

CENTRE FOR GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
University of the West Indies

Working Paper Series (Cave Hill)

**Women and Higher Education in the
Commonwealth Caribbean:
UWI: A Progressive Institution for Women?**

Pro Vice Chancellor Dr Marlene Hamilton

**Working Paper No.2
February 1999**

Editorial Committee:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Dr Eudine Barriteau | - | Director, Centre for Gender and Development Studies, UWI, Cave Hill |
| Dr Elizabeth Best | - | Part-time Lecturer, Department of Linguistics, UWI, Cave Hill |
| Dr Alan Cobley | - | Head, Department of History, UWI, Cave Hill |
| Dr Neville Duncan | - | Senior Lecturer, Department of Government, Sociology & Social Work,
UWI, Cave Hill |
| Ms Maxine McClean | - | Lecturer, Department of Management Studies, UWI, Cave Hill |
| Dr Judith Soares | - | Tutor/Coordinator, Women and Development Unit, UWI, Cave Hill |
| Ms Gemma Tang Nain | - | Deputy Programme Manager, Caribbean Community Development and
Women's Affairs, CARICOM |
| Ms Sherry Asgill | - | Research Assistant Centre for Gender and Development Studies |

ISSN: 0799-0480

ISBN:976-621-037-3

Centre for Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill

EDITOR'S NOTE

Working paper no. 2 is the text of the fourth lecture in the series "*Caribbean Women Catalysts For Change*" organised by the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, Cave Hill. The series, dedicated to honouring the memory of Dame Nita Barrow, late Governor General of Barbados, is part of a research project dedicated to analyzing and documenting the contributions of outstanding Caribbean women in the fields of: regional and international development; trade; politics and political participation; trade unionism and agricultural development.

V.E.B

Key Words/Phrases

Feminism; Gender Biases in education; Women academics; Gender discrimination;
Role modelling; Mentorship; Networking

Author's Note

Chair, I thank you for those very kind words of introduction. I also thank most sincerely, Dr. Barriteau and members of the organising committee, for the tremendous honour afforded me in inviting me to give this lecture. To sing Dame Nita's praises is very much like gilding the lily. Nonetheless, those of us who knew her, no matter how slightly, seem to have some special memory which we like to share. Mine is of (perhaps) the last time I saw her close at hand (I had recently been appointed a Pro Vice Chancellor), when she turned to the Vice Chancellor and said, "Well, Alister, at last the University is growing up! You finally put a woman 'up there' " (or something to that effect).

I have strong memories of Mona's Graduation Ceremony in 1990, too, when Dame Nita gave the address to the graduating class, and commented at some length on the growing numbers of women being presented each year. She had obviously reflected hard and long on this issue, and used the occasion of graduation to comment in the following manner:

"Something very important, even dangerous, is happening to our societies. Women are outnumbering men in many areas of educational performance and productive enterprise. Yet at the same time, at the other end of the spectrum, illiteracy among women is increasing It is they (the women) who bear the brunt of structural adjustment programmes."

She continued:

"As we stand here, on the threshold of the twenty-first century, in the regional institution of higher (learning), let us understand that THIS IS NOT A CHALLENGE FOR WOMEN. It is a challenge for the entire society; not the least of all the university community, which must turn its mind to real problems in our societies." ¹

I would like to suggest, Chair, that this series of lectures, dedicated to the memory of a giant among Caribbean women and named in her honour, does in fact take up Dame Nita's challenge. My personal challenge at this time is to do full justice to the task presented me.

I express sincere appreciation to three of my colleagues and friends - Elsa Leo-Rhynie, Woodville Marshall and Peter Whiteley, for their insightful critique of the draft, and for their willingness to debate (explosively, at times) many of the issues raised. **Marlene A. Hamilton**