Background
Assessments of universities such as Jimma University\(^1\) and the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM)\(^2\) that found sexual harassment and violence and high attrition of female students played a role in developing gender centers.\(^1\) At the University of Western Cape, campus activism on issues including gender imbalances in salary and career development, sexual harassment, and maternity leave and child care contributed to the creation of a gender center.\(^3\) In other institutions, national and institutional commitment was key. For example, one of the objectives of the Presidential Working Party to establish Moi University was to develop a gender center, and the university’s 2005-2014 strategic plan committed to incorporating gender issues in policy decision-making processes.\(^4\) Makerere University also enjoyed a supportive national legislative environment in Uganda.\(^5\)

Description
Many institutions, including Jimma University, Moi University, UDSM, and Makerere University, note the role of the gender centers in promoting gender mainstreaming. The gender centers, offices, and committees at the institutions included in this review shared some common functions, including gender equality-related policy development, provision of training, skills-building, mentoring, counseling services, networking, information sharing, and research. Some institutions also provide scholarships to female students (Jimma University,\(^6\) Makerere University,\(^5\) University of Toronto\(^7\)); facilitate housing for female faculty (Jimma University,\(^6\) University of Western Cape\(^3\)); develop curricula on gender-related issues (the University of Ghana\(^8\)); and develop proposals for “gender sensitive infrastructure within the University”\(^9\) (Sokoine University of Agriculture).

The University of Toronto has multiple offices that work on diversity and equity issues. Where many of the other institutions have a single primary gender center, the Status of Women Office and the Sexual & Gender Diversity Office share the functions common to other gender centers. The Status of Women Office “addresses gender equity for all women students, staff and faculty at all three campuses”\(^10\) while the Sexual & Gender Diversity Office addresses sexual and gender discrimination.\(^7\)

Results
Reviewers rated this practice as featuring the following gender transformative characteristics:
- Provide information and education about discrimination or rights
- Challenge and change common discriminatory gender beliefs or norms
- Change or attempt to change an imbalance of power or otherwise level the playing field
- Introduce, make use of, or further the (existing) legal protections for women
- Transform family, school, and/or work arrangements so that women are not economically or socially penalized/disadvantaged for caregiving.
Few evaluations or assessments of gender centers have been conducted. Of those that were available, the lack of specificity and the breadth of activities undertaken by the gender centers made it difficult to attribute results to the implementation of the gender centers themselves. For example, a document review on gender equity in tertiary institutions in Uganda found that there has been an increase in discussion of gender issues at Makerere University; however, it is unclear what methods were used and what the scope of the review entailed. Likewise, the University of Toronto’s data monitoring found that the percent of female tenure-track faculty increased from 2009 to 2010 and that a high percentage of staff who left were women; however, it is unclear the extent to which these results are linked to the university’s gender equity offices.

Despite this need for more documentation and evaluation, reviewers noted the importance of having gender centers or similar mechanisms that are focused on achieving gender equality and non-discrimination goals. There appears to be some overlap in the work of gender centers and equal opportunity employment units (see first practice in this sub-section of interventions). In fact, both practices were rated as having nearly the same gender transformative characteristics. The role that gender centers play in coordinating and implementing activities such as affirmative action measures underscores their role in attempting to change power imbalances.

Implementation lessons learned
Awareness-raising and advocacy among the general institutional community is important to ensuring buy-in and ownership of gender center goals and activities. In addition, gender centers should develop and implement sustainability strategies, as resource challenges could hinder the centers’ activities. Many of the gender centers receive funding from external donors, such as the host government (University of Ghana), foreign governmental aid agencies (Makerere University), the World Bank (University of Ghana), the Ford Foundation (University of Western Cape), and the Carnegie Corporation (Makerere University).

Summary conclusions
Reviewers agreed that institutions should have a mechanism such as gender centers (or equal opportunity employment units; see first practice in this sub-section of interventions) that addresses discrimination, including gender discrimination. The gender center’s (or other mechanism’s) mission, policies, and/or plans should specifically outline the forms of discrimination being addressed, as well as how the mechanism intends to address them. In addition, reviewers noted that more documentation and evaluation of these units is needed, such as whether the use of “gender mainstreaming” (as opposed to a term such as “equal opportunity”) affects the work and/or effectiveness of gender centers.

Reference(s) and source(s)
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3. University of the Western Cape. Awards. 
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6. Jimma University. The activities done so far. 
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• Telephone interview with Mary Hames, Director, Gender Equity Unit, University of Western Cape. May 20, 2011.
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