

**European Best Practices in
Quality Assurance of
Agricultural Programs:
Analytical Report**

European Best Practices in Quality Assurance of Agricultural Programs: Analytical Report, May 2015, Tempus project Nr. 543902-SMGR Development of Public Accreditation of Agricultural programs in Russia.

The content of the publication is based on studying the experience of universities and Accreditation Agency of the European Union (Slovakia, Lithuania, Spain, Estonia). Target group of the publication is represented by a wide range of academic community, employers, the agricultural industry, students of agricultural specialties of higher education. Emphasis is focused on actual topic quality assurance of study programs at universities with orientation on agriculture across Europe and Russian Federation.

In the European Union the significant role plays the quality of products and services. International standards defining quality assurance models and

systems in various economy and social sectors, including the higher education sector. Quality assurance in higher education is surely not only the European issue, but the rest of the world shows the interest for quality and standards, accepted as a basic framework and concept for the total higher education development process as well.

The content of the publication is divided into three chapters, which give well balanced and complex view on the problematics.

The first chapter "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education European space" (the European Association for Quality Assurance) presents the general review about the main framework of the quality assurance system in Europe. In a concise manner, the authors described the European standards for quality assurance and the role of quality assurance agencies in participants' countries from EU.

Second chapter "The system of Quality Assurance (QA) of higher education in Europe (case study of Slovakia, Lithuania,

Spain, Estonia)" focuses attention on the EU partners' institutions Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Aleksandras Stulginskis University in Kaunas, Estonian University of Life Sciences in Tallinn and University of Lleida description of their research and educational activities, offered study programs and the way of applied quality assurance tools and methods.

The last chapter, "Guidelines for the Use of European experience when creating system of professional accreditation of agricultural programs" presents how to use common basis quality assurance systems of higher education - Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the European space (ESG), developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) with the aim to ensures the unity of the approaches and enables mutual understanding and recognition of accreditation of agricultural programs in Russia. This chapter described the experiences and the good practices of universities from EU partners' countries.

In conclusion, I can declare that the reviewed publication "European best practices in quality assurance of agricultural programs: analytical report" is unique in Europe and its professional level is very high,

useful reading for university management and academic staff.

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SMGR Development of Public Accreditation of Agricultural programs in Russia.

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**Challenging Boardroom
Homogeneity: Corporate Law,
Governance, and Diversity**

Author: Aaron A. Dhir

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As women are increasingly becoming a larger proportion of the workforce in the corporate world, gender diversity has garnered much attention from both the academic and the corporate world in the past some years. Though there is literature suggesting that diversity leads to higher creativity, innovation and quality decision-making at individual and group levels, yet global statistics indicate that women are evidently underrepresented on the boards of the world's most significant publicly listed companies. The newly enforced Companies Act 2013 in India has also tried to address this issue by making it mandatory for the publicly listed companies to appoint at least one women director on their Boards. In this context the book is topical and ground-breaking in addressing the lack of diversity in international corporate boardrooms which has ignited a heated global debate. In fact the book brings together two ostensibly dissimilar spheres -

corporate governance regulation and gender diversity.

The book is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 contains the introduction to the topic and builds a roadmap for the subsequent chapters. The author in this chapter presents the global statistics on women representation on the Boards and writes "Regionally, Europe displays the most noteworthy movement toward balanced representation levels. North America lags behind Europe (with Canada trailing the United States), and Asia (especially Japan and China) remains virtually stagnant. Norway, Sweden, and Finland exhibit the highest percentages of women in global boardrooms....." It also discusses the two approaches to introduce gender inclusion on the company boards- the quota approach and the disclosure approach.

Chapter 2 lays the foundation for understanding recent regulatory developments in this area. The chapter explains the statistics from the United States and Canada and considers possible explanations for existing low levels of representation. The author questions the often offered justification of "the pool problem" i.e. shortage of qualified women candidates. The author addresses the question "Why is diversifying the board actually important?" and

develops rationale for increased boardroom heterogeneity. Chapter 3 focuses on the two primary modes of legal regulation which the regulators have adopted as formal corrective measures in an endeavor to curb the existence of male-dominated corporate leadership structures.

Chapters 4 and 5 investigate the quota-based approach in greater depth. The author presents quotas as a form of "command-and-control regulation". The author employs qualitative methodology and makes an analysis on the basis of twenty-three in-depth, semi-structured interviews with directors of Norwegian corporate boards. Norwegian corporate law was the first in the world to mandate gender balance on the Boards. Thus, these interviews constitute the core original research of the book which provides useful insights into the lived experiences of the directors. It is important to note that Norway example was followed by other countries like Iceland, Italy, France, and Belgium.

Chapters 6 and 7 critically scrutinize the second approach to gender inclusion-diversity disclosure. The author takes United States as a second case study as the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has since 2009 mandated disclosure of board diversity efforts. In

Chapter 6, author uses a mixed-methods content analysis to investigate the U.S. approach and examines how corporations have responded to the disclosure rule during the first four years. The author highlights that the US disclosure rule does not define “diversity,” thus leaving it to the firms to give this term meaning which has resulted in firms having adopted different interpretations. The author finds that US disclosure law has not done much to increase gender diversity, making it hard to assess diversity's effects. Norway quota mandate on the other hand has increased board diversity significantly. Chapter 7 contextualizes the findings of the previous chapter in terms of social norms and the expressive function of law and offers possibilities of reform that might serve to strengthen the U.S. approach. The author also considers the possibility of a “hybrid model” and highlights the role of shareholders in improving the socio-demographic diversity of corporate boards.

Chapter 8 concludes by drawing out key lessons from the analysis conducted in the previous chapters. The author holds that diversity has positive effects on the substance of board decision making and on the board's

overall governance culture. In this chapter the author revisits the two approaches studied in the previous chapters and discusses the case of Canada where reform is in a nascent stage. Author suggests that the impact of disclosure requirements could be strengthened by defining diversity more accurately, including identity-based diversity, and by adopting the comply-or-explain model used in the United Kingdom and a larger part of the European Union. Secondly, the author brings out future lines of research and concludes that the underlying theoretical basis for inclusion must be further developed and amplified. The appendix to the book provides elaborate details about the methodology followed in research.

The book essentially considers the lack of women in the higher rungs of business corporations and the relationship between gender and economic governance. The book examines the two most ubiquitous approaches to increasing gender diversity on corporate boards today - quotas and disclosure. The author clearly demonstrates the legal interventions which have been made around the world for achieving inclusion by researching on the legal

developments in Norway and the United States. The author has commendably combined theory and research and laid the path for future research on the subject. This book provides depth to the current policy conversations and offers new insights into the role law can play in remodeling the gender dynamics of various corporate governance cultures. This book should be read by everyone interested in understanding the plethora of policies around the globe addressing equal opportunities in the corporate world especially the corporate boardrooms.

About the Author:

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