

Ahfad University for Women Beyond Academic Excellence: Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement

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Abstract

This paper exemplifies the role of universities in contributing to community development and social welfare by getting involved in activities beyond the academic realm. It highlights the engagement of universities in social responsibility (SR) and civic roles taking the experience of Ahfad University for Women (AUW) as an example. The aim is to develop more understanding of the role of universities in social responsibility (SR) and civic engagement (CE), and enhance learning from real experiences.

The paper starts by exhibiting some theoretical aspects about SR and CE and the contextual factors within which AUW strives for both academic excellence and meeting its social commitments. This is followed by highlighting the evolution of AUW, with focus on its mission, vision, philosophy and goals.

Further, the paper presents the University contribution in achieving MDG 2 and how the activities carried by AUW contribute in achieving education for all, as an approach to SR&CE. The rest of the paper focuses on presentations of the activities and practices of AUW towards achieving social responsibility and civic engagement, with some practical experiences of projects recently implemented by AUW within the frame of SR&CE.

Finally, the paper highlights some of the challenges facing AUW while assuming its role in SR & CE.

I. Introduction

Universities are the main pillars on which Higher Education policies and strategies are constructed and implemented. Equally, universities are the most important institutions where the needs and demands of societies in terms of human capital are identified and fulfilled. Thus the role of universities, as social institutions, extends beyond the provision of the immediate educational services. Universities are expected to play a significant role in serving their communities by being socially responsible and actively engaged in a variety of activities that help the communities to strive for development and advancements. Thus this paper has delved in the arena of the civil engagement and social responsibility SR of universities, trying to achieve the below mentioned objectives.

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1. Objectives

The purpose of this paper is mainly to:

- a. Develop more understanding of the role of universities in civic engagement and social responsibility
- b. Highlight the policies, strategies and actions which affirm the role of, Ahfad University for Women (AUW) in civic engagement and social responsibility.
- c. Reflect how AUW activities contribute in community development.
- d. Identify the challenges encountered by AUW while assuming its civic role.

2. Methodology

This paper is guided by a mixed paradigm of doing research as it is basically within the «real world research» paradigm, where the scrutiny of a social reality is its focus. It also builds on the constructivist approach where the researchers see their task is to understand the multiple social constructions, meanings and knowledge around the phenomena (Robson, 2002) as given by the research informants and documents.

The paper has greatly utilized secondary data from different sources mostly AUW related documents, reports and research studies.

Primary data has been obtained through interviews with some top level senior employees providing information in the relevant aspects. A sample of six individuals has been purposively selected using non-probability sampling techniques targeting those who could best reflect on the policies and practices of AUW in civic engagement and social responsibility. These included the President of the University, Vice-president for Academic Affairs, Vice-President for Financial Affairs, Deans of Schools, the Director of the Institute of Women, Gender and Development Studies, and the Executive Director of Babiker Bedri Scientific Association for Women Studies.

Data analysis followed a simple qualitative data analysis technique by creating categories that imply the different components of the actions of AUW and identify how they feed as civic and SR actions.

II. Theoretical underpinnings

1. Contextual Socio-Economic Background

According to UN human Development Index 2006, Sudan was categorized as a low – income, food deficient country and ranks as number 141 out of 177 countries and territories . Among Sudan's 36 million people, life expectancy at birth is 58 for women and 55 for men. More than half of the women are illiterate, as are three out of ten men. About 17 percent of children under the age of five are under weight (WFP, 2007).

Sudan is still poor in health provision and the morbidity rate is high owing to many reasons among them are malaria, diarrhea, communicable diseases and the like. The nutrition status of Sudanese people is poor and malnutrition is widely spread due to food shortage and imbalanced diet. Despite of the progress made in Sudan in terms of health, economic and social services provision, communication and transportations, still the coverage of these services is skewed and in some places or regions has declined. Gender inequality and gender gaps are prevalent due to various socio-cultural factors, lack of political commitment, and limited resources of civil societies; these are manifested in great feminized poverty.

Sudan ecosystem is fragile and is deteriorating rapidly due to multiple factors, mostly socio-economic changes, which result in excessive grazing, falling of trees, soil erosion, desertification,



over-hunting, land degradation and declining biological diversity. In addition the civil war that continued for over two decades in the south and the conflict that broke out in 2003 in Dar Fur had displaced about 2 million people. The civil war has torn the country; it has depleted its natural and human resources, destroyed its infrastructure and driven the villagers out of the rural areas into refuge, internal displacement and migration. The refugees are sheltered along the neighboring countries. The internally displaced gathered in camps outside the big cities in the North, South, West and East after their villages had been raided, burnt, and their livestock been stolen.

Moreover, Sudan has witnessed a massive population movement (civil conflict, drought, and major floods), and increased population growth, disparities among regions in service provision, high illiteracy rates among poor urban and rural women, in addition to harmful customs, traditions and practices. Addressing these challenges have become the major directive for the establishment of community oriented programs at Ahfad University particularly, the Rural Extension and Development program and the establishment of specialized schools to serve the community such as the School of Rural Extension Education and Development, School of Health Sciences, and the School of Medicine AUW.

2. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility means different things to different people and is defined as the «managerial obligation to take action to protect and to improve society as a whole while achieving the goals of the business» (Hatten, 1997). The manager of any socially responsible institution should be inspired to achieve goals, obey the law, act ethically and be a good corporate citizen meeting the needed level of civic engagement.

CSR and the level of commitment to it, guide strategic planning and the philosophy of any institution stems from it. It is the obligation of any institution to maximize the positive impacts of its operations and maximize the impacts of these operations on the well-being of the society at large. There are four basic levels of SR cited in the literature; economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic (ibid):

a. Economic responsibility

Historically the primary role of business - mostly relevant to CSR- has been economic. The concept has lately been extended to cover all types of institutions and their economies with focus on the utilization of resources and energy in activities designed to increase social benefits.

b. Legal responsibility

Laws can be seen as the society's codes of right and wrong which exist to ensure that individuals and institutions do what is considered right. These codes change all the times as laws are added, repealed, or amended in an attempt to change public sentiment. Examples are laws protecting consumers, the environment and some laws are ensuring equity and equality especially at the workplace. SR implies strong commitments towards the laws and regulations within their context as well as some of the laws that stems from international mandates and agreements (ibid).

c. Ethical responsibility

Ethics are the rules of moral values that guide decision-making by groups and individuals. Ethical responsibilities of institutions are about how its decisions and actions show concern for what its stakeholders (employees, customers, and the community) consider as fair and just.

d. Philanthropic Goodwill

Philanthropy is the highest level of social responsibility as illustrated in the literature. This includes participating in programs that improve the quality of life, raise the standard of living



and promote goodwill. The difference between ethical responsibility and philanthropy is that the latter is not seen as an obligation; rather it is seen as a voluntary action and a contribution to the society to make it a better place (Hatten, 1997).

Philanthropy is not limited to the wealthy, average citizens (individuals, institutions) can be and are philanthropic.

Universities as institutions, and sometimes as businesses (private universities) are seen as bodies acting in a socially responsive and philanthropic manner. By doing so, they assume both their obligatory role and philanthropic goodwill (ibid).

III. Why SR in Universities?

A short answer would be that the world has changed in deep and challenging ways which demand that new generations of managers and public officers take into considerations much more than the economic and financial performance in their decision – making, strategies and practices.

Universities are where leaders of tomorrow will be formed in their understanding of the world, in the scientific frameworks they apply, and in their «coat» of values.

As universities change in their values, understanding and practices, so does the practices of the future decision makers.

Eventually, through a new professional class and their values and practice, a new culture is formed for all society.

This is precisely the same reason that SR is of great social value because it changes the values and practices in organizations, and helps forming a new culture and starts deploying a culture of sustainability and development (Loria, 2008).

Thus a new social contract is needed in which collaboration and exchange among sectors is at the prelude of the activities of these sectors in order to face the challenges of a constrained reality.

1. Higher Education and MDG 2: Universal Education

Millennium Development Goal (MDG) #2 mobilizes world leaders to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere - boys and girls alike - will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling (grades 1 - 5). Universities are key institutions of civil society. They help in creating knowledge and developing the skills needed to provide effective services to the community and to advice higher education government policy. They train national citizens to become future leaders, policy-makers, scientists, teachers and other professionals who achieve and sustain the universal education goal. AUW since its inception, and for the future ahead is committed to this goal.

2. The Evolution of Ahfad University for Women

Ahfad University for Women (AUW) was the first non-governmental and non-profitable women's university in the whole of the African and Arab region. The founder of girls' education in Sudan (Sheikh Babiker Bedri,) lived at a time where girls and young women were nurtured towards subjugation, domesticity, and ignorance. Having the gift of persuasion and foresight, Sheikh Babiker Bedri in 1907 persuaded the society, British and local government ruling at that time and opened, in his own home, the first classroom where girls received their education. His son Prof. Yusuf Bedri, who succeeded him in 1954 continued to develop schools to be the pioneer of non-governmental higher education in Sudan (AUW Prospectus, 2006).

Yousif Badri influenced by that heritage of leadership became committed to find new ways to serve the Sudanese communities through higher education. He formed a committee of Sudanese



scholars to help in developing a vision he outlined for disciplines that can be taught at the new college to serve new market needs and to create new horizons.

Hence, the choice of the first two schools: one is Family Sciences with emphasize on nutrition education and home economics was selected as the most appropriate discipline to address the communities and family needs. This was the first time for this specialization to be taught within a Sudanese university.

The second school is Psychology and Preschool Education. Also, it was a new specialization to be offered to serve the market with specialists in managing and teaching in kindergartens, as well as specialists in promoting psychological health. It is worth noting that Ahfad Kindergarten opened in 1936 was the first in Sudan to substitute the Khalwa, which is exclusively a religious pre-school establishment for boys, of the age five to nine.

Hence, the vision is to modernize education from childhood and to give the people prospects of a healthy life physically and psychologically.

The commitment to the different communities of Sudan, especially rural people, made Yousif Badri think of a course to engage the students with rural people through their study program. Hence, the course of rural extension was introduced in 1972 to the students of family sciences and then in 1974 became a university requirement. The fundamental mission is to create from those female students leaders in their societies with first-hand experience of identifying local people's needs and addressing them. Moreover, graduating empowered females who have skills to address these needs and become role models and change agents. Social change and the training of future change agents was the vision that guided for the establishment of further schools, disciplines or programs. The School of Management was then opened in 1976, the School of Rural, Extension, Education and Development opened in 1987, School of Medicine with community and problem based orientation opened in 1990, and School of Pharmacy opened in 2001. The evolution of Ahfad University for Women is characterized by the establishment of unique units, centers, institute and postgraduate studies. The Ahfad University College for Women was given the status of a full fledged university in May 1995 (AUW, 2008).

3. Mission, Vision, Philosophy and Goals

a. Mission

Since its inception AUW has a mission, which is to provide quality education for Sudanese women to become change agents, bridge the gender disparity in education, and participate in community development projects.

b. Vision

AUW vision is to create proactive women change agents and leaders from all parts of Sudan who can participate actively in the development of their families and communities.

c. Philosophy

The philosophy of AUW is to prepare women to assume responsible roles in families, communities, and in the nation.

d. Goals

- 1) Prepare students and promote their skills to become leaders in diverse areas of knowledge and intellectual spheres.
- 2) Develop appropriate curriculum that would lead to promote the students' analytical and critical skills in order to contribute effectively for the improvement and enhancement of the Sudanese communities and people.
- 3) Encourage scientific research in general and in women's and gender issues in particular

taking account of the importance of disseminating research findings through different tools of publications, public debates, conferences and media.

- 4) Develop outreach programs that are directly related to serve the outside communities particularly in rural areas. These could be various programs of comprehensive nature for continual education, distant education, training, advocacy or awareness raising activities in a way to make the university an effective tool and seat for civic engagement with special focus to reach the rural communities.
- 5) Create networking and close partnerships with the civil society, public and private sectors whether nationally, regionally or internationally. These partnerships could be in areas of joint curriculum development to serve the needs of the society, state and the market as well as contribute to the promotion of technology for services and production purposes.
- 6) Establish good cooperation with other universities and academic or research institutes nationally, regionally and internationally in different spheres of knowledge promotion particularly as pertaining to develop appropriate and relevant curriculum and technology that serves the ever changing needs of Sudan (University Act, 1995).

4. The Role of AUW in Achieving MDG 2

a. Knowledge/Education: targeting the needy and the poor

AUW seeks to reach girls between age 16 -21 and older age groups such as mature students. The university provides scholarships based for those who cannot afford to pay fees for higher education, especially those coming from areas of conflict where women suffered double discrimination; from the patriarchal ideology and from the civil war and tribal conflicts. As a group representing the marginalized, AUW offers them special discretion in enrollment regulations as well as scholarships to study in its various programs. The university makes an effort in raising funds from partners to sponsor the scholarships and to convince local and state authorities to facilitate for the students residence in Omdurman within the vicinity of the University campus. The first comers, coming to Ahfad from Darfur, South, and East, are considered as pioneers and received full board residence at AUW campus to encourage parents to send their daughters to study at AUW. A special program was then opened to lead to a Bachelors degree in Rural Development, Extension and Education in 1986 that continued to enroll only students from disadvantaged areas, South, Nuba Mountains, Darfur, East, and Blue Nile areas. In 1998, it offered places for other students. This positive discrimination policy made AUW stand as the main university which has substantial numbers of graduates from these states (AUW, 2008).

AUW has excelled in its affirmative action in student admission policy which has continued to create a diversified student population in relation to ethnicity, culture and religion representing different parts of Sudan, and African countries such as Ethiopia, Eriteria, Nigeria, Comoros Island (AUW, 2005).

AUW extends its education mission to reach poor urban communities and rural areas in Sudan through the university mandatory annual fieldtrips and family attachment projects. The outputs of these rural areas (covering 40 - 50 rural areas in Sudan) are community awareness raising and development projects. These (annually themed) projects target community problems such as health, sanitation, and environment, female genital mutilation (FGM), girls' education, income generating activities, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. The family attachment program is followed within the School of Medicine and is conducted by the medical students, where each student is attached to a poor family to monitor the health conditions of the family until the student has graduated (Badri, 2005).

Other means of reaching the grassroots is through collaboration with its outreach arms: The Babiker Bedri Scientific Association for Women Studies (BBSAWS) and Community Animators Friendly Association (CAFA). To maintain the mission of AUW in education, just to mention some, BBSAWS offered activities such as literacy classes, rehabilitation of schools, and financial support to primary students in disadvantaged areas to continue their education (BBSAWS Report). Some of the activities undertaken by CAFA in support of disseminating information are awareness raising programs, advocacy, and campaigns on reproductive health issues, gender-based violence, targeting females and males' adolescents, youths, and the elderly (CAFA Performance Report 2004 - 2008).

Moreover, the university in its efforts to ensure that poor children receive basic education a micro-credit project was established to provide poor women with funds to set up an income generating activity to help them to pay for their children's education (AUW, 2008).

b. Research

AUW strives to strengthen research and training capacities. Research activities are encouraged to contribute in solving some of the country's social problems, through students' graduation research projects, which are guided towards tackling social issues and concerns. Social justice, gender equality and women empowerment, peace culture and conflict resolution are examples of research projects undertaken by students. This will help integrating student and faculty members' engagement in research projects and consultancies addressing community and social development. The following is a sample of studies that were undertaken by AUW faculties in contribution to peace and conflict resolution, a major concern to all Sudanese communities.

- 1) Book on "Sudan between Peace and War, IDP in Khartoum, Southern and Western Kordofan.", UNIFEM, Kenya, 1998.
- 2) A document on "The Initiative to Facilitate Women Participation in the Peace Process", in collaboration with CARE international, 1999.
- 3) Production of three training manuals, two on Peace Building and Conflict Resolution and one focusing on Peace Education within schools.
- 4) Research Report on Darfur under Siege. AUW and Tufts University, USA.

c. Women Empowerment Project

Women empowerment is one of Ahfad's goals. The project has two fold objectives: one is to empower national citizens in integrating gender mainstreaming in policies, programs, and projects. Second, to empower the powerless poor women through provision of micro-credit so that they become self-sufficient and gain control over their lives and improve their living standard through regular income, as will be later explained in Section VII.

IV. Civic Engagement Role of AUW

The philosophy of AUW of being community oriented and graduating potential change agents in their local communities makes the university to be people-oriented biased towards those disadvantaged women to help them, through community development activities, to play a crucial role in their communities. This philosophy led AUW towards shouldering a prominent role in civic engagement and participation as a means of achieving the University social responsibility.

1. Objectives towards SR and civic engagement CE

The uniqueness of AUW in comparison to many other universities is in its commitment and social responsibility towards all Sudanese people through its various civic engagements being

broadly reflected by the implementation of the various activities conducted by AUW aiming at the following outputs (AUW Prospectus, 2006):

- a. "Degree requirement courses that engage the students with the communities or the formal institutions of both the public, private and international bodies".
- b. "All outreach and extra curricula activities of academic, cultural and creative nature done by staff, students and administrators using and involving all available national resources and international partnerships".
- c. "Wide range coverage of population for its capacity building and institutional strengthening activities. The target population includes university students, staff, administrators, NGOs, media personnel, politicians, planners, lawyers, youth, grassroots organizations, civil servants professionals, and many others working at the public and private sectors".
- d. "Production of information, education and communication (IEC) materials directed to the local people or youth or any other special target groups for awareness raising. Also, educational materials that disseminate civic engagement activities of AUW and, that encourage social responsibility and empowerment among the students".
- e. Sponsorship to poor students and students from disadvantaged areas with free education at AUW".
- f. "Encouraging research that serves communities, the people as well as direct students to relish values of peace, social responsibility and have vision for improving quality of life.»
- g. To help in and/or offer Services to the public especially in remote rural areas, displaced camps and sub-urban shanty areas".
- h. "Engaging in national activities directly, or by linking to others or offering AUW spaces and staff time to debate or celebrate national issues or figures."
- i. "Activities undertaken by AUW arms, which are independently registered as NGOs and serve AUW's mission and goals and represent civic engagement activities" (AUW, 2008).

2. Civic engagement policies

- a. AUW policy is to adhere to principles of democratic values, equality, inclusiveness, respect to diversity, human rights and dignities, resolving conflict peacefully; allowing for the promotion of persons potentials and respecting individual freedom within the law.
- b. Policies of developing curriculum that is community oriented, that allows AUW to achieve its vision, mission, goals and objectives are followed. The curriculum is also designed in a way to meet international standards. Knowledge is Sudanized through case studies, training and community outreach activities integrated in the curriculum (see for details university requirement courses such as rural extension course, women studies, environmental and population studies courses, see also family and field attachment programs and brochures of the master degree programs).
- c. Policies of encouraging the development of programs and projects that allow AUW to maximize its civic engagement, also offer space to staff promotion and self education. Examples of them are projects to eradicate female genital mutilation, promote reproductive health, visionary leadership, culture of peace, and raise awareness on good governance and democracy.
- d. Research and capacity building programs that would enhance the internationalization objectives as well as social responsibility achievement such as those developed with Western universities in Norway, Holland, Germany, and Tufts or at regional level with American University in Cairo (AUC), American University in Beirut (AUB), Dar al salaam

- and Nairobi universities.
- e. Using the university facilities to offer services for staff, students and the neighborhood and catchments areas within the university radius (e.g. kindergarten, primary and secondary schools, health center, hospital, farm).
 - f. The policy of students' intake stipulates that tuition waiver is provided to needy students from all reigns of Sudan. Such students usually comprise about 30% of the annual intake. (AUW, 2008)

3. Strategies and Mechanisms

- a. Reaching to all Sudanese sectors by offering diverse activities contributing to capacity building and institutional strengthening.
- b. Instilling in students and staff the values of volunteerism and social responsibility.
- c. Promoting students and junior staff communication and leadership skills within class and at outreach activities.
- d. Enhancing students and staff potentials for maximum self-realization through offering various curricula, extra-curricula, outreach activities and networking opportunities.
- e. Becoming actively engaged in national and international links serving Sudanese people and achieving AUW vision, mission and goals.
- f. Influencing policies, institutions and legislations to achieve a transformed society of gender equality, overall justice and security through various advocacy programs, conferences, solidarity activism and targeted short courses and extra-curricula activities.
- g. Another strategy of establishing other institutionalized or informal arms that could contribute in AUW achieving its objectives and to be in line with its vision, mission and goals is the establishment of NGOs such as Babiker Bedri Scientific Association for Women Studies (BBSAWS), and Community Animators Friends Association (CAFA).

V. Reflections on AUW Praxis toward Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement

The analysis of the interviews and documents aimed at exploring the role of Ahfad University for Women in social responsibility /civic engagement and how its curricula and extra-curricular activities contribute to community development. As well as identifying the various challenges that AUW encounters in assuming its role in civic engagement. Hence, the data from the interviews, supported by relevant documents, is analyzed into thematic categories.

1. AUW Curricula: Community Oriented and Socially Responsive

The results of the interviews and analysis of relevant documents revealed that AUW provides community oriented curricula that are responsive to current and changing community needs. The curricula are a mix of learning and service provision as is explained below:

- a. The university has required courses to be taken by all students registered for Bachelors Degree, which include Rural Extension, Population Studies, Reproductive Health, Environmental Studies, Women and Gender Studies, Career Development, Research Methodology, Talents Development Skills, and Introduction to Behavioural Sciences. Issues of gender, democracy, poverty, population, and, human rights have been integrated into the undergraduate as well as the postgraduate courses. The aim from these university required courses is to instill in the students values of love, tolerance,

cooperation, loyalty, critical thinking, altruism, and civic responsibilities. Also, to develop students who become responsible citizens able to define their goals, needs, and to serve for achieving better life for the local community and the nation as a whole.

- b. Rural Extension Program which was started in 1973 involves annual field trips to rural areas by fourth year students across all specializations. Students conduct outreach activities to raise awareness in poor rural communities as well as undertake assessment studies for advocating for needed development projects.
- c. Family attachment program in the School of Medicine: students are attached to families in the neighboring areas of the university and other underserved urban areas.
- d. The School of Management contributes in development of the small enterprise sector through its curricula, analysis of faculty and students' research, students' in-service training reports and regular contacts with the business and relevant governmental sectors which provide students with skills to influence the development of this important sector.

2. Involvement of Community in Curricula

AUW has always ensured the involvement of the local and national community in the development of its curriculum. This is achieved through technical advisory committees that govern and monitor individual academic programs. These committees are usually composed of national experts, business representatives, and potential employers of graduates and beneficiary community members. Regional, age and gender variations are always considered in the formulation of these committees that meet regularly to assist in design and evaluation of programs. Moreover, a good proportion of undergraduate and graduate students' researches are carried out to assess the curricula with regard to the needs of the communities and economy. Also through the Rural Extension Program, baseline data and the studies at large are used to modify curricula to meet the community needs. AUW carries curricula revision every four to five years based on the feedback from the different activities and supervised by the technical advisory committees.

3. Research Activities

A large share of AUW research projects addresses issues of community needs and welfare of Sudanese people as has been mentioned in the interviews. AUW carries out different types of researches i.e. policy oriented research, action oriented research, knowledge production research and scientific researches. As mentioned earlier, community involvement is part and parcel of the research identification process. For instance, AUW respond to research areas and topics identified through community oriented programs (rural extension field trips), business companies, relevant civil society organizations (CSOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), the state (SAP, Sudan MDGs report, RH policy, Women Empowerment Policy), base line surveys and needs assessment e.g. Marawi Dam, National Statistics and Census Centre. Some of these research studies are conducted by AUW as an academic institution and sometimes jointly with its partners. To enhance the university's social responsiveness in coordinating policy-influence research activities, AUW recently established the Research and Grants Unit.

Moreover, the university provision of services (which will be mentioned in the upcoming sections), also, helps to identify research areas both for staff and students' research projects. AUW Reproductive Health Centre contributes to identify research themes. In addition, the outreach program of field attachment for the medical students helps to generate research topics within medical field. The biomedical research community at AUW was initiated mainly to contribute to Sudanese wellbeing by focusing on community related problems and concerns.

It also stands as service provision through patients referral to central hospitals and through collaborative work with the national control programs for tropical diseases. Moreover, in other schools the summer training and field attachment provide the different schools with a variety of research topics/themes. Experimental researches were conducted and action researches were established in areas related to appropriate technology where projects for solar cooker and bio-gas were initiated (AUW, 2008).

4. Training

Moreover, AUW provides training services targeting different groups: women, youth, community leaders, policy makers, health personnel and others. Through these service learning activities, faculty members in the university build their capacities in teaching and find opportunities to engage in serving the community. Many of these training programs have also informed the university curricula, such as the Regional Training on Integrating gender and Rights in Reproductive Health, which has informed courses in health education and behavioral and social health, as well as trainings in Gender Sensitive Planning, Research and Evaluation. In addition, such trainings also contribute in strengthening the capacities of national citizens in integrating gender mainstreaming into policies and programs.

5. Service Provision

The efforts of AUW in social responsibility and commitment towards improvement of poor urban areas as indicated in the interviews with top management and from the analysis of documents, this is done through the following services:

a. Ahfad Family Health Center

It was established in 1994 with the support of the UNFPA. Its aims are to serve staff, students and neighboring areas, specially displaced people by offers a wide range of services including ANC, FP, nutrition, diabetes, counseling and others. The Centre also offers outreach activities in association with Family Attachment Program (FAP)

b. Ombadda Teaching Hospital

The hospital aims to provide training for medical, pharmacy & dietetics students. It also provides services to Ombadda community (population of over 1 million and a half), and internally displaced people (IDPs) from Southern and Western Sudan. The services available are pediatric, obstetric and gynecology (including antenatal and postnatal care), ophthalmology, orthopedic, medicine, surgery, Psychiatry casualties. Supporting services include x-ray, laboratory, and an outpatient clinic.

c. University Teaching Farm

It is one of the students training units situated in West of Omdurman, adjacent to displaced camps. The farm has potential to become a training avenue for IDPs in basic livelihoods skills development in: farming techniques, food production and food security, appropriate technology for farming and food production. The farm also offers the community drinking water to supplement few existing water points.

d. Early Childhood Development Centre (ECDC)

The AUW ECDC do not only serves as a training centre for AUW students but it also provides training services in early childhood development to other kindergartens in the different states of Sudan. Moreover, it offers child care service to AUW staff and neighbouring community. It is also training centre to kindergarten teachers and supervisors working in national and private child-centres.

e. English Language Unit

It provides services for both the university and society. Regarding the former, the unit teaches general English to different schools, centers and institutions, designs and evaluates syllabi to the different schools, centers and institutions, and train students to be teachers. In the latter, The Unit extends its training services to different universities staff to help them teach in English (e.g. Upper Nile University), trains teachers of private and government schools to enhance their communication skills and organizes courses for government different sectors (General Admission office, customs officersetc) to develop their English language.

6. Community Mobilization

Many of the AUW faculty members together with some graduates are involved in informal work experiences where they use their expertise in areas of specializations to engage in voluntary services in NGOs, networks and informal coalitions. The existence of two NGOs inside the AUW has provided better opportunities to the AUW faculty members and graduates to engage in these informal duties. These NGOs provide services of awareness, training, research and production of knowledge for the community. They benefit from the inputs of the AUW faculty members and others. When engaged in these activities, the AUW faculty members share experience with other partners as well as gain insights into the reality of lives of people they serve, thus use these perspectives to restructure their individual courses and training programs.

The AUW also involves its alumni through a very coherent network that allows them to reflect on the usefulness and deficiencies in the curricula they studied at AUW. The alumni are also regularly involved in training programs the AUW carries out as well as in service provision through its out-reach work.

7. Extra Curricula Community Oriented Activities

The results of the interviews and relevant document analysis (AUW, 2006 and 2008) revealed that Ahfad's extra curricula activities feed into national and international community issues/agendas. AUW celebrates occasions and events related to its mission as presented in the following paragraphs:

a. International Days

AUW Celebrates the International Women's Day through the University Annual Women's Week. The themes of the women's week are related to International Conference on Population Development (ICPD), Gender Equality and women Empowerment issues and peace. Students formulate sub themes on which they plan and perform activities including drama, music, choral, etc. The celebrations of the population and food days, which have been organized separately, mainly aim at raising awareness of students, government and communities of food and population issues. As well students perform different activities to deliver messages tackling issues of hunger, poverty, reproductive health, etc.

b. Student Associations

Students are encouraged to form and join different societies at the university such as drama, sports, music association. Also they join ethnic associations and students leagues. There are other forms of association which have been formed by the staff and open for students' families and the community such as Senior Citizens and Friends of Deaf and Mute Association.

c. AUW Out-reach Arms

Those are voluntary organizations formed through an initiative of AUW and hosted within the university campus, namely: Babiker Bedri Scientific Association for Women Studies (BBSAWS),

Community Animators Friendly Association (CAFA), and Sudanese American Foundation for Education (SAFE), carry outreach programs in terms of training, awareness raising, networking, research activities and provision of references and text books to universities mainly by SAFE through donating books from American universities to AUW and other Sudanese universities.

8. Links: National, Regional and International

AUW has several Links at the National, Regional and International Levels. These links include: capacity building for the staff (Ph.D. and M.Sc.), programs in terms of conducting Summer School, student and staff exchange programmes, research as well as institutional strengthening.

- a. Links at the National level with Sudanese universities, such as University of Khartoum, Gezira, Sudan, Juba, Alazhari, Shandi, Kassla, Al Obied, aims at strengthening capacity building of the universities staff, joint research and curriculum development and teaching.
- b. Links at the Regional level, AUW is Anchor Institute for the Visionary Leadership Programme (VLP), partner of Center of African Family Studies (CAFS) (Kenya), WHO EMRO these include conducting joint courses, capacity building to AUW staff, other NGOs and universities staff.
- c. Links at the international level: Linkage with Manchester, Reading, Iowa State university, Humboldt University, Beilefeld University, Bonne University, Free University, Maastricht, Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Leiden and Amsterdam Universities, Cape Town University, University of Western Cape, South Africa, Suez Canal University, American universities in Beirut and Cairo, and others in Africa, USA, Asia and Middle East. The link includes staff training, curriculum development, research and summer schools.
- d. Bilateral and multilateral links: these included support of foreign governments and UN agencies to AUW infrastructure, institutional strengthening and funding staff capacity building and projects.

9. Diffusion of Knowledge

Another means that emphasizes AUW commitments towards women empowerment is through production of two journals. Those are:

- a. Ahfad Journal is an outlet for national, regional and international links, analyzing issues affecting women in Sudan and in other developing countries.
- b. Promising Half is for students and by students. It includes articles on women's and gender issues and concerns of the students.
- c. Women Magazine which is published twice a year by the BBSAWS.

10. Advocacy and Awareness Raising

AUW in Collaboration with national and international organizations conduct and/or organize conferences on issues of gender, human rights and reproductive health. The purposes are to formulate policy recommendation, advocate for these issues and raise awareness. Example of such activities is:

- a. AUW in Collaboration with the Khartoum center for Human Rights and Environmental Development and with the support of Sudan Organization against Torture (SOAT) developed and led a Conference on Human Rights Education during the period 15th -18th December 2003.
- b. A conference on Sudanese Women Situation: Challenges and prospects was conducted on January 2004 by AUW supported by the Netherlands Embassy.

- c. A regional conference on violence against women was conducted on September 2004 by AUW in collaboration with BBSAWS and Institute for Human Rights, Geneva.
- d. A Conference on violence against women was conducted on September 2004 by AUW in collaboration with BBSAWS and Institute for Human Rights, Geneva.

VI. AUW Civic Engagement: Practical Experiences in Implementing Community Development Projects

This section presents examples of projects implemented by AUW which reflects its contributions in SR and civic engagement in community development.

The University through collaboration with different international partners executes and implements projects that seek to empower women, achieve positive social change in attitudes, behaviours and practices and to lead to community mobilization and development. Examples of these projects are:

1. Project Title: Women Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming

AUW Partner: UNFPA

Executing and Implementing Agency: AUW

Duration: 4 years

a. Executive Summary

This Women Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming project set of activities intends to contribute to the Gender component of the Country Program, which is primarily sensitization of national citizens in integrating gender mainstreaming in their policies, programs and projects. It is also an endeavor to contribute in realizing MDG 3, women equality, equity and empowerment. The project activities such as capacity building training workshops on gender mainstreaming, budget analysis and auditing issues, as well as scientific studies, advocacy and awareness raising sessions will altogether contribute to achievement of the stated outputs. Manuals and materials produced and published will provide substantive information and guidance for training and awareness raising of intended target population.

b. Project Outcome

Gender equality and Human Rights of women and adolescents including Reproductive rights are integrated in national policy, development framework and laws.

c. Expected Output

Gender mainstreaming and women empowerment issues promoted and integrated in the national policies and plans.

d. Intellectual Empowerment

This is done through capacity building trainings intended to promote national capacities knowledge related to conceptualization of gender, gender analysis and gender mainstreaming. They were sensitized to the importance and practical implementation of gender mainstreaming at institutional and programme levels.

The training workshops in gender sensitization conducted (free of charge) as a series of at least 4 per year for an average of five days. They target mid-level personnel in ministries (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of International Cooperation), governmental bodies such as Central Bureau of Statistics, National Population Council, and non-state actors, such as NGOs and civil society organizations CBOs, academic institutes and different networks. (AUW – UNFPA Annual Report 2007 and 2008).

e. Economic Empowerment

The university strives to empower poor women economically and increase their income through administering a revolving fund program. It is one of the benevolent activities of AUW that target beneficiaries from poor urban neighboring communities close to Ahfad University for Women. The project was initially supported by UNFPA in 1997 and has been solely sustained by the university since 2005 (AUW Revolving Fund Report, 2007).

f. Objectives

The primary objectives of this program are to empower the powerless poor women through provision of micro credit so that they become self-sufficient and gain control on their lives and improve their living standard through regular income. The revolving fund aims at creating a link between improving the economic status of women via income generating activities (IGA) and their capacity to improve their reproductive health status and their families well-being through regularly utilizing Ahfad Family Health Centre, as well as, to empower women with decision-making abilities.

g. Target Group

- 1) The program targets the urban poor (including university labours), displaced and those living below the urban poverty line, in terms of poor housing conditions, lack of water and electricity facilities, illiteracy .
- 2) Priorities are given to women, female-headed households, women as sole breadwinners and if any of the family earners have a disability.

h. Orientation

A house to house survey and analysis of the beneficiaries' standard of living is done for identification of genuine cases. The beneficiaries usually receive an orientation before getting the loan, about how to manage the loan to increase their income, and to make them feel confident about taking decisions related to financial decisions at the household level and about RH and the harmful traditional practices as well.

i. Grants and Monitoring

Each year a grant of about 5,500,000 Sudanese Dinars is disbursed to about 55 poor families to help them in establishing income generating activities. Regular monitoring about thirty two field-visits (in Umbadda area) to IGA beneficiaries' homes were undertaken by the IGA coordinator to monitor their activities and make sure they visit Ahfad Family Health Centre for utilization of contraceptives, pre- and- antenatal care, pap-smear exam, nutrition consultation, child growth and monitoring and other needed services. The repayment rate has been maintained to 97%.

j. Impact of the revolving fund

- 1) It had a positive impact on women empowerment in terms of being financially independent, ability to communicate and negotiate, gained wider knowledge about importance of education, family planning and antenatal care.
- 2) Women have more accessibility to reproductive health services in terms of affordability and empowerment of making their own decisions regarding use of those services.
- 3) Improved women's skills in business and boosted their self-confidence and esteem, a way towards regaining control of their own lives (AUW Revolving Fund Report, 2007).

2. Project Title: House –to –house education on HIV/AIDS

Partners: Sudan National AIDS Program and UNICEF

Duration: One Year

a. Introduction

In May 2008, and in collaboration with the Sudan National AIDS Program and the UNICEF, the AUW has carried out an outreach house-to-house activity through 45 field trips with 400 students from the university. The activities of these field trips included house to house visits, public talks, seminars and role plays. Also the students have been engaged in individual and group discussions with the members of the households, using the IEC materials developed by the SNAP and UNICEF, and public discussions through the outdoor activities during the whole trip period. Through this activity, coverage of an estimated 6000 households was achieved. Moreover, the students also managed to reach another 63,000 people through outdoor activities such as public talks, seminars and role plays inside the villages. Within these activities, pre and post-testing of the community knowledge about the HIV/AIDS through the pre-designed questionnaire was carried out.

The Rural Extension Program at Ahfad University for Women includes scientific field trips to explore the life of rural people and the means and ways for proper interventions to improve the quality of their life style. The key participants in the program activity are the students and faculty members at AUW who train both the students and the rural communities especially women. Other stakeholders are government officials and NGOs working in the area.

The Program includes theoretical, practical and application part (in form of the field trips).

b. Objectives of the Rural Extension Program and Field Trips

- 1) To provide the students with first hand knowledge and skills about life of people in the rural communities.
- 2) To increase knowledge and competency among the university staff in planning and managing extension programs.
- 3) To raise the awareness of the rural community about the important health and development issues pertaining to their good quality of life.

c. Other related objectives

- 1) To expose and train students to deal with issues of rural life.
- 2) To allow the students to practice methods of social research in collecting and analyzing data related to the needs of rural communities.
- 3) To train students in the field of development and to encourage them to act as agents of change.
- 4) To train students to design and develop simple educational and disseminate information to rural committee.

d. Scope and geographic coverage of the trips in 2008

The States covered by the field trips this year were: Khartoum, , White Nile, River Nile, Blue Nile and North Kordofan. The main theme of the field trips this year was raising the awareness of the community about HIV/AIDS.

e. Outcome of the activity

This year, 2008, the program in collaboration with the Sudan National AIDS Program and the UNICEF has covered some 50 rural areas in 5 of the northern states of the Sudan. The aim of this collaborative activity is to test the newly developed IEC materials through house to house education by the AUW students. Through its different activities this project has contributed to improving the knowledge and awareness of the communities about a crucial health problem, and also it served staff and students in developing their capacity to interact with the community and assume their role as change agents.



3. Project title: An initiative to promote Democracy, Human Rights and Culture of Peace through involvement of Youth

AUW partner: Europe Aid

Implementing body: Babiker Bedri Scientific Association for Women Studies (BBSAWS)

Duration: November 2007- September 2008

3.1 Activity 1: TOT training workshop on Democracy, Human Rights and Culture of peace.

a. Training Objective

To train trainers on how to use the manuals on Democracy, Human Rights and Peace in training of teachers, parents and secondary school students.

b. Participants

15 Participants (3 males and 12 females) were carefully selected from active members of BBSAWS and AUW. Trainers were selected based on the following:

Committed and active members who have already conducted training in any of the organization areas of concern priority was given to those with experience in the Democracy, Peace and Human rights.

c. Training outcome

15 members of AUW staff and BBSAWS were trained on how to use the manuals on Democracy, Human rights and peace in training youth. This group was qualified to take part in the training workshops of AUW students and supervisors who will accompany the students in the fieldtrip.

3.2 Activity: Teachers and parents training workshop in Khartoum Sate

a. Training Objective

To promote secondary school's teachers and members of parent's council understanding of the concepts of Democracy, Human Rights and Peace.

b. Results of the training

Eight teachers and six parents were trained in the issues of democracy, human rights and culture of peace. Their capacity in promoting these concepts was enhanced and they have shown great interest to engage in these issues.

3.3 Activity: Ahfad University Staff training Workshop

a. Participants:

Targeted participants were AUW staff members accompany the students in the annual field trip to Kordofan State. According to the project plan 10 supervisors were to be invited to the training workshop, however Ahfad University adopted the theme on civic education this year and hence the training was extended to all supervisors .A total of 45 staff members were included in this training workshop.(Please note that Ahfad University paid the cost of training of the additional participants)

b. Objectives of the workshop

- 1) Train AUW staff on concepts of peace, democracy and human rights.
- 2) Raise AUW staff capabilities to become better TOT in relation to the pre-mentioned topics.
- 3) Train the participants on the important messages that could be carried during the next field trip to the community.

c. Topics covered in the workshop



- 1) Democracy
- 2) Human rights
- 3) Culture of peace

3.4 Activity: Training workshops for CBOs members in Kordofan State:

a. Workshops Objectives

All training workshops in Kordofan were designed to fulfill the following Objectives:

- 1) To raise participants understanding of the concepts of democracy, human rights and culture of peace.
- 2) To prepare cadres who will be able to work in promoting these concepts among the community.

b. Training topics include

- 1) Definition of Democracy.
- 2) Principles of Democracy.
- 3) Citizenship and citizens
- 4) Election procedures.
- 5) Human rights
- 6) culture of peace

c. Outcome of the workshops

- 1) Participants' awareness regarding the concepts democracy and the election, citizenship, human rights, culture of peace has been raised.
- 2) As TOT components were included in the training activities, this created a group with improved capacities and skills to be future trainers within their communities.
- 3) The participants made special recommendations and requests to help in any future election practices.

VII. Challenges facing AUW Role in SR and CE

On the basis of the data collected in this study and from our own observation as faculty members in AUW, there are several challenges identified that encounter AUW in expanding and maintaining its social responsibility towards community welfare. They are classified into external and internal factors.

1. External Factors

- a. The top management stressed that lack of funds represents a major barrier as AUW mainly relies on tuition fees, which is not fully paid due to the economic deteriorating situation and pressures on students' families. Sometimes AUW seeks external support from some UN agencies and NGOs, which is not always helpful due to the political situation of the country.
- b. Moreover, the international community signifies a challenge, for instance the sanctions on the Sudan government inhibit AUW to receive funds for undertaking projects within the framework of its SR and CE.
- c. The broader environment constitutes another major challenge, such as the escalating poverty and conflicts, which demand from AUW more civic engagement.
- d. The Ministry of Higher Education does not have an affirmative policy for higher education institutions to be engaged in civic activities neither does it have incentives for those universities who are more aware of their social responsibility. Hence, this put more

- pressure on universities that are socially responsive.
- e. Another major challenge is the community's demands and high expectations for immediate benefits from AUW civic activities, which sometimes could be beyond the capacities of the University.
 - f. Moreover, there is resistance to change at the community level, particularly in changing attitudes, perceptions and social behaviour.

2. Internal Factors

- a. As mentioned earlier, the role of higher education institutions in civic engagement is not yet well established in Sudanese universities. Although AUW mission endeavors to promote social responsibility as a core value, some faculty members are resistant to getting involved in community-related programs. This is mainly due to the staff lack of belief and/or culture of voluntarism and philanthropy within the academic environment. The lack of incentives for faculty to be involved in civic activities perpetuates this situation.
- b. Also, many students are not interested in engaging with communities' activities unless they are part of the evaluated course work. In additions, some students face strenuous demands on their time, particularly if they need to work to fund their studies. In addition, the gap between the community needs and the students' interests might impact negatively on their availability for civic engagement.
- c. The limited resources and logistics of AUW hinder the university from strengthening its connection with the private sector and government bodies, particularly in the rural areas where joint effort is needed to contribute towards community welfare.
- d. Although the University has a documentation service unit, it is noticed that there is little focus on documenting AUW extensive civic activities. Besides, there is lack of media publicity of AUW philanthropic activities. This is important to inform different and interested stakeholders in supporting AUW in achieving its civic mission.

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