ABSTRACT

Gender mainstreaming is a phrase that was coined during the 3rd world women conference in 1985 with the aim of broadening interventions to end gender inequalities in a more comprehensive way. Feminist thinking envisioned social transformation where power relations would be altered into more equal relationships between men and women. As a strategy to ending gender inequalities, gender mainstreaming is two-pronged – incorporating interventions that meet practical needs of women and those that are strategic with the goal of achieving gender equality. As a global policy, it was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1996 after the adoption of the BDPfA in 1995 during the 4th women world conference in Beijing. Governments, including Kenya committed to the BDPfA and adopted gender mainstreaming, in keeping with international norms. In Kenya, the national assembly adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1996.

The aim of this study was to establish the impact of gender mainstreaming in public institutions with a focus on Kenya in terms of the changes that have occurred since the advent of the gender mainstreaming requirement. Specifically, it was to assess how gender mainstreaming has been applied, how it has transformed public institutions in a gender responsive manner, and determine the challenges of gender mainstreaming in public institutions. In addition to these, was to assess the appropriate measures to be adopted to improve the engendering efforts in public institutions.

The study used the feminist approach in interpretation of the data collected which was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented in frequencies and percentages in tabular form as well as in pie-charts and bar graphs. This applied to data collected through the structured questionnaire while data collected through interviews was presented I narrative form.

From the study, the findings are that the Affirmative Action is the way through which gender mainstreaming is applied especially in recruiting and promoting women within the public service. The findings also indicate that there is high awareness of gender in public institutions and all cadres of staff are familiar with gender language. Further, there is legislation that is more gender aware and increased number of policies put in place, which are being implemented with varying degrees of effectiveness. The other significant finding is that attitudes towards women and men sharing public space are changing, with women now being more accepted and respected as agents and beneficiaries of the development process in their own right. Pockets of resistance to women being decision makers still persist because at the top level women’s numbers are still low compared to their numbers at the middle and lower cadres. Men still dominate the decision making processes in public institutions.

Challenges abound in the way to achieving gender equality with lack of political will ranking as the biggest impediment.

The findings led to the conclusion that ground has been covered in relation to ensuring that women and men become beneficiaries and agents of the development process. There are increased numbers of women in public institutions in all cadres, although the senior positions cadre is outdone by lower and middle levels. That women are now more accepted in the workplace and gender aware legislation is being enacted are all positive achievements of gender mainstreaming. However, vigilance is required until gender equality is achieved at all levels where there will be no discrimination propagated on the basis of gender, and men and women will receive equal treatment in public institutions. The study sees the need for research on the experiences of women who have risen through the ranks as public servants in government ministries and state corporations. Considering that they have acquired a wealth of experience in the course of their careers, do they advocate for transformation in public institutions that ensures gender equality or do they become masculinized by the system?