Makerere wants chambers for breastfeeding students

By Martin Kitubi

Makerere University registers several pregnant or nursing students annually, authorities have revealed.

However, the university says some drop out due to the unfavourable environment, including lack of nursing facilities for them.

In addition, the university says there are cases of nursing students being mistreated by lecturers, who often send them out of lecture rooms. To address the challenge, Dr Euzobia Mugisha Baine, the acting director of Makerere Gender Mainstreaming Directorate (GMD), wants breastfeeding chambers established for students.

She said the chambers would not only be used by students, but also academic, non-academic and support staff at the university.

"Last year, a student dropped out of the School of Food Technology, Nutrition and Bio-Engineering because a lecturer would deny her chance to breastfeed," Baine said.

"When the matter came to GMD, we followed up and we found that the young mother had quit," she said.

Female participants exclaimed in dismay at the revelation.

This was revealed during the dialogue on the third academy programme for Higher Education Resources Services (HERS) hosted at Makerere University.

Makerere University

The week-long is aimed at developing women leaders in higher institutions in East Africa.

Gender mainstreaming

Baine, while presenting a paper on the gender mainstreaming situation analysis at Makerere University, said the problem could be much bigger than they anticipate.

Recommend the breastfeeding in higher academic institutions as an area which has not been exploited by researchers in Uganda, Baine stressed that gender equality means rights for everyone, including pregnant and nursing students.

She said such facilities are never thought of when higher institutions of learning are being set up.

Baine lamented that much as such discriminations against breastfeeding students have been reported in the media, academic institutions have not taken the subject seriously.

"We are happy to say that several great corporate companies have these facilities. However, universities, which enrol adult students, do not have," she said.

In 2014, 26 female students were suspended from Uganda Christian University's Kabale affiliate college for conceiving before marriage.

Subsequently, the Uganda Human Rights Commission condemned the action, quoting Article 30 of the Constitution, which grants everyone a right to education.

They also quoted Article 28(3) (c) of the Constitution, which allows equality and freedom from discrimination.

Support for the move

The move for establishment of nursing facilities was backed by several educationists, including ambassador Dr Genet Zewide, the chairperson of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE).

Zewide who, between 1991 and 2006, served as the education minister in Ethiopia, called for several changes at academic institutions globally.

She said there is inadequate investment in women, limited access to higher education and they face sexual harassment.

The academic

The academy programme is organised by the HERS East Africa, an affiliate of HERS Colorado in USA.

Prof. Judith White, the former president and executive director of HERS-USA, said there is need to drive cultural change in higher education institutions so that they welcome and appreciate women contributions.

Prof. Barnabas Nawangwe, the vice-chancellor of Makerere University, said the institution is gradually increasing the number of female leaders.

"We have several female professors, associate professors and deans. In the future, these will occupy big offices in the university," he said.