

Championing Gender Responsiveness in STEM: An Analysis of the CEIT PERSpectives GAD Program

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Introduction

Gender equality remains a significant concern in higher education systems worldwide. Although institutional policies and international frameworks increasingly emphasize inclusivity and equal opportunity, persistent gender stereotypes, structural barriers, and cultural norms continue to shape educational experiences and professional pathways (Acker, 2012; Morley, 2013). These challenges are particularly evident in fields such as engineering and information technology, where gender disparities remain prevalent and women continue to be underrepresented in both academic participation and professional advancement (UNESCO, 2017; Cheryan et al., 2017).

Higher education institutions are therefore expected to play an active role in promoting gender equity by integrating gender perspectives into institutional policies, teaching practices, and community engagement initiatives (Leathwood & Read, 2009). Such efforts align with global commitments to social inclusion and sustainable development, particularly those promoted by the United Nations through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among these goals, Sustainable Development Goal 5 emphasizes the importance of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, highlighting education as a critical mechanism for addressing structural inequalities and promoting inclusive societies (UN, 2015).

Within this context, the College of Engineering and Information Technology (CEIT) at Kalinga State University developed the **CEIT PERSpectives** (Promoting Equality, Rights and Social Transformation) program as part of its Gender and Development (GAD) initiatives. The program aims to foster awareness of gender-related issues, challenge discriminatory attitudes, and cultivate an inclusive academic culture that recognizes diverse identities and experiences. By integrating gender-sensitive training, participatory activities, and community engagement, the initiative

encourages both faculty and students to reflect critically on gender dynamics within educational and social contexts.

This paper examines the CEIT PERSpectives initiative as a model of gender-responsive programming in higher education. Specifically, it analyzes how the program contributes to institutional gender mainstreaming, promotes awareness and sensitivity toward gender issues, empowers participants through collaborative engagement, and aligns with global development frameworks that advocate equality and social justice.

Main Body

The CEIT PERSpectives program of the College of Engineering and Information Technology at Kalinga State University embodies a comprehensive institutional approach to promoting gender equality and social transformation within higher education. Designed as a Gender and Development (GAD) initiative, the program integrates gender-sensitive education, participatory engagement, and policy-oriented advocacy to address persistent gender disparities in academic environments. By fostering awareness and encouraging critical reflection among faculty and students, the program aims to cultivate inclusive attitudes and empower individuals to challenge gender-based stereotypes and discrimination.

To better understand its institutional significance and transformative potential, the discussion is organized around four key thematic dimensions that characterize the program's framework and implementation. These themes include: (1) institutional commitment to gender mainstreaming, (2) gender awareness and sensitivity education, (3) empowerment through participatory and creative engagement, and (4) alignment with global development frameworks and sustainable development goals. Together, these themes illustrate how CEIT PERSpectives contributes to the development of a gender-responsive academic culture while advancing broader objectives of equality, inclusivity, and social justice in higher education.

1. Institutional Commitment to Gender Mainstreaming in Higher Education

Gender mainstreaming has become a key strategy for addressing inequality within educational institutions. It involves integrating gender perspectives into institutional structures, policies, and practices to ensure that programs and initiatives benefit all individuals equitably (Moser & Moser, 2005; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016). Gender mainstreaming is widely recognized as a transformative approach that seeks to incorporate gender considerations into all stages of policy development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation in order to eliminate structural inequalities (Walby, 2005). Within higher education, this approach encourages institutions to critically examine existing systems and practices, ensuring that teaching, research, and administrative processes promote inclusivity and equitable participation among diverse gender groups (Morley, 2013).

The CEIT Perspectives program demonstrates a strong institutional commitment to gender mainstreaming by embedding gender-sensitive approaches into academic and extracurricular activities. Through coordinated planning, administrative support, and faculty participation, the initiative institutionalizes gender

awareness within the academic environment. The involvement of faculty members, program coordinators, and student leaders ensures that gender advocacy becomes a shared responsibility rather than a peripheral activity.

Furthermore, the program targets both faculty and students, recognizing educators as influential agents in shaping learners' perspectives on gender equality. Faculty members who develop gender-sensitive teaching approaches can foster classroom environments that challenge stereotypes and encourage critical thinking about gender roles in society.

Institutional support also ensures sustainability. By incorporating gender-focused initiatives into long-term programming and aligning them with institutional mandates, universities can transform isolated activities into systematic approaches for promoting equality.

2. Gender Awareness and Sensitivity Education

A central objective of the CEIT PERSpectives initiative is to enhance gender awareness and sensitivity among participants. Educational institutions often function as sites where social norms are reproduced or contested. Consequently, promoting gender-sensitive education is essential in challenging discriminatory attitudes and fostering mutual respect.

The program includes learning sessions on gender sensitivity, gender-fair language, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE), gender-related health concerns, and work–family balance. These topics encourage participants to reflect on their own attitudes and recognize how gender-based biases influence interactions within academic and professional environments.

Through lectures, discussions, and interactive forums, participants are provided with opportunities to examine societal norms and their implications for gender relations. Such reflective learning experiences can lead to increased empathy, critical awareness, and behavioral change, as participatory and dialogic learning approaches encourage individuals to critically analyze social structures and challenge deeply embedded stereotypes (Mezirow, 2000; Freire, 1970). Studies in gender education also emphasize that structured discussions and reflective activities can significantly improve students' understanding of gender issues and promote more equitable attitudes and behaviors (Stromquist, 2007; Unterhalter, 2012).

In addition, gender-sensitive education helps create inclusive academic communities where individuals feel respected regardless of their gender identity or expression. Inclusive educational practices have been shown to foster a sense of belonging, mutual respect, and psychological safety among students, thereby strengthening engagement and learning outcomes (Morley, 2013; UNESCO, 2019). This supports the broader objective of cultivating a campus culture characterized by equality, dignity, and social responsibility, which is essential for advancing gender equity within higher education institutions.

3. Empowerment through Participatory and Creative Engagement

Another key dimension of CEIT PERSpectives is its emphasis on participatory engagement. Rather than relying solely on traditional lectures, the program incorporates experiential activities that encourage creativity, collaboration, and active involvement.

Projects such as the **HATAWS Showcase** provide opportunities for students and faculty to demonstrate artistic, technological, and academic talents in a supportive environment. These activities highlight the abilities of individuals across gender identities, challenging stereotypes that often associate certain skills or roles with particular genders.

Similarly, the **RISE for Gender Equality** component focuses on knowledge sharing, advocacy, and dialogue on gender-related issues. Through seminars, workshops, and forums, participants are encouraged to express their perspectives and engage in meaningful conversations about equality and social justice.

Participatory activities not only enhance learning outcomes but also foster empowerment among participants. Research in educational development highlights that participatory and collaborative learning approaches encourage active engagement, critical thinking, and shared knowledge construction among learners (Freire, 1970; Kolb, 1984). By actively engaging in discussions and collaborative initiatives, individuals develop confidence and become more capable of advocating for gender equality within their communities. Such participatory approaches are particularly significant in gender education, as they enable individuals to question social norms, recognize inequalities, and cultivate agency in promoting inclusive and equitable practices (Cornwall, 2016; Stromquist, 2007).

4. Alignment with Global Sustainable Development Goals

The CEIT PERSpectives program also reflects the growing role of higher education institutions in advancing global development agendas. In particular, the initiative aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals promoted by the United Nations.

First, the program directly supports Sustainable Development Goal 5, which calls for the elimination of gender discrimination and the empowerment of women and marginalized gender groups. By promoting gender awareness and sensitivity within the academic community, the program contributes to achieving this global objective.

Second, the initiative relates to Sustainable Development Goal 10, which focuses on reducing inequalities within societies. Educational programs that challenge discriminatory practices and promote inclusive participation help create more equitable social structures.

Finally, the program supports Sustainable Development Goal 16 by fostering inclusive institutions and promoting respect, fairness, and social justice. Universities that prioritize equality and inclusivity can influence broader societal attitudes and contribute to peaceful and just communities.

By linking institutional initiatives with global frameworks, CEIT PERSpectives illustrates how universities can serve as agents of sustainable development and social

transformation. Higher education institutions are increasingly recognized as key actors in advancing sustainable development through education, research, and community engagement initiatives (Leal Filho et al., 2018; Lozano et al., 2013). By aligning institutional programs with international agendas such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, universities can contribute to addressing social inequalities and fostering inclusive and equitable societies (UN, 2015). In this context, gender-responsive initiatives within academic institutions not only promote equality but also strengthen the role of universities as catalysts for social change and sustainable development (Unterhalter, 2019).

Conclusion

Gender-responsive programs within higher education institutions play a vital role in promoting equality, inclusion, and social transformation. The CEIT PERSpectives initiative implemented at Kalinga State University demonstrates how structured institutional efforts can integrate gender perspectives into academic culture and practice.

Through its focus on institutional gender mainstreaming, awareness and sensitivity education, participatory engagement, and alignment with global development goals, the program provides a comprehensive approach to addressing gender inequality in academic settings. By encouraging faculty and students to reflect critically on gender dynamics and actively participate in gender advocacy, the initiative fosters a campus culture that values respect, diversity, and collaboration.

Ultimately, programs such as CEIT PERSpectives highlight the transformative potential of higher education institutions. When universities adopt gender-sensitive policies and initiatives, they not only influence the attitudes and behaviors of their academic communities but also contribute to broader societal progress toward equality and inclusive development.