

WERA-IRN: COMPLEXITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF HISTORICALLY MARGINALISED WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

2020/2021
ANNUAL REPORT

30. 04. 2021 Prepared by Fumane P. Khanare on behalf of the WERA-IRN conveners



1. Introduction

As the convenors of the WERA-IRN, we find ourselves at the end of a long year since an emergency of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which was declared a pandemic on March 12, 2020, by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2020). Covid-19 has interrupted activities worldwide, including educational sectors. Convenors and members of the WERA-IRN experienced various challenges, including losing loved ones during these times. As we reflect upon reasons to be thankful and bring this year to its end, we say "thank you" to everyone for continued support. The support helped us to focus on hope in these challenging Covid-19 times, with the opportunity to imagine creative ways for the WERA-IRN to move ahead.

Following a statement of agreement setting forth the conditions of our WERA-IRN, this second annual report aims to provide the World Education Research Association (WERA) Committee and other stakeholders with pertinent information related to the activities of the WERA-IRN during the period 2020/2021. This report addresses the latter by attending human resources, key initiatives and their implementations, contributions to WERA and other international and national conferences, WERA mentoring programme, and general conclusion.

2. Human Resource

The WERA-IRN's human resource component comprises the Convenors, academic staff, and students from various higher education institutions in Africa. To formalize membership, individuals were invited to familiarize themselves with the proposal, invitation letter, sign, and return it, indicating their acceptance into the IRN.

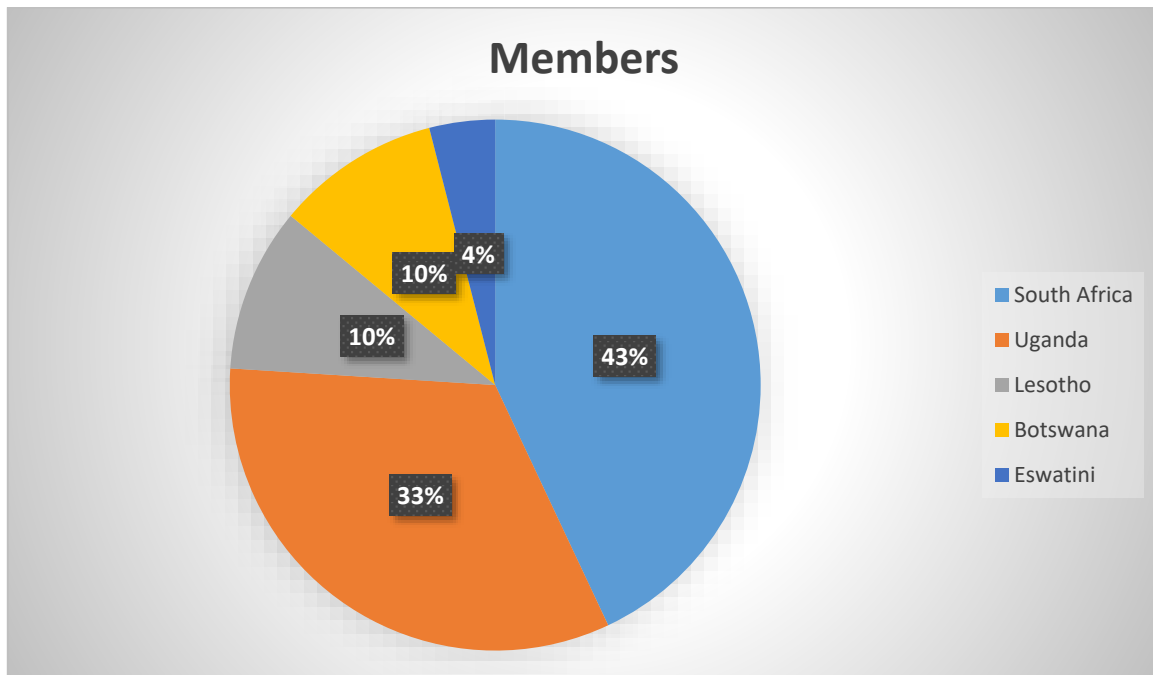
CONVENERS (MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE)

During 2020/2021, the following continued to serve on the Management Committee:

Dr. Fumane P. Khanare	(Psychology of Education, University of the Free State)
Dr. Ntombizandile Gcelu	(Leadership and Management Education, Law & Policy Studies, University of the Free State)
Dr. Desireé P. Larey	(Leadership and Management Education, Law & Policy Studies, University of the Free State)

IRN MEMBERS (n=21)

The academic and students complement was constituted as follows:



We are happy to indicate that a few days ago (April 28, 2021), we received an e-mail from academic staff from the Department of History of Education and Comparative Education at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya, expressing interest to be part of our IRN. Further to this, a virtual meeting is yet to occur with the new members. The conveners will summarize the proposal and request the latest members to review the invitation letter, sign and return, indicating their acceptance to the IRN.

3. Proposed vital initiatives and their implementation

The key initiatives outlined in the proposal for the IRN (for the period 2020-2021) are the following:

a. WERA-IRN Virtual Conference

The WERA-RN Virtual Conference: **The Rise of Asset-Based Approaches: The Experiences of Previously Marginalised Women in a (Trans) Forming Higher Education in Africa** took place on July 31, 2020.

This first virtual conference aimed to bring the IRN together, get to know each other, present and share different experiences and perspectives of transformation in higher education, particularly in Africa; and further explore pathways for support as individuals and as a group. This first virtual conference was restricted to WERA-IRN Women in Higher Education in Africa members only.

Invited Keynote Speakers:

- Prof Pearl Sithole, Vice-Principal: Academic and Research, University of the Free State, South Africa
 - Prof Ruth Mampane, University of Pretoria, South Africa
 - Prof Faith Wamjura Ngunjiri, Concordia College,
 - Dr. Brenda L.H. Marina, President-Elect: International Mentoring Association, USA.
- b. To organize a workshop on 'storytelling' as a research methodology. We planned the workshop where all the IRN members can share various perspectives, everyday stories as tools for transformation, (un)ease and (dis) comfort, and context-based stories as tools for change in higher education. To establish a coherent workshop, conveners were invited to the South Africa-Sweden University Forum titled: 'SASUF Goes Digital', which took place from 23-27 November 2020. Dr. Desireé P. Larey represented the IRN conveners. She contributed to the workshop by partnering with Professor Staffan Josephson from Karolinska Institutet in Sweden. Professor's research is on narrative analysis and mainly in the health sector. Following the above workshop, the plan to bring all IRN members into a storytelling workshop did not occur due to the lockdown restrictions in different countries, mainly in the host country, South Africa.
- c. To digitize stories and share them through google drive and use Skype for further discussion. Members in each country were supposed first to share their stories and then sent to the conveners. However, this activity had to be postponed as most of the IRN worked remotely. Many did not access the internet despite offering zero-rated data bundles provided by some universities. The COVID-19 crisis has revealed egregious disparities of compounding inequalities and the digital divide faced by the Global South, especially students and academic staff from remote areas. In general, 2020 was challenging. The conveners concluded to postpone the 2020 face-to-face activities to 2021 during the committee meeting held on October 22, 2020.
- d. The IRN Forum was organised as the initial event of the network in the Education Association of South Africa Annual Conference (EASA 2020) at the beginning of January 2021 in South Africa. This event did not occur as the EASA annual conference was postponed to 2022.

4. Contributions to WERA and other international and national conferences

a. Invitation of WERA-IRN members to the International Mentoring Association (IMA) Webinars

In October and December 2020, Dr. Brenda L.H. Marina (IMA President) invited four IRN members to present at the IMA webinars under the theme "Mentoring Women in Higher Education: South African Perspective."

The first webinar took place in October, and the presenters were Dr. Desireé P. Larey (IRN convener) and Ms. Amy Padayachee (IRN member and a Ph.D. student supervised by Dr. N. Gcelu)

The second webinar took place on December 15, 2020, and the presenters were Dr. Fumane P. Khanare and Dr. Ntombizandile Gcelu (IRN conveners). The detailed information about the presentations are available here: <https://mentoringassociation.org/>

The webinars were a successful event, and the presenters found this type of international exposure as a positive experience. The webinars provided a basis for improving our professional growth as the conveners of the IRN.

Dr. Brenda Marina invited Dr. Fumane Khanare to Cambodia's 1st International Conference on Mentoring Educators, which took place from 21-23 December 2020. The invitation provided a platform for Dr. Khanare to talk about the IRN on behalf of the conveners. It also offered an opportunity to describes the IRN's intersections to the mentor, the mentee, and the World Education Research Association-International Research Network (WERA-IRN), which led to its first virtual symposium (July 31, 2020) intertwined with the mentoring connections in the United States of America. Dr. Brenda L.H. Marina provides a nurturing space for the IRN members to share their personal and professional experiences. She has offered to support through her extensive experience in mentoring.

b. Symposium of the WERA-IRN at the WERA 2020+1 Focal Meeting in Santiago Decompostela- Galia- Spain (Virtual Conference)

The symposium papers and individual papers were re-submitted for consideration of the 2020+1 WERA Focal Meeting in 2021. This will provide the first introduction of the IRN Women in Higher Education in Africa at WERA Focal Meeting. The symposium's objective is to present this global research on the resiliencies and fragilities of historically marginalised women in higher education in the African context. The papers of the symposium will highlight the

research findings conducted by members of the WERA-IRN. Conveners observed that not many of its members would be able to attend the conference. Many described the negative impact of COVID-19 and how it has interrupted activities holistically, including their financial status.

7. WERA Mentoring Programme

Our experiences for the past two years as conveners of the WERA-IRN were exposed our strengths, shortcomings, and opportunity to grow personally and professionally. The WERA Mentoring Programme was timely and desirable. We are pleased that the conveners and some members of the IRN submitted their applications and were successful. Some have already started working with their mentors. As we project into the next and final year of the IRN, we are looking forward to a successful year with excellent support from the mentors and WERA Committee in general.

8. Conclusion

COVID-19 worldwide destroyed existing structures in all walks of life. However, reignite a hope for future where Ubuntu will be at the center of our everyday life. We are privileged to be part of WERA and intend to uphold its principles and values to enhance or create enabling learning environments.

The Hill we Climb (Extracts from Amanda Gorman's 2020 Inaugural Poem)

When the day comes, we ask ourselves,
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed
a nation that isn't broken,
but simply unfinished.
so we can reach out our arms
to one another.
that even as we're tired, we tried,
that we'll forever be tied together, victorious.
The hill we climb.
If only we dare.
For while we have our eyes on the future,
history has its eyes on us...

We will rebuild, reconcile and recover.
When day comes, we step out of the shade,
aflame and unafraid,
the new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it.