NAVIGATING THE TERRAIN OF GENDER JUSTICE

A Handbook for Gender Audits at Higher Education Institutes in India

Meenakshi Gopinath  Seema Kakran  Shilpi Shabdita
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of His Holiness the Dalai Lama
Navigating the Terrain of Gender Justice: A Handbook for Gender Audits at Higher Education Institutes in India

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Re-envisioning Gender Justice on Indian Higher Education Campuses

For over two decades, WISCOMP has collaborated with colleges and universities across the country in its efforts to foreground gender justice on campuses. Deepening this engagement, WISCOMP launched the HAMSA: Campus Equity Initiative in 2018 as an innovative Pan-India initiative to develop frameworks for Gender Audits at Higher Education Institutes (hereafter HEIs).

This initiative sought to embed gender-just norms and practices at HEIs through participatory processes of evolving Gender Audit frameworks tailored to suit the needs and context of each institute.

The initiative drew on the SAKSHAM Report\(^1\) (2013) of the University Grants Commission that recommends the need for regular Gender Audits on campuses of higher education, and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) Framework of Assessment (2018) that mentions Gender Audits in its Appendix: Glossary and Notes\(^2\) (See Annexure A for NAAC Guidelines of 2021). Despite these policy recommendations and guidelines, many ambiguities continue to exist around the meaning, process and scope of Gender Audits and their relevance to HEIs.

Conventionally, Gender Audit parameters have been framed in a manner that confines gender equality to the numeric presence of women on campuses and equates gender-based-violence only with sexual harassment. Substantive issues of voice,  

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\(^1\) One of the authors of the Handbook, Meenakshi Gopinath was Co-chair of the Task Force that prepared the SAKSHAM Report.

\(^2\) The Appendix carries the following definition of Gender Audit: “A tool and a process based on a methodology to promote organizational learning at the individual, work unit and organizational levels on how to practically and effectively mainstream gender”. See NAAC, NAAC Institutional Accreditation MANUAL for Self-study Report Universities (Bengaluru: NAAC, December 2019), 131.
representation and the gendered nature of knowledge production in the academy have been marginalized and invisibilized in the gender equality discourse on many campuses.

This Handbook aims to substantively expand the measures and parameters of Gender Audits in the Indian higher education space, keeping substantive equality lies at its core. It invites HEIs to re-imagine the discourse on equality and inclusion beyond gender ratios, particularly in hitherto male bastions of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields. It is structured on the premise that the mere numeric presence of women and sexual minorities on a campus or the absence of sexual harassment is not a holistic yardstick of an institute’s progress on gender equality. It is important to ask:

- What designations and positions do women hold?
- How does the presence of women and sexual minorities alter gendered practices on campus?
- Do institutional policies address the varied needs and concerns of women, men and sexual minorities?
- Is gender perspective integral to the teaching-learning process at the institute?
- Has the discourse on safety at the institute shifted away from ‘protection’ and ‘surveillance’ towards trust and responsible choice?

Foregrounding these concerns, this Handbook lays out a dynamic process for HEIs to push the envelope and ‘embody’ gender equality with all its challenges.

Senior Management Teams (Vice Chancellors, Principals, Registrars, Heads of Internal Quality Assurance Cell, to name a few), Women’s Development Cells, Gender Studies Departments and interested faculty at HEIs can use it to build capacities and propel a Gender Audit process at their institute. It is an accessible resource which broadly defines the scope of a Gender Audit, and lays out a roadmap for its implementation. Based on WISCOMP’s experience of conducting workshops at several HEIs across India, the Handbook draws attention to possible challenges and outlines strategies which may help to overcome resistance and create a buy-in among various stakeholders. Beyond offering strategies, a Toolkit for collective reflection on gender issues along with a step-by-step facilitation guide is included.

1.2 Gender Audit: The Six Parameter Intervention

The Handbook introduces the idea of Gender Audits with its attendant substantive equality measures or parameters as integral to enhancing gender justice at HEIs. These parameters of Gender Audits, initially developed at the Columbia University, U.S.A., have been adapted by WISCOMP for Indian HEIs and found to be successful.

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3 We are indebted to Dr. Kristy E. Kelly for sharing these parameters with us. The parameters evolved as part of a course on Gender and Development that she has been teaching to Masters’ level students at Columbia University from 2011 onwards.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Countering the Myth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender Audits only benefit women.</td>
<td>Gender Audits can potentially benefit women, sexual minorities and men across intersections of class, caste, religion, disability, and other identities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The elimination of sexual harassment is adequate to measure gender equality.</td>
<td>Gender equality addresses not only overt sexual harassment, but other forms of structural violence and exclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-women institutes are ‘naturally’ gender sensitive.</td>
<td>Women are not ‘naturally’ gender sensitive. They can be complicit in perpetuating patriarchal practices. Gender Audits are as relevant to all-women institutes as they are to co-educational institutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Audits are designed as top-down monitoring devices.</td>
<td>Gender Audits are designed to be internally-driven participatory processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Internal Committee (formerly known as Internal Complaints Committee) that has the minimum number of sexual harassment cases to deal with is the most efficient!</td>
<td>Large number of cases being handled by an Internal Committee could be indicative of transparency, impartiality, trust, and awareness on campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM disciplines are not gendered.</td>
<td>All disciplines are gendered! For example, Rosalind Franklin was deprived of her due recognition for the discovery of DNA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender equality follows ‘automatically’ once legally required compliance mechanisms like the Internal Committee (IC) or Gender Sensitization Committee against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH) are in place.</td>
<td>Redressal mechanisms against sexual harassment are only one aspect of gender equality. There are many other ways in which gendered policies and practices create barriers in the path to equality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women at HEIs in states of India that have high literacy rates and impressive performance on Human Development Indices enjoy equality and non-discrimination.</td>
<td>Gender-based violence and discrimination are also rampant in states of India that have ‘high’ literacy rates and impressive performance on Human Development Indices. For instance, even in Kerala the rate of crimes against women is 60.20 per 100000 women, more that the national average of 57.90 and proportion of sexual crimes against girl children as against overall crimes against children is more than 82%24.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.6 GENDER AUDIT TOOLKIT

Identifying Concerns of Gender Equity and Inclusion at the Institute

Elicitive and dialogic tools can be used to create multiple broad-ranging conversations on concerns of gender equity and inclusion at the institute. These allow different stakeholders to bring their experiences and knowledge to bear on the Gender Audit, creating a community of practitioners who take ownership of the process at their campus.

A Gender Audit Toolkit with five such elicitive tools that have been used at WISCOMP workshops are shared below and they can be adapted to different contexts and needs.
# Youth Speak, Creative Expressions
## Student Performances at Partner Institutes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enactment of female historians, educators, poets, doctors, scientists, writers, musicians and lawyers</td>
<td>Enactment of female historians, educators, poets, doctors, scientists, writers, musicians and lawyers to highlight the erasures of women’s narratives and contributions and to recover ‘HerStory’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramp Walk to critique practices of body shaming and to celebrate diversity.</td>
<td>Ramp Walk to critique practices of body shaming and to celebrate diversity. Students with different body types, differently abled students, and male, female and transgender students walk the ramp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autoethnography(^{39}) on Women in STEM</td>
<td>Autoethnography(^{39}) on Women in STEM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Discussion with students of Physics Department on Gender Discrimination in the STEM fields</td>
<td>Group Discussion with students of Physics Department on Gender Discrimination in the STEM fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance performances where students celebrate the independent free-spirited woman</td>
<td>Dance performances where students celebrate the independent free-spirited woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangoli on themes of gender-based violence and women’s aspirations for freedom and equality</td>
<td>Rangoli on themes of gender-based violence and women’s aspirations for freedom and equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Play on the rights of a girl child in rural India</td>
<td>Street Play on the rights of a girl child in rural India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mime Theatre in collaboration with artists from other nearby colleges on the challenges faced by women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in accessing education</td>
<td>Mime Theatre in collaboration with artists from other nearby colleges on the challenges faced by women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in accessing education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Diaries on the experiences of female students travelling to different cities to pursue higher education, adapting to new socio-cultural environments, exploring independence and agency, and navigating ties with family</td>
<td>Visual Diaries on the experiences of female students travelling to different cities to pursue higher education, adapting to new socio-cultural environments, exploring independence and agency, and navigating ties with family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo-journaling to share the gendered nature of campus infrastructure</td>
<td>Photo-journaling to share the gendered nature of campus infrastructure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{39}\) Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in which an author uses self-reflection and writing to explore anecdotal and personal experience, and connects this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, social meanings and understandings. See Carolyn Ellis, The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004).
Meenakshi Gopinath is an Educationist, Political Scientist and the Founder and Director of Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP). She is Chair, Centre for Policy Research and Principal Emerita of Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi. A Fulbright Scholar, she has received several awards in recognition of her contribution to the field of women’s education and empowerment including the Padma Shri.

Seema Kakran is a Gender Facilitator and Political Scientist. She is Deputy Director at WISCOMP. A specialist in public policy and political theory, she received her education at Jawaharlal Nehru University, University of Delhi and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, USA.

Shilpi Shabdita is Program Officer at WISCOMP. She has a Master’s degree in International Peace Studies from University of Notre Dame, USA. She has worked in areas of gender justice, peace education, conflict transformation, migration and community-led memorialization in post-war contexts across India, Uganda, Afghanistan and USA.
...An invaluable guide for all stakeholders who envision gender-just higher education environments and are looking to intervene to enable this transition...

Hon. Justice Gita Mittal, former Chief Justice, High Court of Jammu & Kashmir

...The Handbook aptly employs Gender Audit to lay down a dynamic process for HEIs to facilitate gender equality in all its complexity. A must read for Academic Leaders, Faculty and Students!

Dr. Pankaj Mittal, Secretary General, Association of Indian Universities

...Sensitive to the complex and subtle nuances of a plethora of individual institutions, this commendable Handbook will not merely sensitize the reader to mute, covert and overt forms of gender discrimination but evoke pathways to eliminate them.

Prof. Rajen Harshé, former Vice Chancellor, Central University of Allahabad & former President, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Prayagraj

...This Handbook is a critical call to action to academic institutions around the world to institute Gender Audits as accountability tools...

Prof. Rangita de Silva de Alwis, Associate Dean of International Affairs, UPenn Law School & Hillary Rodham Clinton Distinguished Fellow on Gender Equity, Georgetown

The rich ideas presented involve all actors in the space, having the potential to disrupt hegemonies, develop capacities to discern subtle forms of patriarchy, learn to become self-reflexive and cultivate agency to call out everyday injustices that intersect with gender.

Prof. Poonam Batra, Professor of Education, formerly at University of Delhi

...This novel Gender Audit has broken new ground by bridging the gap between the theory and practice of democracy...It addresses issues of governance and leadership, administrative structures, processes, curriculum, physical space and mechanisms for redressal of gender based grievances.

Prof. Krishna Menon, Professor, Gender Studies, School of Human Studies, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University Delhi

...Gender Audits helped launch a new Centre for Gender and Women’s Studies; narrow down our curricular gaps while enhancing our best practices...

Prof. Diganta Kumar Das, Registrar, Cotton University, Guwahati

Navigating the Terrain of Gender Justice: A Handbook for Gender Audits at Higher Education Institutes in India introduces participatory Gender Audits as one of the ways to engage with the complex and vexed terrain of gender equality in Indian higher education. It offers a practical roadmap for interested senior management and faculty to push the envelope on gender justice by designing interventions that suit the context, priorities and structural possibilities for innovation at their institutes.