-female teachers disparity could be explained by:
- the low number of girls in the second cycle;
- the fact that there are only few branches that offer the Master’s degree at Abdou Moumouni University and girls who want to do it have to go to other countries. This is not always easy for women who are married, already working or who do not have the financial resources.

As concerns career development for female teachers-researchers, there are 7.4% of women professors against 6.6% for men, 7.4% women associate professors against 10.5% for men, and 22.2% assistant lecturers against 9.2% for men. Comparison at this level favors women and shows that their success is at least similar to that of men; yet the main problem is the particularly low number of women.

Some of the reasons for the slow career development include:

- Work pressure arising from the shortage of teachers and infrastructure compared to the high number of students. Teachers-researchers are overburdened with courses and thus lack the time for research which is essential for their promotion;
- The inadequate financial resources allocated for research, the dilapidated state of laboratories and equipment, the low access to documentation and information and communication technologies (ICT), which are all impediments to any veritable research;
• The family burden, which is particularly heavy for women;

• Difficulties in publishing articles in first rate international reviews. The more accessible annals of Abdou Moumouni University are not published regularly on account of budgetary constraints.

Another factor working against women is their low representation at the decision-making level. Apart from the rector who is a female teacher-researcher, very few women hold duty posts. There is no woman dean of faculty or director of a school or an institute. There are only two women heads of department. Nor is there any woman delegate representing teachers-researchers of her institution on the university board where major decisions are taken. This is due mainly to the fact that the women hardly run for such posts, which are all elective, or perhaps because they do not want to be involved with solving students’ problems, which are at times stated violently. Maybe the women do not want to take on any additional work.

INITIATIVES TAKEN TO IMPROVE WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Abdou Moumouni University of Niamey has been confronted with several crises, some of which have been most violent. These frequent student strikes have adversely affected the formulation and implementation of programs aimed at raising the enrollment and success rates for girl students. Nevertheless, actions have been taken to reduce the gap between girls and boys, and others in favor of female teachers-researchers.

Restructuring of Abdou Moumouni University

Given that there is no national policy governing higher education and research, Abdou Moumouni University in 2002 took the initiative to embark on a restructuring process in order to adapt and be modernized. The university had to change and adapt to the globalization context. In this respect, it set itself objectives for quality and usefulness.

The restructuring consisted, inter alia, in the creation of Training and Research Units (TRU), professional schools, university institutes of technology (UIT) and research institutes. TRU are defined with consideration for Niger’s development needs. They have the advantage of combining teaching and research, and are very flexible. Indeed, teaching modules with a credit system make it possible to give training on demand as well as continuing training. Furthermore, the diversification of branches offers students a wide choice of options, depending on their abilities and professional goals.

The TRU bring together teachers and researchers of similar or related disciplines to work on a pedagogic project and training fields, thus encouraging the formation of research teams. Through the TRU, students can prepare their master’s degrees in Niger and benefit from mobile programs under inter-university cooperation. At the end of their post-university studies, they could be recruited, and as such boost the number of female teachers-researchers.

A scientific council was also set up to notably monitor the relevance and quality of programs as well as the recruitment of competent teachers-researchers. Through affirmative action, gender will be taken into account at all levels. As search, for the recruitment of teachers-researchers, women with equal qualifications as their men rivals will be given preference within specific quotas. In the selection of new baccalaureate holders’ files, female candidates could be given preference within a certain limit and under conditions to be determined by the University Board.
Similarly, the participation of female teachers-researchers and students in various university bodies could also be raised. At times they just need to run as candidates to win.

**Sexual Harassment**

During the workshop organized on the restructuring of Abdou Moumouni University the question of sexual harassment was discussed by a committee, which tabled a resolution condemning the practice, and encouraged victims to denounce those harassing them, who will them be brought before the disciplinary section. The workshop adopted the resolution, whose implementation yielded some positive results. Since the first denunciation which led to disciplinary action against the person concerned, no other cases of harassment have been reported. The imminent setting up of a gender unit should lead to greater reflection on this question and others concerning girls as well as to proposals for appropriate solutions.

**University database**

The university administration, in partnership with the Forum of African Women Educators (FAWE), is about to finalize the setting up of a database at AMU, which largely takes gender into account. Quantitative data has already been gathered and all that is left is to fill the questionnaire designed to get the opinions and suggestions of all segments of the university community on social, structural, organizational, institutional and academic issues.

**HIV/AIDS**

Information and awareness-building seminars and campaigns were organized at Abdou Moumouni University in a bid to contribute to the fight against the pandemic.

In this respect, the Advanced Teachers’ Training College organized a training seminar on HIV/AIDS and sexually communicable diseases. It is carrying on vigorously with its information, sensitization and education actions, notably through visual aids and in its teaching programs. Female teachers and students are actively involved in it, and there is a noticeable positive impact on the behavior of the university community in respect of HIV/AIDS, education on which will moreover be introduced in the schemes of all the faculties and the Advanced Teachers’ Training College.

**Research training through research**

Faculties of Abdou Moumouni University take in some graduating students as part of the 2 year national civic service done by students who have completed their studies. They help in the organization of tutorials and practicals, and can equally take part in research projects, thus seizing the opportunity to prepare a master’s degree. There are plans to introduce a scholarship program to boost the assistance to students as part of the gender unit to be set up soon.

**Innovative programs**

There is the need for prior action in order to increase the number of girls in the university. Under the FAWE-NIGER initiative, female university and secondary school teachers conducted innovative field projects which resulted in significant improvement in the enrollment and performance of girls in villages with very low school attendance. Those girls are still doing well in secondary school, and will soon join the students of Abdou Moumouni University. A similar project was designed for girls at the university in order to improve their performance and help retain them in university through a scholarship program or catch-up classes.
Initiatives in favor of women teachers-researchers

- Workshop to teach women teachers-researchers how to design research projects.

The promotion of teachers and researchers is tied to the publication of research findings. But funding stands as a major obstacle to research activity. The purpose of the workshop was to teach women how to draft viable projects. Participants at the workshop which was jointly organized by the regional FAWE and Abdou Moumouni University came from 15 English, French, Spanish and Portuguese speaking African countries. It also gave them the opportunity to exchange experiences and start inter-university cooperation relations. Some of them have been able to attract funding for projects they drafted following the training. Women of the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences who formed a team obtained a 3 (three) year substantial funding.

Setbacks

The political instability experienced in Niger, which led the international community to take economic sanctions against the country, negatively impacted on Abdou Moumouni University. In fact, between 1996 and 2000, development partners deprived the university of cooperation and funding. Such situation hampered the movement of teachers and researchers and, to a less extent, that of students. It also blocked the funding of some projects and programs, including those intended to raise the enrollment rate of girls.

As such the project aimed at training maîtrise students in computer science and the use of the Internet did not succeed because the scholarships needed could not be obtained. The aim had been to give the girls an extra asset so that they could easily find jobs or follow distance vocational training at the master’s level.

Another project planned for the same period was to organize dynamic girl students in a FAWE club in order to help raise their awareness to their problems and overcome negative prejudices such as the inability of girls to understand mathematics as well as other similar stereotypes. Unfortunately this project was blocked by the instability prevailing at Abdou Moumouni University and the fast pace of catch-up classes.

Another project to which several female university teachers were attached was the setting up of a day-care center in the campus, which would have helped student mothers to solve the problem of keeping their children and eased transport related expenses. Indeed, with children on the campus, mothers could pass the whole day at the university and return home only after classes. They could even take advantage of the library to study and obtain documentation.

- Actions likely to improve women’s participation at Abdou Moumouni University

Most countries in sub-Saharan African are concerned with the under-representation of girls and women in higher education. This concern is even more acute in Niger where, at the University of Niamey, there are only 2 girl students for 10 boys, and 1 woman teacher-researcher for 9 men.

The magnitude of the men/women disparity and the poverty prevailing in the country are such that it is impossible to offset the disparity at whatever term relying on national resources only. Hence the resumption of international cooperation at Niamey University and rekindling of interest in higher education among development partners augur well for the improvement of women’s participation at the institution.

The Government first needs to adopt a social policy in favor of poor but deserving girls, that is, hardworking girls from an underprivileged background. With scholarships, such girls can succeed in their studies and even obtain a Master’s degree and come back to boost the teaching staff strength at the
university. As was done in favor of girls attending primary school, a department or unit could be set up in the ministry in charge of higher education, research and technology to promote women in higher education. One of the main duties of such a department could be to set up a scholarship program for hardworking poor girls. It could also draw up a long-term action program to be submitted to development partners for support. The program would be evaluated periodically to assess its impact on the rate of enrollment for female students.

The department could further launch an information and sensitization campaign targeting girls. The University of Niamey could do the same internally. The Government’s will to make such a program one of the priorities of its poverty reduction strategy would largely determine its credibility and sustainability.

With regard to female teachers-researchers, the Government should help the university to constitute a research budget with a quota earmarked for deserving women, that is, very dynamic women with outstanding research output. Such credits can help them particularly to attend scientific meetings if they have a paper to present, or to acquire minor equipment and reagents.

It could act as an incentive for them to publish and progress in their careers. Program beneficiaries will strive to develop their research findings and generate resources. The program will be evaluated periodically to measure its impact on the careers of women teachers-researchers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In a bid to significantly boost the enrollment of women in universities in Sub-Saharan Africa where their presence is generally low, all opportunities must be put to advantage, particularly those arising from programs contracted by governments with the international community. Such programs include achievement of the Dakar objectives of Education for All (EFA), the Ten-year Education Development Plan (TEDP), the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). When these programs were being adopted, development partners made the commitment to help the governments to achieve set objectives, which include encouraging women to attend school at all levels of the educational system. As such, any viable project in this respect should attract funding.

At national level, considering that the more educated women are, the more ably they can contribute to the fight against poverty and to the country’s economic and social development, partnership can be fostered to promote girls attending higher education. Such partnership should involve all education sector stakeholders, namely governments, parents, communities, NGOs/associations, students and teachers who have to work in synergy to achieve better.

As concerns universities, a patronage system promoted by professional associations and networks of very dynamic women could help girl students and young women teachers-researchers. The system could play a counseling and guiding role. The workload of university teachers involved in the system could be reduced. Catch-up classes could also be given to new high school graduates to build their capacities.

Each country should commission a survey of the situation of women in higher education, especially in the sciences and technical education. The survey should be based on quantitative and qualitative data broken down according to sex. The State should then take positive measures to offset disparities observed. Decentralizing higher education by making the university regional should solve the problems faced by poor girls when they come to the capital to study (lodging, travel, feeding). Information and communication technologies and distance learning may also help improve women’s participation in higher education by saving them the need to travel.
CONCLUSION

Parity between men and women in higher education is still far from being achieved. At Abdou Moumouni University in particular, the disparity is still very wide as concerns students and teachers-researchers alike. The number of women is still so low that considerable efforts have to be made to narrow the gap. We need substantial material and financial resources, a solid partnership among the various education sector stakeholders and strong political commitment to achieve meaningful results.

The State needs to increase the budget allocation to the university to give the institution the means necessary for its functioning and improve the participation of girl students and women teachers-researchers. That is the price to be paid for assistance from partners, since they more readily support actions in which governments have already made some investment.

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