



Fostering gender responsive school leadership in Africa: A policy brief

Developed by The African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL)

October 2024

Acknowledgements

Published by:

© 2024 VVOB – *education for development*

Julien Dillensplein 1 bus 2A, 1060 Brussels, Belgium

Telephone: +32 2 209 07 99; Website: www.vvob.org

Authors

This policy brief was written by Grace Mwaura, an independent consultant specialising in education and skills development, youth empowerment, gender and inclusion and sustainable development.

Suggested citation

Grace Mwaura (2024). "Fostering gender responsive school leadership in Africa: a policy brief". October 2024. VVOB – *education for development*.

Disclaimer

This work is a product of staff of VVOB under the African Centre for School Leadership initiative. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this work do not necessarily reflect the views of VVOB, its Board of Directors, or the funding donors. VVOB does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this work. The boundaries, colors, denominations, and other information shown on any map in this work do not imply any judgment on the part of VVOB concerning the legal status of any territory or the endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries. This publication contains references to other publications and websites. VVOB cannot be held responsible for current or future content of these publications and websites, nor for the content of external publications and websites that refer to this publication of VVOB.

This publication was produced in partnership with the support of the Mastercard Foundation, Governments of Belgium and Flanders, and in partnership with Rwanda Ministry of Education, Kenya Education Management Institute (KEMI) and the Institute for Educational Management and Planning (IEPA). Its contents are the sole responsibility of VVOB and do not necessarily reflect the views of these actors. The

Mastercard Foundation, the Governments of Belgium and Flanders cannot be held responsible for the content of this publication.

About VVOB and the African Centre for School Leadership

[The African Centre for School Leadership \(ACSL\)](#) is a coalition of partners in Africa committed to the promotion of effective school leadership by bringing together organisations that offer professional development services, research, and policy advice on effective school leadership. The ACSL coordinated by Association for Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Education Sub-Saharan Africa (ESSA), Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and VVOB – *education for development*.

[VVOB – education for development](#) is an international non-profit organisation with over 40 years of experience in quality education. Through capacity development, VVOB provides support to ministries of education in Africa, Asia and South America to improve (initial) professional development of teachers and school leaders in early childhood, primary, general secondary, and technical and vocational education.

All queries on rights and licenses should be addressed to VVOB, Julien Dillensplein 1 bus 2A, 1060 Brussels, Belgium - Telephone: +32 2 209 07 99; E-mail: info@vvob.org; Website: www.vvob.org.

In partnership with:



Leaders in Teaching



Belgium
partner in development



Flanders
State of the Art

CONTENT

KEY MESSAGES.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
WHY DOES GENDER IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP MATTER?.....	7
SUMMARY OF GENDER BARRIERS IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA.....	9
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	12
CASE STUDIES.....	15
LOOKING FORWARD: GENDER RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA.....	17
REFERENCES.....	18



KEY MESSAGES

Across Africa, structural barriers within the education system, entrenched social norms and gender stereotypes, as well as individual socially-induced factors limit women's accession and retention in school leadership roles. To overcome these gender barriers concerted policy action is required.

Two policy goals inform the policy guidance provided in this policy brief: increasing the accession and retention of female school leaders and promoting gender responsive school leadership in African schools.

Eight policy recommendations are proposed to help achieve these policy goals:

1. Gendered school leadership standards, competency framework and recruitment procedures
2. Gender-inclusive school leader career pathways
3. Mentoring networks for female teachers and school leaders
4. Anti-discrimination policies
5. Training on gender responsive education
6. Work-life balance initiatives for school leaders
7. Incentives for school leaders in rural and remote schools
8. Gender audits and transparency in data

The policy brief draws inspiration from some pan-African case studies that can inspire policy makers on how to transcend gender barriers while promoting gender responsive school leadership.



INTRODUCTION

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, women's accession to school leadership positions is limited by entrenched structural barriers, social norms and gender stereotypes, as well as individual socially-induced barriers (Bergman et al 2022; Bush et al 2022; Global School Leaders 2024; Gouédard et al 2023;). Yet, gender has been found to be a key ingredient to effective school leadership (Bergmann et al 2022; Bush et al 2022). This policy brief presents key policy recommendations that education policy makers can implement to address the low representation of women in school leadership while also promoting gender responsive school leadership. These gender barriers include those relating to the inability of women to pursue school leadership roles due to their own dispositions such as leadership identity and gender stereotypes that influence women's self-confidence and delegate them to domestic responsibilities. Structural barriers within the education system such as the lack of recruitment standards, a biased inspectorate, unclear career pathways, and lack of professional development offerings are also addressed.

Two goals underpin the proposed policy recommendations. First is promoting gender inclusivity in the professionalization of school leadership whereby roles and responsibilities of school leaders are defined and supported by a clear and competency framework, standardized and gendered recruitment framework and professional development for school leaders. In this context, clarity in entry and retention into school leadership would reduce biases in recruitment and encourage women to pursue these career paths. Second is the intentional dismantling of existing gender stereotypes and harmful social norms. This requires a shift in mindsets as well as institutional changes such as affirmative actions and anti-discrimination policies, social networks for female teachers and school leaders, and capacity building on gender biases and gender responsive educational leadership.

For the purposes of this policy brief, gender is defined as the socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men, but to the relationship between them (UN Women 2014). Gender-responsive policy or programme refers to a policy or programme which fulfils two basic criteria: a) gender norms, roles, and relations are considered and b) measures are taken to actively reduce the harmful effects of gender norms, roles, and relations including gender inequality (GPE 2018).

Case studies have been drawn from various African countries to provide inspiration and guide policy makers towards gender responsive and effective school leadership.

However, there was controversy, and no consensus was achieved on statements whether school leadership should lead to improved public examination outcomes and raising the performance of a typical student. There was no consensus neither that school leadership practices should include promoting and using ICT in teaching, learning and management. There was no consensus that women are more likely to be effective instructional leaders than men, amongst the experts. In general, the panel of experts recognized that with regards to the state of school leadership and school leadership PD in Africa, there was evidence supporting most statements but not enough for generalizations at continental level. While there was interest in the concept of Ubuntu leadership amongst the experts, the argument was brought forward that the Ubuntu philosophy should be understood as a universal value, not only specific to Africa. The experts did not have a consensus on PD having to be mandatory, and regarding including ICT, financial literacy, and management techniques in the content of school leadership PD.

Regarding the four focus areas of the African Centre for School Leadership, the panel of experts reached a consensus on all stated ambitions. They asserted that it will be important for the Centre to assist and support countries in the development of clear policies that promote school leadership development and to engage with governments across the continent to put school leadership 'on the map'. There was strong agreement on the importance of supporting the development of long-term PD trajectories where participants engage with both theory and practice and on the importance of capacity building of PD providers and bringing together these PD providers and national governments to ensure school leadership PD is embedded within national education systems. The experts found it important that the Centre should conduct studies on the effectiveness of school leadership PDs and on the impact of school leadership on quality of education. Other areas of research that were seen as important include the interplay between gender and school leadership and school leadership models rooted in the African context. As such, they agreed that the Centre should be the 'go-to' place for research and information on school leadership in Africa, that advocacy should be based on research insights and knowledge production, that scholars, policy makers practitioners and pan-African bodies will be essential and that convening all partners in regular conferences on school leadership will be essential. In general, the experts emphasized that the Centre should be acting in an advisory role to governments.

The Delphi method has proven to be an appropriate method to discuss the findings from the scoping review and the proposed way forward for the Centre. The Delphi method provided an opportunity for the panel to debate and finetune their opinion, to create better insights and ownership for the proposed solutions. In three survey rounds, along with a feedback session in between the last two rounds, a broad consensus was found on most statements on school leadership in Africa and on the importance of all stated ambitions of the African Centre for School Leadership. This suggests that the conclusions from the review of empirical research on school leadership in Africa accurately reflected the views of the experts across the many countries and individual experiences. A number of statements on school leadership and school leadership PD in Africa remained controversial, and no consensus was found amongst the experts, notably on the interplay between gender and school leadership and on the potential of school leadership models that are rooted in the African context, such as Ubuntu School Leadership. It was concluded that these topics need further exploration and research.



WHY DOES GENDER IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP MATTER?

Women are under-represented in school leadership. Only 26% of school leaders are women in low- and middle-income countries compared to 53% in high income countries. Across some African countries there are as few as one woman in every ten school leaders (Bergmann et al 2022). A recent study showed that in six African francophone countries, despite recording high numbers of female teachers in primary schools, the percentage of female leaders ranged from 9 to 21% (UNESCO 2023a). The Women in Learning Leadership (WiLL) studies in Chad recorded a very low average of 5% women school leader representation with the rural areas averaging at 3% and urban areas at 12%, majority of the women leaders being in private schools. Similar statistics have been recorded in Niger whereby women make up only 17% of the primary school leaders even though more than half of the primary school teaching workforce are female (Gouédard et al 2023). Earlier studies in South Africa show a similar trend whereby even though female teachers are more than 70% of the overall teaching profession, only 36% are in school leadership positions (Davids 2018). Overall, women are found to lead in schools which on average have better infrastructure - these are often urban and private schools as observed by the Women in Learning Leadership studies in Chad (Gouédard et al 2023).

The gender gap in school leadership is intertwined with other inequalities in the education system, primarily with gender parity in education (Bergmann et al 2022; Bush et al 2022; Global School Leaders 2024; UNESCO 2023b). Overall, most African countries score the lowest in the region on gender parity in education with an overall score of 54% against a global average of 75% (UNESCO 2023b).

According to a UNICEF report, girls' enrolment in primary schools in low-income countries is at 78%, compared to the world average of 88%. In secondary schools, this is at 31% compared to the global average of 66% (Jativa et al 2022). Whereas there are more women than men in the teaching profession, their proportion starts to decline in secondary education and beyond owing to severe gender imbalances (World Bank 2018).

Though limited in scope, some emerging studies claim that female school leadership is positively associated with improved learning outcomes and overall improved school environment. Various reports based on some African countries show that female-led schools had lower school drop-out rates, higher completion rates, more engagement of teachers and the wider school community and girls tended to perform better (UNESCO 2023a). A related study by UNICEF – Innocenti observed that female leaders' practices in Chad made the school community more effective due to a strong commitment to engaging students, teachers and the wider community (Gouédard et al 2023). In Zimbabwe, female leaders were found to be more collegial, collaborative and caring than their counterpart male leaders (Moyo et al 2020). Their relationship-oriented leadership style was believed to reduce resistance and engage stakeholders in efforts to improve the school. Similar observations were made in Nigeria (Nosike & Oguzor ,2011) with Aladejana & Aladejana (2005) claiming better management of female-led schools. This was also the case in Ghana's basic education schools where UNICEF's Data Must Speak study claimed better exam performance in female-led junior high schools (UNICEF - Innocenti 2023). While these studies cannot be used to generalize the role of women in school leadership, further studies are necessary to understand the intersectionality of gender and school leadership while addressing unconscious biases relating to women and men's leadership capabilities.

Overall, overcoming gender barriers in school leadership is key to achieving effective and gender responsive school leadership (Global School Leaders 2024). This means acknowledging gender-responsiveness as a key ingredient to effective school leadership policies, standards, and guidelines. Standards for effective school leadership have been examined in and tested in some various contexts such as Rwanda (REB 2020), Ghana (National Teacher Council 2020), Madagascar (UNESCO 2024), Sierra Leone (Nwokeocha et al 2023b). In Rwanda, these include among others, setting strategic direction for the school, leading learning, leading teaching, managing the school as an organization, and working with parents and the wider community. As research has shown that effective school leadership may be hindered by entrenched gender barriers that limit women's accession and retention in school leadership (Bush et al 2022), developing gender responsive school leadership policies and frameworks is essential. This addresses existing gender barriers while also empowering existing school leaders to pro-actively respond to gender needs in their leadership practices.



SUMMARY OF GENDER BARRIERS IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA

Gender barriers to school leadership are intertwined and therefore, one policy recommendation may address multiple barriers. We summarize the gender barriers in this section and in Table 1 below.

a. Structural gender barriers that limit women's access school leadership positions

Globally, there are more female teachers than men (Bergmann et al 2022) but their representation declines as the level of education increases. For example, while women constitute a majority of primary school teachers their representation in secondary schools can drop to as below as 30% in some regions (World Bank 2018). This gap highlights systemic barriers that women face in advancing their careers to higher levels of education and into leadership roles within schools. Several factors lead to these structural barriers such as rural and remote settings which may be unfavourable for female teachers, gender stereotypes and social norms that limit women's participation in public life (Gouédard et al 2023; Mberia 2017). The lack of a standardized recruitment framework with clearly defined criteria for selecting and evaluating school leaders affects women disproportionately (Bush et al 2022). This is compounded by the lack of, or poorly developed school leader professional development programmes and a lack of a clear competency framework to inform a teacher's progression into leadership roles. Consequently, recruitment of school leaders relies on the discretion of education officials, majority of whom may be male and/or biased based on the pre-existing gender stereotypes and social norms (UNESCO 2023a).

b) Harmful gender stereotypes and deeply rooted social norms limit women's opportunities for considering and progressing in school leadership career pathways

From a very early age, girls and boys are socialized into distinct roles which significantly affect how they carry themselves in everyday life. Unfortunately, these norms tend to delegate women to domestic responsibilities while men are expected to occupy leadership roles (Gouëdard et al 2023). This significantly hampers women's self-confidence to take up leadership responsibilities even when they possess excellent abilities. On the other hand, when women are in leadership positions, they face double standards and gender biases often resulting in harsher assessments compared to their male counterparts (Martínez et al 2021).

Tangonyire (2021) has argued that double standards and gender biases apply both ways. For instance, when men occupy school leadership positions that are primarily delegated to women, they are negatively perceived by the parents and teachers. Double standards towards women school leaders are however important because women are already under-represented in school leadership roles and therefore, such challenges further limit their ability to progress in leadership pathways. In rural South Africa, Ndebele (2018) observed that due to an entrenched culture of male dominance in school leadership, parents and teachers had a negative attitude towards female school leaders and viewed them as incompetent.

Traditional social norms delegate domestic responsibilities to women consciously and unconsciously discouraging them from joining the workplace and/or ascending to higher leadership positions for fear of neglecting these traditional roles. As most men and women are socialized to see their roles as distinct in this manner, it becomes challenging to change the mindset towards having balanced professional and domestic responsibilities. Consequently, women may self-eliminate from leadership career pathways that tend to take time away from their domestic responsibilities, while also, men may fail to consider women for leadership roles in light of their domestic roles (Chabaya et al 2009).

c. Socially induced individual factors limit women's self-confidence and self-esteem

As women internalize the gendered expectations about their social role in society, they may feel inadequate to take up leadership roles traditionally delegated to men. Unfortunately, this results in low self-esteem and low confidence constraining their aspirations and overall leadership agency (Davids 2018). Failing to take on leadership roles reinforces existing gender stereotypes that limit women's contribution to domestic responsibilities or lower levels of participation in professional settings (Bush & Glover 2016). Some evidence of self-exclusion from school leadership roles has been documented in Zimbabwe (Chabaya et al 2009), Ethiopia (Dagnew et al 2020), and Tanzania (Mbepera 2015).

On the other hand, because of entrenched social norms where most domestic responsibilities are attached to women, the reality of time and energy constraints linked to the burden of domestic responsibilities often pushes many women to opt out of professional commitments or even withdraw from the labour market altogether (Brion et al 2021). But even a more disturbing factor is where women fear overshadowing men with their achievements because they have been socialised to accept men as the only ones who should occupy leadership positions. Consequently, there are few female school leaders, thus even fewer role models for those female teachers that might be interested in a leadership career pathway.

Evidently, gender barriers to school leadership are varied, interconnected and compounding. They also intersect with other challenges such as gender-based violence, poverty, political factors among many others. As such, policy solutions to these challenges must be equally interconnected and reliant on evidence, partnerships and multi-sector coordination.

Table 1: Summary of gender barriers to school leadership and policy recommendations

Structural barriers	Social norms and gender stereotypes	Individual socially induced barriers
- Lack of mentors and role models - Lack of transparent school leader recruitment procedures - Male dominance of school and education leadership - Education stakeholders' negative attitudes toward female school leaders - Lack of support from subordinates - Unspoken culture of discrimination against women - Lack of support from current school administrators	- Masculine stereotypes of leadership roles - Socialization into gendered roles - Strong negative stereotypes about women's abilities and female leaders - Lack of support at home	- Fear of work life balance - Lack of mentors and role models - Time and energy constraints due to family obligations - Acceptance of traditional social norms of leadership
Policy Recommendations		
- Anti-discrimination policies - Gender inclusive school leader career pathways - Incentives for school leaders in rural and remote schools - Mentoring networks for female teachers and leaders - Training on gender responsive education - Work-life balance initiatives for school leaders - Gender audits and transparency in data - Gendered school leadership standards, competency framework and recruitment procedures		
References		
Aladejana and Aladejana 2005; Bergmann et al 2022; Brion et al 2021; Bush and Glover 2016; Bush et al 2022; Chabaya et al 2009; Dagnew et al 2020; Gouédard et al 2023; Jativa et al 2022; Komiti and Moorosi 2020; Mberia 2017; Mbepera 2015; Ndebele 2018; Shava et al 2019; Wodon et al 2024.		





POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the aforementioned gender barriers, and drawing inspiration from some case studies across the continent, education policy makers may address women representation and gender responsiveness in school leadership through the following policy actions.

1. Gendered school leadership standards, competency framework and recruitment procedures

School leadership standards must include gender-responsiveness as one of the key ingredients in their operationalization. A clear framework on the qualifications of a school leader and recruitment procedures (selection, onboarding and performance appraisal) must openly address any associated gender biases and stereotypes. For example, role descriptions must indicate any special considerations for women to be equally considered, affirmative action must be applied in shortlisting, and performance appraisals must consider the contexts of women and men and conducted by both male and female inspectorate. To institutionalize these gendered standards, some countries may include them as part of their legal frameworks e.g. in Niger where the eligibility criteria for primary school leaders is within the country's regulatory framework (Gouédard et al 2023).

2. Gender inclusive school leader career pathways

This recommendation requires ministries of education to intentionally design and implement professional development and career advancement opportunities that promote gender -equity including among other things, ensuring that leadership training programmes, mentorship, and career progression frameworks are inclusive and accessible to all genders and address any barriers that women may face in accessing them.

This also calls for investments in an inclusive leadership landscape that promotes policies that support work-life balance, challenge gender stereotypes, and provide equal access to school leadership positions. It also means that diverse leadership styles and experiences are recognized and valued. Importantly, these career pathways should be made public so that women have access to information regarding possible opportunities in school leadership positions.

3. Mentoring networks for female teachers and school leaders

Through mentoring, more experienced female school leaders support newly qualified female school teachers and leaders, and offer guidance and strategies for navigating gendered leadership challenges especially in male-dominated environments. A framework for mentoring and coaching female school leaders would also help boost women's leadership identity, agency and voice thereby countering the barriers relating to women's low self-esteem and confidence. Mentorship should start early in a female teachers' career journey preferably during teacher training or in their first years of the teaching profession. The support networks should continue throughout the women's career and be institutionalized such as in teachers and school leaders' professional organizations. Some of the support networks through which mentoring and coaching can be delivered include professional learning communities and teachers' and head teachers' associations.

4. Anti-discrimination policies

Formulating and effecting policies addressing gender related issues such as gender-based violence, sexual harassment, diversity and inclusion, affirmative action are proactive steps towards empowering school leaders and education administrators to recognize when certain gender barriers might discriminate women from joining the school leader career path and as well, equips them with tools for responding to instances of discrimination. Anti-discrimination policies apply to all facets of school leadership including in professional development and training, recruitment and performance appraisal, and in support networks created for school leaders. Gender quotas have been applied in other public sectors to increase women representation and are equally applicable in school leadership.

5. Training on gender responsive education

Training on gender responsive education has been widely and can be strengthened with special attention to training on how to overcome gender biases and stereotypes in school leadership. This should be an essential component of continuous professional development for all teachers, school leaders, education administrators and policy makers providing knowledge and equipping them with tools for identifying and countering harmful social norms in their contexts. To complement this, community sensitization on gender responsive education would empower parents and the wider school community to support their school leaders in delivering gender responsive leadership.

6. Work-life balance initiatives for school leaders

Whereas both men and women require work-life balance, this recommendation recognizes that women's time and energy is disproportionately constrained, becoming a discriminatory factor when pursuing school leadership roles. Institutionalizing flexible working arrangements teachers and school leaders and making these known to women during training, recruitment and performance appraisals is a significant action. For example, providing housing reduces commute time and keeps male and female leaders closer to their families. Parental leave and childcare policies allow men and women the opportunity to care for their families while working further empowering them to aspire to career progression. These kinds of policies must be designed with women and made publicly available.

7. Incentives for school leaders in rural and remote schools

Often times, the working conditions in rural schools are harsher compared to the urban schools causing women to avoid working in such settings. Different types of incentives might counter women underrepresentation in these contexts. First, improving the conditions for these schools would boost overall attractiveness by women teachers and leaders. Second, allowances for housing, transportation, childcare, healthcare etc. specific to rural areas increase the chances of attracting more women. This can further be supported by gender quotas to improve women representation and increase their visibility thereby, also inspiring more female teachers to aspire to such positions. Another type of incentive could be requiring newly qualified teachers to work in rural areas at the start of their careers in exchange for future mobility, accelerating salary progression, fast tracked entry into school leadership positions, and training opportunities targeted to rural school teachers and leaders.

8. Gender audits and transparency in data

Gender responsive school leadership means that education administrators commit to regular gender audits and to fairly utilizing existing educational data to inform decisions relating to women representation in school leadership. Furthermore, gender audits provide a structured approach to recognizing and addressing gender-related barriers, resulting in a more equitable and effective school leadership.





CASE STUDIES

The following case studies are a source of inspiration for education policy makers. While some of them are not entirely addressing gendered challenges in school leadership, they provide an exemplar of how ministries of education might start the journey to professionalize school leadership while adopting a gender responsive approach.

Ghana

Diverse but uncoordinated efforts to professionalize school leadership exist in Ghana's education system where long service in the teaching profession remains the main criteria for entry into school leadership. While there are no specific academic requirements for school leaders, the National Teacher Council includes leadership courses in its professional development framework. Universities have equally customized training programmes for school leaders with research indicating that those who have had a leadership training also have a higher self-efficacy (Abonyi 2024). There exists a Handbook for Head teachers as well as a framework for mentoring and coaching teachers (National Teacher Council 2020). While there is limited attention to address gender barriers in school leadership in these initiatives, research shows that some recent actions by the Ghana Education Service may be triggering a mindset shift and countering some of the deeply rooted traditional norms around hiring school leaders to lead schools that resonate with their gender. In two different studies examining male and female school leaders appointed to lead single sex schools of the opposite gender, Tangonyire found that regardless of gender, a school leader's capability to lead was anchored on their preparation for school leadership, accession to school leadership roles, and eventually being able to perform while in those leadership roles (Tangonyire 2021; Tangonyire et al 2022).

The Gambia

The Gambia has a one-year mandatory school leadership and management (SLM) diploma program that's a prerequisite for entering the school leadership track (Nwokeocha et al 2023a; Wodon et al 2024). This training program targets teachers serving in middle leadership positions to equip them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitude to effectively run a school and achieve desirable school and learning outcomes. Gambia's SLM programme is against a backdrop of a gender gap in the teaching profession whereby of the total teaching population, there is a 41% female representation (better than most countries, but still low), and fewer women than men graduating from the teaching profession (Nwokeocha et al 2023a). As initial assessments of the first cohort of the programme beneficiaries suggests high levels of satisfaction, there is need to augment future cohorts with gender considerations such as ensuring enrolment of equal numbers of male and female participants and thereafter comparing their satisfaction in school leadership profession.

Madagascar

In Madagascar, the lack of higher academic and pedagogical qualifications, social norms, the absence of recruitment standards, and challenging working conditions are some of the barriers that limit women's accession to school leadership positions. Despite this, Madagascar stands out as one of the few African countries where the proportion of female teachers is higher, up to 47%. This is attributed to their recent strategies for greater professionalization of school leaders that includes a structured competency framework, institutionalized recruitment and professional development processes, tailored training, and strengthened supervision and support mechanisms for primary school leaders (GPE 2024; UNESCO 2024). Consequently, nationally, women hold 35% of public primary school leadership positions. This representation varies significantly across regions with some urban districts registering as high as 80% women leaders and rural ones having less than 10%.

Rwanda

Globally, Rwanda is considered a top performer in gender equality in the public sector. In line with the 2003 constitution (Republic of Rwanda, 2003) where the government committed to ensuring equal rights for men and women, minimizing gender disparities during teacher recruitment is one of the considerations promoted by the 2007 Teacher Development and Management Policy (Republic of Rwanda, 2007). Further, the 2008 Girls' Education Policy (Republic of Rwanda, 2008) seeks to achieve a balance in the appointment of male and female head teachers and principals, while also identifying and training women with potential at the entry and middle management levels to fast-track them into leadership positions in education. In addition, the Rwanda Basic Education Board in partnership with the Building Learning Foundations is promoting female school leadership by providing gender-focused training and recruiting for middle management positions (Education Development Trust 2022).

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is faced with a huge gender gap in the teaching profession with only 29% female teachers in basic education whereas majority of teachers in pre-primary education are women. Addressing gender disparities in education and advancing school leadership and management are part of the nine priorities of the country's education sector plan and also reflected in the school teachers and leaders' professional standards that are under implementation since 2017 (Nwokeocha et al 2023b). The country's National Professional Standards and Competencies for Teachers and School Leaders have been mainstreamed into policy documents including the Comprehensive and Harmonized National Teacher Policies, the Teacher Licensing Examination Guidelines and Syllabus and the Collective Agreement Between the Employers of Teachers of Sierra Leone and The Sierra Leone Teachers Union (Wodon et al 2024). Some of the incentives that the country has pursued include restructuring teachers' salaries, aligning their professional standards and competencies with continental frameworks and establishing a strong legal foundation with teachers' service commission (TSC) to regulate teaching.



LOOKING FORWARD: GENDER RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA

These policy recommendations aim at supporting education systems to transcend gender barriers and make school leadership more gender responsive in order to overall achieve effective school leadership and eventual quality education. Gender responsiveness school leadership will go beyond representation of women to ensuring that leadership practices, policies and culture all promote gender equity. In the context of professionalizing school leadership, gender responsiveness is therefore a key ingredient that requires integration within the policy framework for effective school leadership.

The African Center for School Leadership (ACSL) is developing a series of knowledge and advocacy resources to support education stakeholders in ensuring effective school leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa. This policy brief is informed by a desktop analysis of existing literature on gender and school leadership in African countries with a key focus on drawing out the key policy actions that education stakeholders can take in order to address the gender barriers to school leadership. Further analysis may be required to clearly define gender responsiveness in the context of effective school leadership resulting in a framework for gender responsive school leadership in Africa.

Finally, there are best practices across the continent where individual school leaders, schools or ministries have successfully overcome certain gender barriers and provided avenues for accession and retention of female school leaders. This policy brief makes a call for documenting such case studies as a source of inspiration for other school leaders and policy makers.

REFERENCES

- Abonyi, U. K. (2024). Headteachers' leadership practices in Ghana: Does a formal qualification in educational leadership and management programme matter? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*.
- Abonyi, U. K., Boateng, F. K., Adjei-Boateng, E., & Ansaah, E. (2022). Promoting gender equity in school leadership appointments: A comparison of male and female headteachers' instructional leadership practices in Ghana. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 52 (3).
- Aladejana, F., & Aladejana, T. I. (2005). Leadership in Education: The Place of Nigerian Women. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 33(2).
- Anand, G., Atluri, A., Crawford, L., Pugatch, T., & Sheth, K. (2023). Improving School Management in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review. IZA Institute of Labour Economics Discussion Paper Series no. IZA DP No. 16252.
- Bergmann, J; Alban Conto, M.C.; Brossard, M. (2022). Increasing Women's Representation in School Leadership: A promising path towards improving learning. UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti. Florence, Italy.
- Brion, Corinne and Ampah-Mensah, A., (2021). Changing Cultural Norms Through Educational Leadership: Voices from Ghanaian Women Principals. *Educational Leadership Faculty Publications*. 269.
- Bush, T., Kirezi, J., Ashford, R. & Glover, D. (2022). School leadership and gender in Africa: A systematic overview. *Research in Educational Administration & Leadership*, 7(4), 680-712.
- Bush, T., & Glover, D. (2016). School leadership in West Africa: findings from a systematic literature review. *Africa Education Review*, 13(3-4), 80-103.
- Chabaya, O., Rembe, S., & Wadesango, N. (2009). The persistence of gender inequality in Zimbabwe: Factors that impede the advancement of women into leadership positions in primary schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 29, 235–251.
- Dagnew, A., Yirdaw, A., & Asrat, S. (2020). Challenges that contribute to low participation of women in educational leadership at government primary schools, Ethiopia: Women Educational Leadership participation. *Contemporary Educational Researches Journal*, 10, 109– 122.
- Davids, N. (2018). When Identity and Leadership Intersect: The Experiences of Six Female Principals in South Africa. *Africa Education Review*, 15(1), 157–174.
- Dzimiri, C. & Jita, L.C (2022) Outsiders inside: The place of new, inexperienced female school heads in the community, *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8:1, 2085358.
- Education Development Trust. (2022). Rwanda programme boosts female leadership in primary schools. Education Development Trust.
- Global School Leaders, 2024. Evidence review: A review of research on gender in school leadership.

- Gouédard, P., C. Ramos, et B. Tameza. (2023) Women in Learning Leadership (WiLL) – What does Women’s School Leadership look like in Chad? UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti. Research Report Executive Summary.
- GPE (2024) Women in leadership in Madagascar blog.
- GPE (2018) Guidance for Developing Gender-Responsive Education Sector Plans.
- Jativa, X., Karamperidou, D., Mills, M., Vindrola, S., Wedajo, H., Dsouza, A. & Bergmann, J. (2022). Time to Teach: Teacher attendance and time on task in West and Central Africa. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.
- Komiti, M. & Moorosi, P. (2020). Career development of women principals in Lesotho: Influences, opportunities, and challenges. *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, 79: 95-114.
- Martínez, M. M., Molina-López, M. M., & de Cabo, R. M. (2021). Explaining the gender gap in school principalship: A tale of two sides. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(6), 863– 882.
- Mbepera, J. (2015). An exploration of the influences of female underrepresentation in senior leadership positions in community secondary schools (CSSs) in rural Tanzania. Doctoral thesis, UCL Institute of Education.
- Mberia, A.W (2017). Women and leadership in mixed secondary schools in Kenya: Do stakeholders’ attitudes matter? *International Journal of Social Science Research*, 5 (1): 39-52.
- Moorosi, P. (2020). Constructions of leadership identities via narratives of African women school leaders. *Frontiers in Education*, 5, 86.
- Moyo, Z., Perumal, J., & Hallinger, P. (2020). Struggling to make a difference against the odds: A synthesis of qualitative research on women leading schools in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Educational Management*.
- National Teacher Council, (2020). Mentoring and Coaching Framework for Pre-Tertiary Teachers in Ghana. Ministry of Education Ghana.
- Ndebele, C. (2018). Gender and School Leadership: Breaking the Glass Ceiling in South Africa. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies*, 7, 1582.
- Nosike, A.N.; Oguzor, N.S. (2011). Understanding school leadership and management in contemporary Nigeria. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 1(3), 10.
- Nwokeocha, S., E. D. Kah, H. Njora, and Q. Wodon. 2023a. Republic of The Gambia – Situation Analysis of the National Framework of Professional Standards and Competencies for Teachers and School Leaders, IICBA Study No. 2023-3, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa. Link: unesdoc.unesco.org/in/rest/annotationSVC/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach_import_6f160cf8-371d-4785-870b-ea2f8f52196c?_=387275eng.pdf&to=86&from=1.
- Nwokeocha, S., A. Sessay, H. Njora, and Q. Wodon. 2023b. Republic of Sierra Leone – Situation Analysis of the National Framework of Professional Standards and Competencies for Teachers and School Leaders, IICBA Study No. 2023-2, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa.

- REB (2020) Professional Standards for Effective School Leadership in Rwanda. Rwanda Basic Education Board, Kigali.
- Republic of Rwanda (2008) Girls Education Policy. Ministry of Education, Kigali.
- Republic of Rwanda (2007) Teacher Development and Management Policy in Rwanda. Rwanda Education Board, Kigali.
- Republic of Rwanda (2003) 2003 Constitution. Kigali, Republic of Rwanda.
- Shava, G., Tlou, F., & Mpofu, M. (2019). Challenges Facing Women in School Leadership Positions: Experiences from a District in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 19 (14).
- Tangonyire, R. C. (2021). Performing and challenging gendered walls in leadership spaces in single sex schools: Lessons from a male-led girls' basic school in Ghana. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 51(3), 637-654.
- Tangonyire, R., Nyame, G., Bediako Asare, K., & Jangu Alhassan, A. (2022). The experiences of female headteachers of boys' senior high schools in Ghana. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 52(4), 815-836.
- UNICEF Innocenti and Ghana Ministry of Education, UNICEF Ghana, UNICEF Innocenti (2023). *Data Must Speak: Schools Inspiring Change: Research on the practices and behaviours of positive deviant schools in Ghana*. Innocenti Research Report, Florence, Italy.
- UNESCO, 2024. *Le leadership des femmes pour la réussite scolaire à Madagascar. Une analyse institutionnelle sensible au genre de la direction d'école primaire*. IPE-UNESCO Dakar, 2024. Link: unesdoc.unesco.org/in/rest/annotationSVC/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach_import_fcd1e14b-68e4-48b1-813b-a4e62325de76?_=389222fre.pdf&to=84&from=1.
- UNESCO (2023a) *The role of women school principals in improving learning in French-speaking Africa*. ISBN : 978-92-803-1472-4.
- UNESCO (2023b). *Education in Africa: placing equity at the heart of policy; continental report*. UNESCO Office Dakar and Regional Bureau for Education in Africa and African Union.
- WISE (2022) *Education Reimagined: Leadership For A New Era*. Centre for Strategic Education, Victoria. ISBN 978-0-6454278-1-3.
- Wodon, Q., C. Male, and A. Onagoruwa. *Africa Teachers Report (2024). Educating Girls and Ending Child Marriage in Africa: Investment Case and the Role of Teachers and School Leaders*. IICBA Study 2024-2. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: UNESCO IICBA.
- World Bank (2018). *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

PARTNER OF



**African Centre
for School Leadership**

VVOB – education for development
Julien Dillensplein 1 bus 2A
1060 Brussels
Belgium

T • +32 (0)2 209 07 99
E • info@vvob.org

in VVOB
 @VVOBvzw
 VVOBvzw

www.vvob.org

In partnership with



Belgium
partner in development



Flanders
State of the Art

Leaders in Teaching