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Sexual Violence on University Campuses: The Case of University of Buea

Zoneziwoh Mbonggulo Wondieh

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Zoneziwoh Mbonggulo Wondieh

Zoneziwoh Mbonggulo Wondieh is an award winning humanitarian reporter, working in Cameroon interviewing and giving a voice to women's perspectives on the country's development. Zoneziwoh is also a community mobilizer, sexual and reproductive health activist, and gender professional. She has over five years of experience working on Gender Equality and Women Rights, Leadership and Development.

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Jacaranda Avenue, PO Box 25742, Nairobi

+254 (0) 20387022500603

info@africanleadershipcentre.org

www.africanleadershipcentre.org

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By ZONEZIWOH MBONDGULO WONDIEH

**PEACE SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT FELLOWSHIPS FOR
AFRICAN SCHOLARS 2010/2011**

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES:
THE CASE OF UNIVERSITY OF BUEA**

Introduction

Sexual violence in general has gained both international and local recognition, over the past two decades. However, much of the international attention to this problem focuses on situations of armed conflict and rarely on environments and states that are seen as peaceful. The United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325, 1860, 1888 and 1889 have tended to focus on addressing the impact of armed conflict on women (1325) and particularly on the issue of sexual violence against women in situations of armed conflict. As such, sexual crimes within countries not affected by war are left to domestic jurisdictions. In particular, sexual crimes or sexual exploitation and abuse of women in institutions of higher learning rarely get mentioned within and outside these establishments. In fact, these situations have been met by an uncomfortable silence.

This paper, which is based on “my forward look” project at the African Leadership Centre (ALC) aims in part to break this uncomfortable silence. The paper is divided in to two parts.

The first part looks at how university campuses are addressing sexual crimes in general but with emphasis on some African and some non-African universities. It discusses case studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz; Makerere University Uganda, and University of Cape Town.

The second part focuses on the University of Buea; how sexual crimes on female students are addressed and also how the ruling maleness ideology, which ascribes manhood to power and / or authority, affects the student-teacher (social status) relationship (Kapano Ratele).

Justification for this “forward look” project

Why focus on sexual violence on Universities Campus?

Unlike in the past, nowadays, many college campuses are no longer safe havens, especially for female students. Researches on college sexual crime indicate that the female student is more at risk than her peers who are not student (The Sexual Victimization of College Women Research Report, 2003).

Possible reasons for this are that most campuses are still very male dominated. Thus, more often than not, there is some sort of reluctance towards protecting women's sexual rights; and probably again, due to the social myth that women's sexuality is private – a matter between the man and woman concerned only. In such communities, where cases of sexuality are seen only from the male-lens and not from a more holistic approach or women's perspective, it is however evident that such an unbalanced analysis must have negative impacts on the orientation of the people and the community in general, on the actual values about womanhood and manhood.

In addition, the absence of effective mechanisms to address sexual assaults on campus limits victim availability to seek justice against the perpetrators. It also raises a society where people live in fear and subjugation, while perpetrators feel mighty and right for their acts. Given that campuses are often considered to be the 'temple of wisdom'. Thus, by granting no form of justification for such an offense demeans that value of academic institutions which ascribes to it as 'temple of wisdom'. In addition, recalling the observation made in the National College Women Sexual research report in 2000, it states that female college students experience more sexual violence than their peers who are non-college bound. In this light, the report highlights the non-students advantage to non-student female student - in terms of availability to opportunities to seek redress, for instance, access to the judiciary, law enforcement another legal institutions that advocate against sexual violence and pleasurable sexual relationship - all these therefore makes university campuses an important environment not to ignore. The fact that non-college student have more privileges in acquiring useful knowledge on how, where to report incidence of rape or sexual assault is thus an advantage for non-college/ university students to fight for her [sexual] rights.

Another factor that makes University campus the desirable case study for this research is that the university in its traditional term is a place, which brings people from every race,

beliefs, nationality, ethnicity and religions together for a common mission – acquisition and sharing of knowledge. This may vary but the main point is to acquire and transfer knowledge for a meaningful influence in the society. Either way, I am yet to hear of a university whose object is averse to this. However, in the cases selected, academic excellence is one of the main values, although higher education institutions i.e. Universities, are also nurturing grounds for transformational leaders, societal role models; morals, professional and ethical citizens.

Why University of Buea?

The University of Buea (UB) makes an excellent example for this research because of its peculiarity; being the first Anglo-Saxon university in the country, established 1993, UB remains a center for academic excellence within the Central Africa Region. The current population of UB students is estimated at over 16 000, according to the University of Buea Students' Guide of 2012. And the university has as objective to promote, protect and respect the rules governing the fundamental rights of freedom of speech and natural justice. In spite of that sexual harassment and sexual exploitation of female students by academic staff rampant nature remains overlooked on campus. In which most at times victims finds confidence in informal reporting - that is to say victims of sexual violence rather prefer sharing their grief with friends, colleagues and peers who may in most situations not have sufficient knowledge on how to tackle such incident, as well as bringing social justice to persons concerned. Based on this that University of Buea (UB) makes an interesting case to study so as to raise a more positive sexual education on campus.

Objectives

This research, on which this paper is based, has two broad objectives:

1. To analyze some Universities' plans for strategic and practical intervention towards addressing sexual violence on University campuses, drawing examples from some US and African universities.
2. To see how this research can be used to engage students and administration into sexual education discussions in University of Buea. So as to ensure UB '*The Place to Be*' a safer place for all, free from sexual abuse and violence. And this can be done through;

2.1. Stimulating positive discussions on issues affecting the sexual rights of the student.

UB being a very patriarchal institution, with practices very similar to the current political regime, is less concerned about issues negatively affecting women's sexuality. As a result, it is imperative to use evidence generated from reliable data to bring forth this discussion on sexual violence on female students in UB and its consequences to the student; academically and socially.

One outcome desired from this research process is that students be encouraged to breakout from the cycle of silence, trauma, fear and intimidation; and therefore become more engaged with sexuality discourses. This concurs with Berkowitz's works on possible practices that can be applied to prevent violence on women– in which he emphasized that once men become uncomfortable when witnessing harassment, abuse or other forms of violence on women and even if they don't know how to report or respond. That is already an indication that they themselves wouldn't commit in acts of violence. And this is absolutely possible in UB given that positive discussion on sexual assault / harassment is encouraged.

2.2. Enabling the administration in UB to unconditionally implement strong mechanisms to address the increasing sexual abuses on female students by male academic staff.

A second outcome desired from this research is that, once, students are provided with the rights to access information; empowered with the adequate knowledge towards their sexuality; and which the female students in particular know how and where to seek for intervention when faced with harassment and other forms of sexual abuse, it is however assumed that both the student body and administration will become strongly committed actualizing sexual violence prevention policies. And through such policies perpetrators would be sanctioned severely, and then will there be justice for victims and finally a re-strategization and realization of most UB's 'dormant' policies in supporting female sexual rights.

Defining sexual violence

Sexual violence defined in this essay is taken to mean “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work” (World Report on Violence and Health).

Sexual violence exists in many forms. But in this context, it would include, rape within teacher – student relationships, female student-to- male students, unwanted sexual advances or comments, violent acts against the sexual integrity of women, including fantasized sexual postures, bullying, and including all of the aforementioned acts in the definition.

Questions

This research is guided by 3 key questions:

- i. Nature of sexual violence against female students in universities? This will focus on the specific case of UB**
- ii. What lessons can be drawn from the approaches of other universities to sexual violence on university campuses?**
- iii. Through what strategies can sexual violence be reduced in the University of Buea?**

Nature of Sexual Violence on Campus, the Case of University of Buea

Sexual violence continues to be a security challenge to many female students in most universities. According to a US-based research on sexual victimization on campus females, revealed that in a year, for every 10 000 female students population, more than 350 female students may experience some sorts of sexual violence such as rape [National College Women Sexual Victimization Research report, 2000].

Meanwhile in most Cameroon universities, though the nature of sexual violence is quiet complicated as access to data on reported sexual victimization remains unavailable. Prof Pondi in his book on 'Sexual Harassment and Deontology in the University Milieu' highlighted possible motivation for sexual violence on student and its nature in Cameroon universities – and this include: low ratio of student-lecturer (supervisors) which is 125 students to 1 lecturer [supervisor] and 19% of which are women in a student population of 150 932; over 50% being female [2008 Annual Statistics of the Ministry of Higher Education published 2009]

Among all these, the dilemma is that in UB, research studies on sexual violence are still underexplored. This explains the reason why sexual violence incidences goes untold; with victims prefer to report their sexual victimization to friends, families, colleagues and peers – instead of seeking formal counseling. The fact that there is yet an established body on campus placed purposefully to handle cases of sexual violence on campus also contributes to the complex nature of sexual violence in the university – where perpetrators continue in their acts of abuse, while victims keep silent and suffer miserably and continued to being deprived of their rights.

In January 2011, the Director of Student Affairs, Dr. Ludwig Metuge, made a public announcement blaming the prevalence of sexual violence on campus on the 'indecent' dressing of women. As a means to combat this, the administration reinforced a dress code policy that denies female students especially the rights to wearing tight-fitting or see-through cloths, or mini-shorts on/to campus. As such any student who dare defies the policy, campus security officers were assigned to send them out of campus. In cases where the student bypasses the security checks and goes unnoticed, lecturers had the rights as well to ask the student to leave his/her lectures. Mr. Che Eugene, a guidance counselor for the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, in an interview

[WorldPulse/ZoFem 2012] said: "A majority of female students have experienced one or two forms of sexual abuse from male academic staff on campus. These assaults often happen in the office and in lecture halls, when students are requesting make-up tests or extra lectures, submission of overdue assignments, and making other pleas to male academic staff."

Just like Mr. Che, many instructors believe that so long as female students continue to dress suggestively, exposing certain body parts like the breast, legs, and shoulder- sexual violence is likely to be prevalent on campus.

Maleness and Sexual Violence in the University of Buea

The dynamics of male-female relationship is another interesting factor worth exploring and interrogating, and seeing how these forces interact in UB.

a. **The Myths of being Male and Female in a Community to authority**

UB is a male dominated institution. It upholds strongly the socio-cultural ideology that manhood means power and authority. This affirms Prof Pondi's statement on 'sexist' ideology and mental attitude. Besides, research has proven that to be in position of power implies to control; which is either by subjugation or uniting people. It is also true that with power, good and/or evil is possible. This social belief as Ratele explains is one of the reasons why male promiscuity is rampant. Though sexuality critics suggest that to be man or woman is a cultural attribute and not biological per se, which is unlike the general perception in most communities. However, Shefer, Founten, Ratele surveyed the perception of boys towards sexuality, illustrated that some class of men appreciate their maleness as a means to be sexually assertive and be in charge of all sexual activities.

These assumptions on maleness to femaleness, however holds too in UB. The fact that men in the university community are also part of the larger community taught to believe that to be a man automatically means to be sexually assertive, can thus be claimed to why sexual crimes is rampant on campus.

b. **The Teacher- Student Relationship and the social power dynamic involved**

Another critical aspect is power relations. Already, between a teacher and the student, there exists a power relationship and that by itself creates some sort of tension besides other social norms that prevails such as class and age. Just for the basic fact that in some situations the teacher is superior in position to the student is already a constraint and an influence

the teacher would have over the student. This is reinforced by the attributes of maleness which signifies authority. In such conditions where to be a man implies power, therefore to be a man and a teacher at the same time is obviously more advantageous.

Another aspect is this power imbalance has also been aligned to the considerably few academic supervisors in relation to the students supervisees creates opportunities for the supervisors who are mostly male to exploit the students, particularly the female ones. Other arguments claim that socio-economic insecurity has also played a significant role towards female students' vulnerability to sexual violence. Here, Prof Pondi clearly links this cyclical nature of sexual violence and sexual harassment on female students on Cameroon Universities, where he alludes that "for financial security and social status alleviation, some students – females in particular are bound to accept these imposed sexual relationships".

Approaches to handling sexual violence - experience from the US and Africa

Here are selected universities engagement strategies towards promoting sexual rights and social justice within the academic milieu. The universities examined in this paper include; University of California at Santa Cruz, Makerere University in Kampala Uganda and University of Cape Town, South Africa respectively.

So far, sexual violence on campus has been dealt with at the highest level in government, particularly in the U.S.A and South Africa. Even so there is still very little to say about the successes of these mechanisms adopted to address this crime. For instance, in the United States, at the Federal Level, Congress in response against enacted laws, which expected institutions of higher educations to design and implement policies that ensure justice to victims and appropriate sanctions to perpetrators, while protecting both accused and accusers' rights. Institutions like University of California at Santa Cruz and Los Angeles; University of Virginia, Central Washington University and others, adopted policies that aim to prevent, sanction any forms of sexual harassment.

Even at that, reports still do not show satisfactory results. Following a Chicago Tribune Report early 2011, on research conducted on some 6 Midwestern universities, it was found that of 171 reported sex crimes, only 12 were arrested and 4 convicted. In summation, it meant that of every 14 sexual assault cases reported; only 1 was arrested. And for every 43 case reported, 1 was convicted. The outcome therefore is extremely very insignificant to effect change. And with such demotivated and discouraged results eventually shy away complainants from making complaints since justice is seldom on their side. While perpetrators gaining their freedom and enjoying life to the fullest, victims grieve in pain and emotional distress.

That notwithstanding, the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC) recognizes the fact that sexual assault is prominent throughout the nations and also very serious on campus. Based on that, USCSC sought to play a very important role as an educational and administrative organ in protecting its students and academic staffs and employees. Through which it has created several sexual harassment support services for both victims and any other sexual complainant. In addition is a well-design and comprehensive sexual harassment policy which clearly defines all forms of sexual assaults, how to report,

investigate sexual crimes. And making the institution's a zero tolerance of any violations of such. The policy also details each unit's responsibilities.

UCSC is most acclaimed for its wide outreach to the student body. UCSC uses all forms of dissemination to reach out to the students, educate them about the rape myths, common circumstances under which the crime occurs, rapists' characteristics, sexual assault prevention, and relief-aid from sexual violence trauma. In doing so, UCSC uses peer-to-peer educators, a weekly 'road show' and campaign flier dissemination all over campus.

In Makerere University, Uganda, based on the 2004 findings on Situational Analysis of Gender Terrain at Makerere University, conducted by the Gender Mainstreaming Division, a Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy was established. In line with the constitution of the Republic of Uganda that guarantees all Ugandans equality, dignity and non-discrimination, Makerere pledged to commit to respect the rights of all the students and academic staff. And this is still on-going with the potential to track success over time.

In South Africa, University of Cape Town (UCT), under the supervision of the DVC in charge of Institutional Transformation, UCT created a 'Discrimination and Harassment Office' (DISCHO), 2001. DISCHO works to ensure UCT fully commits to bringing social justice to all students and staff and academic excellence. DISCHO also recognizes the fundamental rights of all human beings, enshrined in the nation's constitutions thus commits to address all forms of sexual assault on campus as human rights abuse.

DISCHO is a giant body, independent in its functions. It has well planned structures; formally and informally. This in a nut shell comprises sexual harassment units with well-trained sexual harassment advisories. The DISCHO has also made special provision where it assists complainants' decisions either to have their matters in a criminal court or disciplinary structures of UCT (Student Tribunal).

The UCT, DISCHO approach has otherwise challenge the tradition campus sexual harassment mechanisms. In 2005, it investigated and advised a total of 96 cases. Among which 8 complainants were assisted for a court cases. And also included were the 12 mediations between the perpetrators and the victim.

The case study of UB could therefore borrow from some of the practices used in the 3 universities cases. Despite some of its flaws in fully attaining a 98% success results from UCT, UCSC, and / or Makerere University, one thing is very common in these universities – there exist instruments; legal and independent structures well established to handle just the purpose of sexual harassment and violence. Both the African universities and UCSC

have set up independent and gender sensitive departments purposefully in handling sexual harassment cases. This therefore breaks those barriers, which prevented victims from reporting.

Though UB claims to have the DV in charge of internal controls as an entity that addresses students crisis (including sexual harassment), it is important for UB to open up to new and more flexible approaches – for instance, Sexual violence on campus can be reduced significantly, given that appropriate mechanisms that are well –publicized are implemented and ensuring the students access to enjoy freedom of information, particular information in the authority possession to pertaining to the students sexual and human rights. With such strict applications of t policies; exposing all abusers and perpetrators and are made accountable for their acts. University of Buea shall indeed be the place to be – that safe haven for all.

Lessons for UB

The lessons learned from these institutions – UCSC, UCT and Makerere signify promising practices in preventing sexual crime on campus. Though, critics, on the other hand say that data collection is often unevenly fragmented. For instance, the information that can be obtained from police data, student harassment units (affairs records) are much unrelated to results from social public works. It therefore means that victims choose various institutions to report their cases for particular reasons. Regardless of these criticisms, the UB case is ideal. There is need for a special unit on campus: a well-known independent body designed purposefully to address sexual crimes. For such an institution independent from the usual structure is very essential and important for the integrity of UB. Especially now that it has demonstrated a public interest to fight against sexual violence on its students – by hosting a public forum on Sexual Harassment and Deontology in the University Milieu in May, 2012.

Through what strategies can sexual violence be reduced in the University of Buea?

Based on above analysis and lessons learnt, it is important that UB should focus on ensuring students' safety and rights respected instead on dresses, so as to reduce sexual violence prevalence. Other protective measures are an adoption of sexual violence policy and the creation of sexual violence body whose staffs and members are well- trained/skills with the committed and interest to addressing sexual violence on campus. More sexual violence education programs be organized so as to engage the students and lecturers in to this discussion. Campus associations/clubs should / could also take special interest in campaign for sexual policy on campus, engaging with the administration and creating friendly avenues for sexually victimized persons. Existing campus clubs/association already working on sexual violence should form alliances to pressure for more effective and meaningful approaches to prevent sexual crimes and promote social justice.

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