

Nankamba shows ODL is boon for women empowerment

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Gender inequality is the serious problem for all the developing countries, where majority of women have been sufferers of social, cultural, political and environmental impacts of development. Lack of education is the cause of inequalities.

As Zambia moves towards attainment of 2030 vision envisaged, education for all has been identified as a key performance indicator of reaching the milestone.

Open and distance learning (ODL) has been increasingly promoted as a powerful avenue for historically disadvantaged groups, especially women, and

A n n i e N a n K a m b a, 43, a Lusaka-based working wife and mother is a shining example.

Nankamba recently obtained her bachelor's degree in commerce & business administration at university of Africa, a leading provider of private university education through ODL.

"This shows the ability of women to break almost all hurdles, including gender, age, marital status, come and time, to getting higher education," she says.

On another dimension, Nankamba is a compellingly helps to validate UoA's claim of 'empowering people through education'. According to chancellor Ruth

Mubanga, higher education was the bedrock to enable people have the freedom to make choices about their life, including having decent income and being independent.

"It is important to grasp the fact that women are underrepresented when it comes to getting university education for many reasons.

"Therefore, Nankamba's achievement, and that of other female graduates of the class of 2016, is a momentous occasion for the university on many dimensions. Particularly, we are proud her because she is the first employee hired by the university, and remains the longest serving. She really epitomises our motto of empowering people through education," Dr Mubanga said.

Nankamba was hired as an administrative officer in 2008. She had since progressed to be responsible for student affairs. It is not an understatement to say that expectations were high for both herself and her employers to progress further.

"You must be very proud of your degrees. Your degrees are of equal status to conventional tertiary learning," Lubinda said in a speech read on his behalf by a representative from his ministry.

Mubanga says the positive impact of distance learning in empowering people, particularly women was gauged from the impressive number of female graduates who made up more than 60% of the nearly 400 students who were recently conferred diplomas, bachelors, masters and doctor of philosophy degrees by the university.

That statistic was also reflected in the university's current student base of more than 2000.

"The positive statistics of women attaining university degrees via open distance learning was significant given that they comprise the largest section of the underprivileged groups in Africa and continue to shoulder almost all domestic responsibilities. In addition, women in Africa face restrictions in the form of traditional patriarchal attitudes that left girls and women behind in education. Therefore, open distance is a realistic path for women and girls to bridge the gap with their counterparts," she said.

Scholars say it was also important not to lose sight of the sequential link with sustainable development resulting from the promotion of ODL.

In the Zambian context, one could argue that this was one of the driver for government to repeal the University Act of 1999 and replace it with the 2013 Higher Education Act that paved way for growth of higher learning institutions. Currently there were seven public and 70 private universities. Remarkably, the majority of private universities were largely ODL.

ODL higher learning institutions such as UoA targeted working adults who do not have the time to pursue higher education qualification at full-time contact institutions. Anecdotal evidence suggest the share of the national headcount of ODL could be well above 35%.

On certain stereotypes about degrees obtained via this mode, the Zambian government was categorical that the qualifications had equivalent status to regular tertiary learning.

Justice Minister Given Lubinda, who was guest of honour at Nankamba's graduation ceremony, was forceful in dispelling the stereotypes, saying ODL helped to catalyse Zambia's development of human capital.

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