

University-Level Education for Women in the Developing World: Questions for Public Policy--A Carnegie Challenge Paper is Launched



From Left to Right: Susan King, Vice President, Public Affairs, Carnegie Corporation of New York; Patricia Ellis, Executive Director, Women's Foreign Policy Group; Edith Ssempala, Uganda's Ambassador to the U.S.; Mary Kanya, Swaziland's Ambassador to the U.S.; and Barbara Herz, author of the Carnegie Challenge Paper.

In the developing nations of Africa, there is a growing understanding that women have an important role to play in helping their countries become full and active participants in the global community, including the worldwide economic marketplace. Still, there has been little documentation or research that articulates how individuals, communities and society are benefited when women in development become doctors, lawyers, professors and senior civil servants.

In order to encourage an international dialogue about ways to increase access to higher education for women in Africa and promote a research agenda that will document its benefits, Carnegie Corporation of New York recently released a Challenge Paper entitled *University-Level Education for Women in the Developing World: Questions for Public Policy*, which explores relevant issues such as cost, cultural barriers and political will. To launch the report, the Corporation provided support to the Washington, D.C.-based Women's Foreign Policy Group to host a roundtable discussion with leading experts on women and higher education that focused on the importance of university-level education for women in development. Participants included Edith Ssempala, the Ugandan Ambassador to the United States; Mary Kanya, the Swaziland Ambassador to the U.S.; and Barbara Herz, author of the Carnegie Challenge Paper. Audience members who joined in the discussion were a cross-section of national and international representatives from the foreign policy, educational, nonprofit, government and diplomatic communities.

"Education is, obviously, today, the foundation for women's empowerment," said Edith Ssempala. "It bridges the inequality gap between women and men. I know for sure that, personally [without higher education], I would not be addressing you now. I would not be in Washington. I don't know even where I would be: maybe in a remote village somewhere."

Mary Kanya raised the issue of HIV/AIDS and the impact that it is having on all levels of education in sub-Saharan Africa, since it is now the leading cause of death in the region. "For example," she said, because of AIDS-related factors such as children being removed from school to care for ill parents and family members, orphanhood, and even children not living long enough to complete their schooling, "in the Central African Republic and Swaziland, school enrollment is reported to have fallen by 20-36 percent."

Barbara Herz, the economist who wrote the Challenge Paper, said, "We know that education is the single best way to accelerate a shift to smaller, healthier, better-educated families, and at the secondary level, the evidence for that is very strong. We also know that education empowers women. But, unfortunately, we don't yet have the research evidence to make this case at the university level, and we don't have the evidence on the broader social benefits. We can all see it and we believe it, but we need documented research results so that governments and international agencies will be prompted to invest more heavily in higher education for women in countries where they might need it the most." She added, "Gender-fair women's higher education can contribute not only to the transformation of women's lives but also to the advancement of society itself."

Copies of University-Level Education for Women in the Developing World: Questions for Public Policy can be downloaded from the Corporation's web site at http://www.carnegie.org/pdf/wom_edu_dev_world.pdf.