Roles of Maritime Education and Training (MET) Institutions – How Can They Support Women Seafarers in West Africa?

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Abstract
In a specific area like the maritime sector, equal opportunity has always been an issue due to the differences that occur among enrolments per gender at maritime institutions. Research has shown that among women seafarer’s challenges, maritime education and training (MET) appeared to be of importance in terms of the first entry point for women to this career. As a result, the main aim of this research is to examine the training practices of MET institutions with respect to the training of women for seafaring careers and to provide sufficient solutions to empower more female students from West Africa to choose seafaring programmes at MET institutions. A qualitative assessment was made through in-depth interviews with 4 MET institutions. However, the study focuses on the training practices of the Regional Maritime University (RMU) in Ghana with respect to the training of female students for seafaring. This is because the research suggests that to enable more women in West Africa to go to sea, it should start by granting access for more female students to the seagoing courses at the RMU which is currently the only regional maritime institution in West and Central Africa that offers training for both male and female students in seafaring careers. The results were collated and analysed qualitatively. The findings revealed that the percentage of female students enrolled in seafaring programmes at the RMU is insignificant and there is insufficient support to encourage more female students to take up these programmes. Furthermore, most of these female students find it very challenging to get employment on a ship. The concluding section makes some suggestions as to how more female students from West Africa can be empowered to choose seafaring programmes at RMU.

Keywords: Female Students, Seafaring Programs, Empowerment, Maritime Education and Training.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The RMU - Serving the Central and West African Regions
The RMU in Ghana is a sub-regional tertiary institution that exists to enhance the development of the maritime transport sector and the fishing industry in member states through the education of students, training of marine personnel, research and consultancy and promotion of maritime co-operation. The RMU occupies the premises of the old Ghana Nautical College, established in 1958 to train ratings for the demised national shipping line of Ghana (Black Star Line). In 1982, the Government of Ghana promulgated the Regional Maritime Law 1982. This was followed by the signing of the instrument of transfer, handing over the College to the then Ministerial Conference of West and Central African States on Maritime Transport (MINCONMAR), now known as Maritime Organisation of West and Central Africa (MOWCA), which negotiated for its regionalisation. The College was re-named the Regional Maritime Academy (R.M.A.) in 1983 with the following countries as founding members: Republic of Cameroon, the Gambia, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone (RMU, 2010).

Through its evolution, the institution has seen many years of training seafarers for the West African Sub-region and beyond. However, the ratio of male to female trainees throughout the period has been nowhere close to a balance even with the thorough marketing of the institution. Many of the women trained by the institution have had very successful careers and today occupy prominent positions in the world’s maritime industry. This was aided by the existence of Ghana’s national shipping line (Black Star Line) as a few female seafarers were trained to be officers for the Black Star Line in the early years of the Ghana Nautical College (Ankoma-Sey, 2014). These women rose to high ranks in the
seafaring hierarchy and include Captain Beatrice Vormawah, who became the first African female ship captain taking full command as master and sailing Ghana’s ships on international voyages; Captain Hannah Aggrey; Captain Georgina Hanson-Nortey and Captain Catherine Haizel (Aggrey, 2000).

The RMU currently has on offer six bachelor-degree courses and three diploma course as well as one Master of Arts program jointly run by the RMU and the University of Ghana. Out of these, the Bachelor in Nautical Science, Bachelor in Marine Engineering, Diploma in Nautical Science and Diploma in Marine Engineering are four programmes that prepare students purely for careers in seafaring. However, the diploma programmes in Nautical Science and Marine Engineering were recently introduced in 2014.

1.2. Statement of Problem
The number of female students enrolled in seafaring programmes at RMU is insignificant. Over a decade (2003 to 2015), the RMU has graduated a total of 393 students in the Bachelor of Nautical Science programme, 11 (or 2.8%) of which are female graduates and 382 of which are male graduates. And a total of 485 students in the Bachelor of Marine Engineering programme, 13 (or 2.7%) of which are female graduates and 472 of which are male graduates (RMU, 2014). Moreover, after the collapsed of the Black Star Line, most of the few females who graduated from the university with a bachelor degree either in Marine Engineering or in Nautical Science ended up securing shore-based jobs due to difficulties in gaining access to ships. For instance, the researcher herself was a graduate from RMU in 2010 with a Bachelor degree in Nautical Science but due to difficulties in getting a ship to continue with her sea career, she ended up pursuing her Master’s programme at WMU. The study therefore, seeks to examine the training practices of RMU with respect to the training of female students for seafaring and to provide sufficient solutions to empower more female students from West Africa to choose seafaring programmes at RMU.

1.3. Objectives of the Study
The aim of the study is to examine the training practices of MET institutions with respect to the training of female students for seafaring and to provide sufficient solutions to empower more female students from West Africa to choose seafaring programmes at RMU. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the following:

• Training practices of the RMU with respect to the training of West African women for seafaring careers.
• Training practices of the World Maritime University with respect to female student’s enrollment, particularly West African female students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. South African Maritime Training Academy (SAMTRA) – Best Practice from South Africa
SAMTRA is a maritime training academy situated in Simons Town, South Africa, which focuses predominantly on the provision of simulator based training. SAMTRA aims to provide relevant training to the African maritime industry as a cost effective solution to Northern Hemisphere alternatives, based on a premise of quality skills development training to world class standards. SAMTRA’s product offering consists of simulation training courses in refrigeration engineering, marine engineering and deck officer training. Non-simulator courses are also offered to include computer based training for both seafarers and shore staff. Moreover, SAMTRA manages Cadet Training Programs for various companies as an extension to its core business, which handles the entire process of a cadets training program, from recruitment to qualification as officer of the watch (SAMTRA, n.d.)

In addition to simulator-based training, SAMTRA provides Cadet training administration services to a number of companies in the maritime industry who require assistance in the management of cadet and
rating training programmes as indicated in Figure 1. These services are attractive to companies who have no presence/representation in the country that wish to employ South African cadets. These administrative services include career marketing, recruitment and short-listing of cadets and where required, selection to company instructions; pre-sea induction programmes and statutory compliance regimes including safety training; documentation including record books, travel documents and training records; accreditation of Accelerated Cadet training programme with the South African Maritime Safety Authority; arrangements to join/leave vessels and sea time planning; financial administration, monthly reports to clients and preparation of cadets for qualification on completion of required training. The administration services of each cadet cease on an individual basis when the cadet has graduated with the certificate of competency (SAMTRA, n.d.).

SAMTRA is working hand in hand with the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) to develop South Africa’s maritime economy by increasing the number of training berths for cadets in order to improve the current shortage of both sea and shore based human resources required to support the industry. The intention is to recruit more youths from nautical colleges who have completed their first year of theoretical studies (for Officer of the Watch level) to induct them with pre-sea safety courses prior to them joining the vessels of the companies that are participating in the project in order to obtain their required sea time. As part of this initiative, SAMSA has acquired a training ship that trains cadets both male and female with more priority being given to female cadets. This training ship can accommodate over 60 cadets for training for the duration of 4 months, after which they are sent on-board the vessels of the companies that are participating in the project. These cadets will either follow a SAMSA accredited accelerated training cadetship, utilising the SAMSA on-board training record book or the accelerated training programmes for specific companies that will have to be accredited with SAMSA. Either route shall result in a South African qualification as Officer of the Watch in full compliance with STCW requirements. Once qualified, these cadets are free to join a shipping company of their choice. Most times, they are employed with the companies in which they served their sea time (SAMSA, n.d.).
As part of SAMSA’s initiatives to encourage South African women seafarers, a pilot project aimed at demystifying shipping for women was conducted in 2010, where SAMSA successfully put together an all-woman crew ship to sail from three ports in South Africa (Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban). Furthermore, all of the shore staff, pilot, tug masters, engineers and vessel service crew attending to the ship were women on every watch (Manaadiar, 2010).

2.2. What Makes a Difference? Examining the Examples of SAMTRA and RMU

As a result of SAMTRA’s cadet administrative services and dedicated training ship programme, South Africa has produced a number of seafarers both men and women as well as encouraging more women to pursue seafaring programmes. For instance, on the four month maiden voyage of the SAMSA dedicated training ship (SA Agulhas), there were 62 cadets on-board of which 20 were female (SAMSA, n.d.). Moreover, out of the 62 cadets on-board the SAMSA dedicated training ship, 12 were from West African countries (Ghana, Gambia, Ivory Coast and Cameroon) with only 2 female West African cadets, including the author.

RMU, on the other hand, has no initiatives in place to assist male or female students gain access to ships. Ever since the demise of the Ghana national shipping line (Black Star Line), it has not been easy to gain access to ships. It is unfortunate to say that the two female cadets, including the author, that were involved in SAMSA’s on-board training initiative for four months, have not been able to get a ship to finish the twelve months sea time required by the STCW 2010 convention in order to sit for the third officer unlimited Certificate of Competency (COC) examination. If the RMU can learn from...
SAMTRA and SAMSA, they may wish to consider operating a training ship through the governments of its member States as well as negotiating with shipping companies to train its cadets. This will help to encourage more students both male and female to apply for the Nautical and Engineering courses since this will serve as a guarantee for immediate on-board employment after graduation hence, this will help to increase the number of seafarers (men and women) in West Africa.

3. METHODOLOGY
This study employs the qualitative method of research, utilizing an in-depth interview approach in gathering data.

3.1. Population and Sample Size
The target population of the study comprised of 4 personnel from 4 MET institutions: the Regional Maritime University (RMU), the World Maritime University (WMU), the Caribbean Maritime Institute (CMI) and the Maritime University of Szczecin (MUS). These four institutions were considered appropriate for the study because the RMU is currently the only Regional Maritime Training institution in West and Central Africa that trains both male and female students for seafaring careers, and therefore, supports the training of West African women seafarers. Additionally, the WMU is a postgraduate maritime university, established by the IMO to enhance the objectives of the IMO and its member states around the world (WMU, n.d.). As such, West African female students at WMU form part of a global network, and when they graduate, they go back to their various maritime administrations in West Africa. Hence, they will support and serve as role models for West African female students perusing seafaring programmes at RMU. The CMI is a regional MET institute located in Jamaica that trains students for seafaring within the Caribbean region (CMI, 2013), similar to the RMU in Ghana, which trains students within the West and Central Africa. The MUS is a MET institution in Poland that has a training ship and used to take RMU students through their on-board training programme. In all, 4 personnel were sampled for the study using a purposive research sampling method.

3.2. Methods of Data Collection
The primary method employed in data collection for this project was in-depth audio-taped interviews. The secondary sources of information were obtained predominantly from books, articles, journals and internet.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
The data gathered during the interviews was analysed qualitatively. The data were transcribed and grouped under the subheadings in which the interview questions were designed and analysed after coding manually using the organising principle for qualitative coding as described by Babbie (2001). In analysing and discussing the findings gathered, the study gave priority to the words of the interviewees in an effort to allow issues important to them to appear and to be fully reflected. Personnel from four institutions were interviewed as shown in Table 1. However, the discussions focus mainly on the Regional Maritime University (RMU) in Ghana and the World Maritime University (WMU) in Sweden. The Caribbean MET institution (CMI) and the Maritime University of Szczecin (MUS) were considered merely to draw comparisons with RMU.

Table 1. List of MET Institutions Interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>Registrar</td>
<td>Regional Maritime University (RMU)</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Registrar</td>
<td>World Maritime University (WMU)</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy executive director</td>
<td>Caribbean Maritime Institution (CMI)</td>
<td>Jamaica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of ship construction and stability department</td>
<td>Maritime University of Szczecin (MUS)</td>
<td>Poland</td>
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4.1. The Case of RMU

4.1.1. Admission for Female Students into the Seafaring Programmes

The journey into seafaring jobs begins at MET institutions where both male and female students are trained and educated in seafaring activities to qualify them to work on-board ships in key positions. When West African women wish to pursue seafaring jobs, they must begin by being granted access to the RMU, which is the only internationally recognised university in West and Central Africa offering seafaring programmes. This is despite the fact that some institutions, especially those in Muslim countries (with the exception of Indonesia, Bangladesh, Turkey among others), still do not grant access for women into seafaring courses. As such, the registrar of the RMU was asked if the institution admits female students into its nautical and engineering departments. He answered affirmatively: “Yes, RMU is a co-educational institution and therefore admit females into its seafaring programmes”.

Irrespective of the difficulties in recruiting female graduates from the RMU on-board ships, the RMU is still open to granting access for female students to its seafaring programmes as compared to other MET institutions such as the Caribbean Maritime Institutions (CMI) in Jamaica, which is strained in admitting female students into its seafaring programmes. As stated by the deputy executive director of the CMI:

Yes, I will say initially we don’t discriminate. The programs are open to both males and females. But owing to some recent developments in the shipping industry, virtually, the ship management companies, those who recruit the officers, they are now saying that they can no longer hire our female cadets because of certain reasons for instance; they say that they invest a lot of money training the female cadets. After which they become pregnant and leave to set up families and so on. They go for shore based jobs so, they think that they are investing in them and they are not getting the services after a while. So they are strained on employing more female cadets. That is the main challenge that is affecting us in that area of enrolment. We have to be telling our female aspirants that we can’t recruit them in to that program just now. We are encouraging them to do another program, may be a similar engineering program for those who are scientifically inclined to go in to this engineering program as well as they are other shore based programs for those who are interested in navigation to go instead in to these programs due to these recruitment difficulties we are facing for the recruitment of our female cadets.

Both male and female students in nautical or engineering programmes at the RMU study in the class room for four years and, after graduation, apply to shipping companies on their own to gain the 12 months ‘sea time’ requirement of the STCW convention before they can sit for the third officer’s Certificate of Competency (COC) examination. This is because the university does not have a training ship or a shipping company that can provide on-board training for its students. As a result, most students ended up looking for shore-based jobs instead of going to sea. However, other MET institutions interviewed for this research do have four year programmes as the RMU but do not follow the same process. For instance, the Maritime University of Szczecin (MUS) in Poland has a training ship and has also made arrangements on-board merchant vessels to provide sea time training for its students. As such, the students go on-board these ships for three months in each year of study and by the end of the four years programme, they have completed the 12-month sea time requirement of the STCW convention to sit for the COC examination, as the Head of the ship construction and stability department of the MUS narrated:

In Poland we have for example our girls, they study for 4 years and during this period, they have to go for sea term practices for a year. Of course, it is not possible to be on board for a year so most of them spends 3 months on board in the ship during each year of study and then they have to complete if they want to be deck officers. They have to
complete 12 months which is required by the STCW convention. We have a training ship but it is not possible to have all the practices only on board this one ship because this ship is prepared to serve the students in one term. So it is too small, most of them sail on board merchant ships which we have agreements with, during their practice.

4.1.2. Female Students Enrolled in Seafaring Programmes
The study intended to find out the current number of female students enrolled in the nautical and engineering programmes at the RMU, so as to encourage more females to apply for these courses. It found that the enrolment of female students was very small. That is, 4.3% in the nautical courses and 5% in the engineering courses, as the registrar of the RMU said:

The percentage of female students admitted into the programmes mentioned above is insignificant. In ratio terms it is about 1:23 for Nautical Science and 2:40 for Marine Engineering.

This explains the reason why there are very few women seafarers in West Africa and in the world (about 2%) as a whole. It is problematic, because as long as the number of women taking these courses remains insignificant, the number of women seafarers in West Africa will continue to be insignificant as the journey of seafaring begins at a MET institution. It is therefore, important to increase the number of female students in sea going programmes at RMU.

4.1.3. Performance of Female Students
Despite their number, female students at RMU generally perform better than their male colleagues. The excellent performances of female students cut across all of the MET institutions that took part in this study. This is because female students taking these courses are aware of the challenges ahead of them in being recruited on-board so they have to study harder than their male colleagues in order not to miss any recruitment opportunities. Three staff members, each from the RMU, CMI and MUS stated:

In spite of their number, those admitted on the programmes performed better than their male counterparts (RMU staff).

Their performances are great because the top female cadets for the last 2 to 3 years perform better than their male counterparts. The top cadet was a female, they do very well as cadets and as good leaders, so they are able to work and perform better than the males (CMI, staff).

I think first of all, they are a little ambitious than boys because they have to compete and I think the most important thing for them is competition in terms of sea going practices. Because in my opinion, this is the main problem in the University, how to make sure each girl has opportunity to make sea going practice in the time she has to do it. Not in the future like next year but now (MUS, staff).

4.1.4. Strategies to Encourage More Women into the Seafaring Programmes at RMU
Due to the insignificant number of female students taking seafaring programmes at the RMU, this study explores what strategies would be applicable for the RMU to improve the intake of women into the nautical and engineering programmes. As such, the registrar of the RMU was asked if the university is currently undertaking some programmes to attract women. The response was that the RMU has put some measures in place for this purpose, such as automatic admission for qualified female applicants and outreach programmes targeting female students at second cycle schools, as the registrar of the RMU stated:
RMU as an institution is putting in place some measures to improve on female intake into these programmes: Automatic admission to all female applicants who qualify for the programme and outreach programmes to second cycle institutions to sensitize students particularly females students on the programmes.

Although these initiatives take place, they do not seem to be effective enough to motivate more women in West Africa to apply for nautical and engineering programmes. If the RMU accepts female students, they should consider beyond the admissions, and be responsible for all of their students’ completion of training, including mandatory on-board training of 12 months specified by the STCW convention. The RMU’s lack of effective strategies in this area can be supplemented by finding ships for its students as well as establishing closer relationships with ship management companies and ensuring that they take up both male and female students immediately after graduation. In the current situation, unfortunately, most women are aware of the difficulties in getting ships as cadets. Therefore, they prefer to take shore-based courses where they can easily find jobs; otherwise, those who take up seagoing courses will end up not finding employment on-board upon the completion of their career investment. If there are ships available to accept cadets, especially females, then more women in West Africa would be motivated to apply for these programmes. The CMI in Jamaica is making more efforts as compared to the RMU to secure berths for its female students on-board ships as Jamaica does not own a national line, similar to the case in Ghana. However, they depend on external sources in training their cadets, as the deputy executive director of the CMI explained:

Carrying a counselling is one. The other thing too is that we are trying to find more ships because Jamaica does not own any ship. We don’t have a fleet so we have to depend on the external sources in training our cadets. Before we had a ship management company and they employed quite a few of our cadets including the females. Our female cadets perform well with the ship management company. However, the ship management company pulled out of Jamaica for a while because of some difficulties they had with the government of Jamaica and that really affected our placement of female cadets. The company is about to return to Jamaica and they are planning to take more of our female cadets and we are all hoping that it will materialise. We are trying to sign some memorandum; we work with our Ports for them to give us some support to place our female cadets on-board.

4.1.5. External Supports to Female Students at RMU

From the comparison with other MET institutions, it is apparent that RMU could offer more effective support to female students in its nautical and engineering programmes. The registrar of RMU was asked whether there were any external organisations that provide support to female students. The response was that the only supporting organisation, so far, is the Women in Shipping and Trade Association (WISTA) Ghana, which has instituted awards for the best female graduating students in both the nautical and engineering programmes. The President of WISTA Ghana reaffirmed, stating that the aim of the award is to attract more women into sea-going courses. In addition to the award, WISTA Ghana is planning to go to secondary schools to sensitise young female students about the maritime industry. This will inspire and motivate many West African girls to consider seafaring as a career choice, as she stated:

I was doing a study at the RMU, and I realised that a lot of women from West Africa don’t go into the nautical courses. We WISTA Ghana, we are instituting an award. The award is for the Best Female Graduating Student in the Nautical and Engineering Courses. This award is to make sure that women are attracted in to these sea going courses and to create awareness in that area. This is what WISTA Ghana is doing. Moreover, we the WISTA Ghana, are trying to go to the various schools and explain,
making them aware of the maritime industry itself. So, we will bring them on tours, they will visit the ports, they will go onto a vessel, learn and all those kind of things. If we are able to get a vessel that can move from Tema to Takoradi Ports in Ghana and with them on-board seeing the various aspects of shipping. I am very convinced that most of them will be motivated to pursue this career.

This example shows that it is not enough to encourage MET institutions to take more female students, but the advocacy of empowering women to seafaring must also focus on the younger generation to increase the awareness of the career option at sea. In the meantime, it is equally important to create role models of women leaders in shipping. While WISTA Ghana is serving this purpose, it is worth noting that the WMU produces a number of women maritime professionals in higher education every year. WMU female alumni have a huge potential to be good role models in this context.

4.2. Promotion of Women - The Case of WMU
Unlike other MET institutions which aim to train seafarers, WMU has a different mission to serve the maritime industry, that is, to create future maritime leaders. Women are no exception. Hence, this section analyses and discusses WMU’s practices in granting admission for female students, admission requirements, percentage of female students taking masters’ programmes, their performance and the ways to bring in more women from West Africa.

4.2.1. Admission for Female Students
WMU runs professional courses for maritime personnel, both men and women at a postgraduate level. Moreover, WMU recognises the need to encourage more women in the maritime industry at large and as such, gives priority to its female applicants as long as they meet the basic qualifications and experience. All that WMU wants is more female applicants, as stated by the registrar of the WMU:

"We expect the same standard of qualification and experience for all students whether they are men or women. But the donors give priority for giving fellowship awards to women. So what we need is more women applicants."

4.2.2. Female Students Enrolled in the Masters’ Programmes at the WMU
From its inception in 1983, the number of female students in the Masters’ programmes at the WMU was insignificant (about 4% to 5%). Over the years, the WMU has worked to increase the number of female students to 30%. The registrar of WMU stated:

"When I came to WMU, it was running for about 4 to 5%. We have worked to increase that and it has been running of about 30% of the student body."

WMU donors are either part of the government or they are under the umbrella of the government. Most governments have gender equality or empowerment policies and have signed up to the UN Millennium goals. So, the problem is not with the donors, but with a lack of female applicants. As such, the WMU needs cooperation from employers to nominate women for fellowships programmes, as the registrar further stated:

"The possible problem is women don’t go into the maritime industry at a lower level. We run a professional programme; it’s similar to an MBA. So, we can’t take a woman just because she is a woman who has never seen a boat. We need more cooperation from employers to nominate women to apply for donors to send them. Some employers are very enlightening and some employers are not. The university is here we only have half the picture. All our donors are either the part of the government or they are under the umbrella of the government and they are working to further help the government establish policies. Most governments do have gender equality policies or gender
empowerment policies. Most of them have signed up to the UN Millennium goals. So, the problem is not with the donors, but with not receiving enough applications, they need more applications from women. Donors don’t fund private organizations because IMO is an association of government and so the donors funding is bilaterally government to government.

4.2.3. Performance of Female Students at the WMU
Female students generally perform better than their male colleagues at a lower level as seen from the above findings. So, in order to find out if this is the case at a higher level, the registrar of the WMU was asked to comment on the performances of female students in WMU. The response was that the university had never measured female versus male performance, but according to the awarding of the Chancellor’s medal for Academic Excellence, female students seem to be performing slightly better than males. This award has not been given to a West African female student so far; however, some West African female students have received other awards as noted in the literature review. The registrar of the WMU Said:

We have not measured that. We have never done a male versus a female performance. But in 2000, we introduced the Chancellor medal that is given to the best performing student. That has been awarded so far, 14 times from 2001 to 2014. Out of the 14 awards winner, it has been given to 4 women out of 14. So, the females are slightly performing better than their men representation. Not massively, but slightly considering their number. Among these four women, two from China, one from France and the other one from Argentina so far.

4.2.4. Ways to Bring in More Women in West Africa into WMU
Due to the lesser number of female students in WMU, the registrar was asked what could be done to bring more women from West Africa to WMU. The response was that it is the responsibility of the female graduates from West Africa to go back and talk to their employers to nominate more women for fellowships. Unfortunately, some employers find it difficult to put women forward for fellowships because of gender-biased assumptions. So, the problem is not with the university or the donors, the problem is with the employers, as the registrar of the WMU narrated:

I talk to graduates who work for employers, please put women forward. There is an institutional difficulty in some places in putting women forward because in their minds women staffs prioritise their families and their home life. I have heard that most of them actually want to get married and have babies. But this is where the donors are very flexible (…) we have only about 45 students’ fellowships for donors. The others are paid for either personally that is up to them, or by their employers. That is where the employers prefer to pay for men but not in Indonesia. Indonesia pays for a lot of women. In Indonesia, the sending agencies are absolutely working with us.

5. CONCLUSION
The RMU is a co-educational institution which admits females into its Nautical and Marine Engineering programmes. However, the number of female students taking these courses is insignificant. Little effort has been made to encourage more female students to apply for these courses. Furthermore, there is minimal external support given to female students in seafaring courses. In addition, the RMU has no access to a training ship or a ship management company that can provide shipboard training opportunities for their students after graduation. Most of them go through a lot of difficulties getting ships as they have to apply individually, without any organisational support from the institution. As a result, most graduates, particularly female graduates, end up getting jobs on land, instead of going to sea.
In terms of encouraging West African female students to seafaring programmes, the role of WMU should not be under-estimated. WMU female graduates can be good role models for younger generations in West Africa. WMU has recognised the need to encourage more women in the maritime industry as a whole and as such, gives priority to its female applicants as long as they have the same qualifications and experience. Furthermore, WMU has made efforts through its donors to increase the percentage of female students taking masters programmes. Specifically, between the period of 1987 and 2014, WMU has had 138 female graduates from Africa with the majority (52%) from West African. However, some employers are not keen to nominate women for fellowships to the WMU. In order to have more women, especially West African Women in WMU, employers from West Africa should consider nominating more women for fellowships since the donors give priority to women. Additionally, West African female graduates could play the role of encouraging more women to apply to WMU as well as asking the employers to nominate more women.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Increasing the number of West African women going to sea must start with encouraging more female students to take up seafaring courses at the RMU. In order to achieve this, the RMU should carry out a campaign in the senior high schools of its member States to sensitise female students to seafaring programmes. Additionally, female students should be strengthened and encouraged to take interest in Mathematics and Science subjects at the senior high school level, which is a requirement for admitting students to seafaring programmes at the RMU. Moreover, scholarships should be instituted to assist female students who opt for any of these programmes. Furthermore, the RMU should reduce fees for female students as the sea going courses are generally more expensive than the shore-based courses due to the training involved. The RMU should also establish an Alumni Office to monitor the development of female cadets who graduate from the university.

In addition, to help both male and female graduates gain access to ships, the RMU should consider acquiring a training ship through the governments of its member States as done by SAMTRA and SAMSA. Furthermore, it is suggested that the RMU should enter into negotiations with shipping companies to employ both male and female students immediately after graduation. The RMU should promote female students by educating shipping companies to the fact that women can do what any ordinary seafarer can.

It would be useful to establish a counselling department for female cadets in the seafaring courses at RMU on the topics of gender issues and concerns aboard ships. These female cadets need to be well informed of these issues and prepare their minds before they are finally immersed in a man's world. It is important that they understand the common issues among women seafarers, so that they will not take things too personally, but rather see the social, cultural and political issues of women at paid work. Additionally, the RMU should acquire a copy of the ILO- SIRC commissioned book on “Women Seafarers: Global Employment Policies and Practices “ and make it available in the library and ensure the female cadets read the very comprehensive and interesting realities that women seafarers have or may experience on-board vessels.

References


