



## CTEF - IPPTN Special Series on SDG4: International Women's Day 2021

### Making Women Leadership the Norm in Higher Education



#### Women equal access to power and decision-making at all level

Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Article 21

- 1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- 2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his/her country.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): Article 7

- a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; and
- b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government

Beijing Platform for Action

- a) Ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision making;
- b) Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5

(5.5) Women full/equal participation in leadership and decision-making role.

(from various sources)

#### Women in Leadership

The International Women's Day (IWD) on 8<sup>th</sup> March each year aims to acknowledge the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, as well as reminding us of the challenges women are still facing today. It advocates gender equality for the betterment of society. The global campaign theme of IWD 2021, 'Choose To Challenge' encourages the public to challenge gender biases and inequality that exist in all spheres of life through various activities held by individuals and organisations.

The United Nations (UN) theme for IWD 2021 is 'Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world'. The UN highlights the transformative power of equal participation between men and women, which is especially crucial during the post-COVID-19 era. Women's participation and leadership should be emphasised in policymaking mechanisms and programme implementation across all fields and sectors globally, especially with regards to the pandemic response and recovery processes.

#### Women Leadership in Higher Education

Studies have shown that women are under-represented in top management positions in higher education (HE), such as Vice Chancellor (VC), Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC), President, Vice President, Dean of faculty, Directors of institutes, and Heads of departments in many countries. For example, as of 2019, only 14% of the Rectors in 46 countries with European University Association (EUA) members are female, compared to 86% being male, while 22 of the European countries currently do not have any female Rectors. In South Asia, women in HE leadership positions are notably missing, whereby only 0.01% of VC are women in Bangladesh, 0.04% in Pakistan, and 3% in India.

In Malaysia, there are more female academic staff than their male counterpart. However, the **majority of female academicians remain at lecturer level, and their numbers decrease at Associate Professor and Professor levels** (see Figure 1 and 2). The positions of VC and DVC are mostly dominated by men. The first time women were appointed as VC of a public university was in 2006, at University Malaya (UM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). **Currently,**

out of 20 public universities, there are only 10% female VC, and out of 65 DVC positions, only 9% female. Similarly with the private universities, out of 51 institutions only 14% which have a female VC.

Figure 1: Number of Academic Staff by Gender and Level of Studies in HEIs for the year 2019

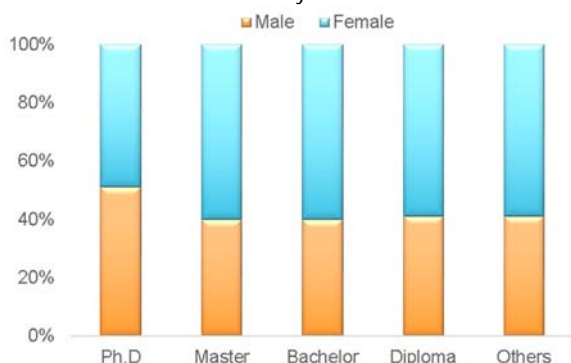
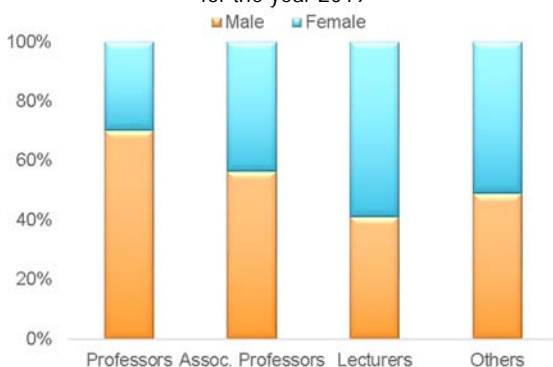


Figure 2: Number of Academic Staff by Gender and Position in HEIs for the year 2019



Findings from various studies on challenges related to women leadership in HE can be grouped into organisational and cultural barriers.

### Barriers to women leadership

#### Organisational barriers

- Structure and hierarchy in favor of men
- Absence of policy and legislation for ensuring women's participation - no childcare facilities, parental leaves, incentives, flexi-working hours
- Glass-ceiling phenomenon
- Gender-based discrimination/violence

#### Cultural barriers

- Stereotype of male leaders as better than women leaders
- Lack of self-confidence
- 'Double burden' - two different responsibilities in traditional and professional roles
- Spouse's attitude – lack of support
- Resistance to women in management level by men
- No role models
- Violence against women

Women Higher Education Leadership – where do we go from here?

Women leadership in HE is important because they bring diversity and inclusivity into the decision making process at all levels. There are many ways to enhance women leadership, and some are already implemented through progressive policies and programmes in universities both locally and globally, from the establishment of women research centres to introducing the element of gender studies in all courses and disciplines. This month onwards is the best time for us to reflect on this issue. As a start, we can refer to the “Four Fixes” adapted from Morley (2013) as guidelines into making women leadership as the norm in HE.

### “Four Fixes”

1. “Fix the women”: Empower women by raising their confidence and self-esteem, provide capacity building, and encourage them to be more competitive, assertive, and risk taking.
2. “Fix the organisation”: Gender mainstreaming through gender equality policies, processes, and practices; challenging discriminatory structures; conducting gender impact assessment, audits, and reviews; introducing work/life balance schemes including flexible working.
3. “Fix the knowledge”: Identify biases and make changes to the curriculum, for examples use gender as a category of analysis in all disciplines, and introduce gender studies.
4. “Fix linkages” between the three efforts: Establish national and institutional higher education mechanisms to ensure integration between the three “Fixes” for planning, implementation and monitoring.

(Adapted from Morley, 2013)

### References

- Ministry of Higher Education. (2019). *Statistics of Higher Education 2019*. <https://www.mohe.gov.my/en/download/awam/statistik/2019-1/612-bab-1-makro-institusi-pendidikan-tinggi-3/file>
- Morley, L. (2013). *Women and Higher Education Leadership: Absences and Aspirations* Stimulus paper. London: *Leadership Foundation for Higher Education All*.

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