

The Beginnings

Abstract:

The African Women Studies Centre recognises that the experiences of African women have not been part of mainstream knowledge development and have often not been a source of public and “legitimate knowledge” that guides development on our continent. These experiences and knowledge have not been utilized to shape, order and name our world. Our focus is, therefore, to bring the African women’s knowledge to visibility, through academic and policy debates in our academic institutions and other fora at the national and regional levels. In addition, we take cognisance of the important linkage between women of Africa and those of African descent but living in other parts of the world. The Centre also recognises that, in our region, we continue to refer to and use theories and frameworks whose basic assumptions do not include African women’s worldview. Theories of power, political and other, need to be interrogated from the African women’s experiences point-of-view. Looking at such novels as Margaret Ogola’s *The River and The Source* (Kenya), Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter* (Senegal) and Lena Elieshi’s “*Parched Earth*” (Tanzania), among other books, will help us understand what this means. Despite the remarkable growth of Gender and Women’s studies in Africa over the last 3 decades, and the intellectual importance of this work, it is still difficult to find works on African women in libraries and resource rooms. This situation makes it difficult to develop a sense of the historical, intellectual and creative ingenuity of the African woman’s ideas and analyses, the development of theories, and the manner in which they can influence our thinking. The African Women’s Studies Centre seeks to bring to the fore the views and perspectives of this category. The establishment of the African Women’s Studies Centre (AWSC) has been a journey, a journey that is worthwhile. The Centre addresses the need to have special focus on African women and women of African descent in order to bring their views and perspective into mainstream academic and policy dialogue. The process towards the establishment of the Centre received the full backing of the women and men at the University. With the great support of the current Vice-Chancellor (Student Affairs) Prof Isaac Mbeche (then Principal, College of Humanities & Social Sciences) and the current Principal of the CHSS, Prof Enos Njeru, (then Dean, Faculty of Arts) the journey towards the birth of AWSC was well on course. Our appreciation goes to the Vice Chancellor, Prof George A. O. Magoha for his tremendous support from right from the beginning. We at the AWSC thank all those who have made the great idea of bringing the African Women’s experiences and knowledge to the centre of academic discourse and policy dialogue to become a reality.