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# Strengthening Effective School Leadership in Africa:

## A framework for policy development

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## Executive summary

Recognizing the vital role that school leadership plays in enhancing educational outcomes, student achievement and wellbeing, VVOB – education for development in collaboration with partners initiated the "African Centre for School Leadership" to enhance effective school leadership in Africa. To lay the foundation for this Centre, an exploratory scoping review and a consensus-building study were conducted. The two studies revealed a significant gap in school leadership policy development across many African countries, confirmed by a mapping exercise in Rwanda, Kenya, and Ghana.

To address this gap, the Centre is committed to working with governments on the development of school leadership policies, standards, and guidelines. This framework provides evidence-based insights for developing school leadership policies in Africa, which together give guidance for the development of national policies to strengthen school leadership in Africa. The framework focuses on the following key topics: conceptualizing school leadership in the African context; school leadership roles and responsibilities; competences, standards, and assessment; school leaders' career stages, certification and licensing of school leaders, removing gender barriers in school leadership, and professional organization of school leaders. A consultative workshop with partners mainly policy makers, researchers and experts in school leadership in Africa was organized to validate the framework. As a next step, the Centre will develop policy briefs on these recommended topics.

## Introduction and background

VVOB– *education for development*, together with the government of Rwanda initiated the African Centre for School Leadership (ACSL) to ignite and promote the potential of school leadership in improving quality of education in Africa. Hosted in Rwanda, this Centre is a coalition of African and African-based organisations and governments coordinated by three regional partners namely, the Association for Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), Education Sub Saharan Africa (ESSA) and VVOB-*education for development.* The Centre is committed to promoting effective school leadership in Africa by bringing together partners that offer professional development services, research, and policy advice on effective school leadership. Building supportive school leadership systems will lead to improved teaching, and in turn, improved learning outcomes, equity, and wellbeing.

To lay the foundations for the Centre, an exploratory scoping review of the empirical research on school leadership in Africa was carried out (Bush et al., 2022). The study offers insights on what constitutes effective school leadership on the continent, based on empirical research. The findings of this study also provide insights about key competencies and practices that are associated with effective school leadership, the features of effective and scalable Professional Development (PD) for school leaders as well as on how local, national, and regional policies promote or inhibit school leaders' leadership practices in Africa. A complementary study on building a consensus on school leadership for quality education in Africa was also conducted to draw on the opinion of experts in the field and across Africa to provide a critical eye to the findings from the review.

Based on the findings from the two studies, recommendations were made with regards to key areas that the ACSL should focus on to promote effective school leadership in Africa. One of them is the development of school leadership policies, standards, and guidelines. This framework is developed in line with this recommendation and the recognition of the importance of school leadership in education policy agendas internationally.
School leadership has been recognized as a vital factor in enhancing educational outcomes and student achievement (Leithwood and Riehl, 2004; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Effective school leadership entails the capacity to motivate and inspire teachers to perform better their teaching practice, ultimately leading to better student outcomes.

The framework includes evidence-based insights and recommendations which together give guidance for the development of national policies, standards, or guidelines to strengthen school leadership in African countries. It suggests the following key topics that constitute areas of policy attention. These topics include: (1) Conceptualizing school leadership competences in the African context; (2) School leadership roles and responsibilities; competences, standards, and assessment; (3) School leaders' career ladders/stages including recruitment and placement, and school

leadership preparation and development; (4) Certification and licensing of school Leaders; (5) Removing gender barriers in school leadership; (5) professional organizations for school leaders.

### Methodology

This framework for policy development in school leadership across Africa is grounded in an exploratory scoping review of empirical research on school leadership within the continent. This review was complemented by a consensus-building study aimed at establishing principles of effective school leadership for enhancing quality education in Africa. Both studies played a crucial role in the founding of the African Centre for School Leadership.

The scoping review utilized a qualitative approach, selecting and analyzing peer-reviewed articles and reports to identify key trends and gaps in African school leadership research. To enhance the policy relevance of these findings, a consensus-building workshop was held with key stakeholders, gathering diverse perspectives on effective school leadership. Furthermore, a mapping exercise in Rwanda, Kenya, and Ghana was conducted to identify ongoing school leadership initiatives and assess their alignment with identified research trends. This included an in-depth focus on specific practices in each country.

The combination of these methodologies—scoping review, consensus-building, and mapping—provided a comprehensive understanding of school leadership practices across Africa. This triangulated approach has informed the creation of this framework for guiding policy development in school leadership on the continent.

## Recommended key areas of policy attention.

### Conceptualizing school leadership competences in the African context

This section suggests ideas and understanding about school leadership in the African context. It defines school leadership from a distributed perspective and highlights the role of the context in promoting effective school leadership.

#### Defining school leadership from a distributed perspective

In recent years, due to the increasing demands for accountability in education, the roles and responsibilities of school leaders (principals/headteachers) have grown more complex and now require a collaborative approach, rather than

relying solely on the charisma of an individual leader (Hartley, 2007). This has led to a shift away from the concept of heroic leadership, emphasizing the importance of distributing leadership responsibilities across various levels of the school organization, as emphasized in contemporary literature (Gumus et al., 2018).

Distributed leadership practices have been recognized as crucial for improving student achievement. Research suggests that sharing leadership among staff can enhance student learning outcomes, primarily by strengthening teachers' academic capabilities (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2008). VVOB'S review of empirical studies on school leadership in Africa confirmed considerable interest in the distributed leadership model on the African continent (Bush et al., 2022).

While there is limited literature specifically addressing the impact of distributed leadership practices on the quality of instruction, numerous studies have provided evidence supporting a positive link between various school organizational factors influenced by distributed leadership, such as organizational change, teacher leadership, professional learning communities, teachers' self-confidence, and school morale (Bolden, 2011). This indicates that distributed leadership may indirectly affect the quality of teaching.

Despite the strong evidence supporting distributed leadership as a key practice for school improvement and student learning, the concept remains somewhat ambiguous (Hartley, 2007). There is no universally accepted definition, set of practices, or consistent terminology associated with it. Spillane (2005) identified four terms—shared, collaborative, dispersed, and delegated leadership—that are often used interchangeably to refer to distributed leadership in the literature. Among these various definitions, some have garnered more attention. From a distributed perspective, leadership practice is seen as the result of synergistic interactions among leaders, followers, and their context (Spillane, 2005). The emphasis here is on the leadership activity itself, rather than just the actions of individual leaders (Spillane et al., 2004). This approach involves all school staff working collectively and collaboratively to develop knowledge.

Another perspective views distributed leadership as decision-making practices carried out by staff at multiple levels, rather than being the responsibility of a single individual (Harris, 2009; Lashway, 2006).

The prevailing definition of distributed leadership in current educational research is primarily influenced by this perspective, defining it as the capacity of schools to engage multiple staff members and stakeholders in decision-making processes (OECD, 2014b). This is also aligned with the UNESCO- Global Education Monitoring Report (2023), A think-piece on leadership and education.

African education policy makers are recommended to develop a policy with clear and comprehensive definition of distributed leadership within their educational context. This policy should clearly describe expected roles and responsibilities at every level.

The distribution of leadership should be in three levels, engaging broader participation of different education actors in leadership.

- **At the School Level:** This includes pre-primary, primary, secondary, technical, and vocational education. Leaders within schools include teachers, middle-level leaders, community leaders, school management committees, and boards. Additionally, student leaders can play a crucial role in this context.
- **At the Education System Level:** At both local and central levels of the education administration, multiple individuals contribute to school leadership by providing academic supervision and handling operational aspects. They also play a key role in shaping the education system by participating in the development and implementation of national laws, policies, and standards. System leaders at these levels include district education officers, inspectors, supervisors, as well as officers at ministries of education and national implementation agencies.
- **Beyond the Education System:** This includes among others non-state actors, such as civil society organizations, employer organizations, unions, and the media, which also exert influence by monitoring and applying pressure on education system leaders to adhere to their commitments or bring about changes.

## The role of context in school leadership

In the process of strengthening school leadership in Africa, policy makers need to pay attention to some key contextual aspects. These include (i) recognition of African-based (indigenous) leadership models, (ii) urban and rural contexts, (iii) decentralization of education systems and (iv) expanding leadership beyond the school setting to engage the school community and finally (v) regional and country-level contexts informing school leadership.

### *Exploring African based (Indigenous) leadership models*

The historical development of education in general and of educational leadership in particular has been predominantly shaped by Western perspectives, contributing to leadership models that reflects a colonial legacy, (Lopez, 2020; Pont, 2020). The authors explain that this legacy is characterized by the omission of diverse concepts, theories, and representations of school leadership influenced by factors such as language, country, culture, and educational systems. With this background and acknowledging that prevailing school leadership models in existing literature are largely rooted in Western perspectives, there is a growing recognition and influence of scholarship on indigenous leadership perspectives. Notably, works like those by Khalifa, Khalil, Marsh, Halloran (2019), and Ruth (2020) are gaining prominence. It is essential for African governments and educational policymakers to delve into leadership

viewpoints that align with their specific context and values. One example of such African-based leadership model is Ubuntu school leadership, which holds potential resonance in certain regions of Africa.

This aligns with the emerging recognition of culturally responsive leadership as a crucial trend in education sector. Educational leaders are encouraged to lead with cultural competence, demonstrating an understanding of the diverse backgrounds and experiences of both students and staff. Culturally responsive leadership entails the creation of a culturally affirming and inclusive school environment that acknowledges and respects the cultural identities of all individuals within the educational community.
Educational policymakers are encouraged to invest in research and development of leadership models that align with the specific cultural contexts and values of their countries.

### *Urban and rural contexts*

Strengthening effective school leadership requires differentiated attention to urban versus rural contexts. This is because rural and urban circumstances may create different challenges and opportunities for school leaders. A recent study conducted by Sumida and Kawata, (2021) reveals that the urban-rural learning gap in recent years is attributed mostly to differences in school and family characteristics. Therefore, understanding and addressing these contextual differences is essential for promoting positive educational outcomes in diverse school environment. Riley, (2013) explains that principals should understand the context in which they work in order to address the needs of the learners and community to which they are accountable. This means, tailoring leadership strategies to the specific challenges, resources, and community dynamics of each setting is recommended.

### *Decentralisation of education*

Winkler and Yeo (2007) characterize decentralization of education as the shift of decision-making authority and accountability from central government education ministries to local government and individual schools. A study conducted in six sub-Saharan countries— Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe indicated that, across all the six countries, important education decisions related to curriculum, school management, and organizational matters were rarely decentralized, hindering local community involvement in decision-making (Naidoo, 2002). These findings suggest a lack of suitable structures and frameworks necessary to support comprehensive education decentralization. However, further studies have highlighted improvements in decentralization processes, particularly in fostering community participation in education delivery through entities like School Management Committees (SMCs) or School Committees (SCs) (Bashasha, Magheni, and Nkonya, 2011; Sasaoka and Nishimura, 2010).

*Expanding leadership beyond the school setting—the role of the school community*

Schleicher, (2012) highlights a crucial role for school leaders in fostering collaboration with neighboring schools or communities. Through these collaborative efforts, schools and their leaders establish networks, share resources, and work collectively. This extends the scope of leadership beyond individual schools to the well-being of young people in the community/municipality/district or region. Such engagements contribute to cultivating a culture where advancements in school leadership are achieved collaboratively across communities, benefiting all involved parties. In this case, leadership responsibilities such as management of school resources and school improvement planning are shared, aiming to align schools and municipalities/district or region in thinking systematically to promote a unified vision of education and a cohesive school system.

The same author suggests that leaders' collaboration with other schools and the local community enhances problem-solving through intensified interaction, communication, and collective learning processes. It also contributes to building leadership capacity and addresses issues of succession and stability by increasing the prevalence and opportunities for local leadership at both the school and community levels.

The leadership communities of practice project initiated and implemented in Ghana by VVOB in collaboration with its partners Sabre Education, Right to Play and Afrikids to strengthen Play-Based learning in ECE in three districts in Ghana is an example of leadership beyond the school setting that can be scaled in Ghana and in other countries. African governments are recommended to establish a comprehensive school leadership policy within the education sector reflecting contextual aspects in school leadership.

The policy:

1. reflects and responds to the cultural contexts of the communities, promoting inclusivity, understanding, and effectiveness in educational system,
2. tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of urban and rural contexts aiming to strengthen school leadership in a way that is responsive to the challenges and opportunities unique to each setting,
3. outlines the scope of decentralization, specifying decision-making authority, and describing accountability measures. This policy also will establish and or strengthen structures, such as School Management Committees (SMCs) or School Committees (SCs), to facilitate community participation in education,
4. encourages and supports school leaders in building partnerships with neighboring schools and communities, outline guidelines and incentives for schools to engage in collaborative efforts, such as forming networks, sharing resources, and working collectively.

### *Regional and country-level contexts*

While sub-Saharan Africa is a diverse region with different education systems, there are some commonalities and challenges shared among many countries. For example, education systems in sub-Saharan Africa share concerns about the overall quality of education which can be addressed by effective school leadership.

Evans and Mendez Acosta, (2021) in their analysis of 145 empirical studies, found that over the last 50 years, education in Sub-Saharan Africa has made substantial progress, with a nearly 50% increase in the completion of primary school (from 46% to 68%) and a doubling in the completion of lower secondary school (from 22% to 40%) between 1970 and 2010. However, despite these improvements, about one in three children still does not finish primary school. Assessments reveal that many students lack adequate literacy or numeracy skills even after several years of schooling leading to the situation characterized as a 'learning crisis' (World Bank,2018).

This learning crisis is attributed to immediate causes such as unprepared students, poor teaching quality, focus on educational inputs that do not drive learning, and weak school management (World Bank, 2018). In recent years, the World Bank's Education GP introduced the concept of "learning poverty" which refers to the inability to read and understand a simple text by age 10. The rate of learning poverty before the pandemic in 2019 was 57% in low- and middle-income countries was particularly high in Sub-Saharan Africa (about 87 percent), (World Bank, 2022). Strengthening effective school leadership in Africa can be a solution to addressing all factors underlying the learning crisis (learning poverty) on the continent as an effective school leader ensures effective use of resources and support teachers, (Bush, et al, 2022).

It is important to note that while there are similarities, there are also considerable variations among the education systems in sub-Saharan Africa due to differences in history, culture, and governance structures. Otunga, et al., (2009) supports that education systems and school leadership in Africa are influenced by factors including geographical, historical, social, cultural, and economic contexts shared by African countries. The authors explain the example of historical factors, such as colonization by Britain and France, that have left a lasting impact, resulting in the categorization of African countries as English-speaking (Anglophone), French-speaking (Francophone), and Portuguese-speaking (Lusophone). This historical background has contributed to variations in formal education across Africa, reflecting the specific foreign influences each region has experienced.

In their effort to strengthen school leadership for quality education, education policy makers in Africa through the African Centre for School leadership and in partnership with key regional bodies including ADEA and ESSA are recommended to conduct regional research to understand overarching trends and challenges. The findings can inform policy decisions

and help prioritize areas that need attention at the regional level and can be tailored at county level, such as the development and implementation of regional professional development initiatives for school leaders. Regional professional development can provide a platform for leaders to learn from one another, exchange experiences, and develop leadership skills that are contextually relevant to the region.

It is recommended to coordinate school leadership policies at the regional level by relevant bodies to create a more cohesive and standardized approach to certain issues. The goal is to create a **cohesive regional framework** that ensures consistency and coherence in the application of leadership policies across various schools and educational institutions within the region. However, it is important to consider maintaining flexibility within this standardized approach to accommodate and address the unique needs and challenges that may be specific to countries within the region. In other words, while there is an overarching regional framework, there should still be room for adaptation and customization to suit the diverse contexts and circumstances of different countries, schools or communities.

## School leadership roles and responsibilities; competences, standards, and assessment

Many school leaders in African countries are still not meeting expectations in creating conditions for effective teaching and learning in their schools and this affects learning outcomes. This shortfall may be attributed to a lack of a framework defining key school leadership roles and responsibilities, particularly in aligning them with the fundamental focus of the school, which is to enhance the teaching and learning process.

Global School Leaders, (2020) explains that many education systems, particularly those in the global South, often lack a set of research-based criteria defining the qualities of an effective school leader. This gap poses a challenge in assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of school leadership.

To address this challenge, OECD (2008) recommends that governments need to redefine school leadership responsibilities focusing on four major domains of school leadership responsibilities to improve student outcomes including (1) supporting, evaluating, and developing teacher quality, (2) goal setting, assessment, and accountability, (3) Strategic financial and human resource management; (4) collaborating with other schools. These key responsibilities of school leadership are very much in line with the professional standards for effective school leadership in Rwanda which include: (1) setting the strategic direction for the school; (2) leading learning; (3) leading teaching; (4) managing school resources; (5) working with parents and the wider community. A related school leadership assessment toolkit was also developed. This is a concrete example of the government effort to promote effective school leadership.

Considering that numerous African countries are still in the early stages of promoting school leadership systems, assessing effective school leadership remains a challenge. To address this issue, Bush et al. (2022) recommend adopting a standards-based approach to school leadership professional development during the initial phases of promoting school leadership in Africa. This approach can articulate official expectations of principals and identify the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of school leaders. Once the standards for effective school leadership are well described in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude, the next step would be to develop a related assessment tool.

Education policy makers at country level are recommended to develop school leadership frameworks or standards that can offer guidance on the main characteristics, roles and responsibilities of effective school leaders. The frameworks or standards can serve as a basis for consistent recruitment, professional development and assessment of school leaders and can be adapted to fit local and school-specific contexts. Moreover, it's crucial to involve key stakeholders in the development of these frameworks.

## School leadership career ladders/phases

The professionalization of school leadership involves a continuous effort to improve the professional skills, knowledge, and standards of individuals holding leadership roles in schools. This ongoing process seeks to raise the standing of school leaders, enhance their effectiveness, and ensure they meet the changing demands of the education sector. Here are proposed steps towards professionalization of school leaders:

### School leader recruitment/selection and placement

The process of recruitment or selection of school principals/headteachers matters for the quality of school leadership. However, many countries currently lack policy guidance concerning the requirements to become a school leader (Tournier et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2019b). Bush et al. (2022), in their review of empirical research on school leadership in Africa, indicate that in most African countries, school principals or headteachers, begin their professional careers as teachers before moving to headship position via a range of middle and senior leadership and management roles. This is linked to the wide perspective that teaching qualification and teaching experience are enough for school leadership. School principals are appointed throughout Africa based on a successful record as teachers (Bush & Oduro, 2006). In other words, the selection of school leaders is considered as a teacher promotion, as indicates Gurmu, (2020), in his study on the processes of Ethiopian primary school principals' selection and primary school principals in Ethiopia.

Based on the above evidence-base challenges in the education systems in Africa, policy makers are encouraged to reconsider their approach to recruiting/selecting and placement of school principal/headteachers to ensure effective leadership of schools. To do this, the following are some possible policy actions:

- Develop a policy with clear, effective, and transparent procedures and criteria for recruitment or selection of school leaders depending on their contexts.
- Introduce or reinforce the importance of formal leadership qualifications specific to school leadership roles.
- Develop accredited programs or certifications that align with established leadership standards.

## School leadership preparation and development

Bush (2018) listed five reasons why it is important for governments to invest in school leadership preparation and development. (1) the expansion of the role of school principal; (2) the devolution of powers to school level; (3) the increasing complexity of school contexts; (4) recognition that preparation is a moral obligation and (5) recognition that effective preparation and development make a difference. In line with this, OECD, (2012) describes school leadership development as a continuum supporting the school leadership career through different stages.

### *Initial leadership training*

Initial leadership training also referred to as pre-service leadership preparation is offered in some countries such as, Canada, Singapore, and the United States to potential principals before being appointed. Such programmes may lead to a university degree or specialized approved qualification. There is a debate whether these initial training programmes in school leadership should be mandatory. Bush et al., (2022) identified some example advocating for structured formal, compulsory, and mandatory training for school leaders include in Botswana (Pheko, 2008), South Africa (Mestry, 2017b), Kenya (Kaume -Mwinzi, 2016), Ghana (Suaka & Kuranchie, 2018), Ethiopia (Gurmu, 2020), Malawi (Wamba, 2015) and Uganda (DeJaeghere et al., 2009). Advocates for these compulsory programmes argue that they would contribute to the professionalization of school leadership and can facilitate alignment with national goals and priorities. On the contrary, other people argue that mandatory programmes do not encourage flexibility and innovation responding to the diverse needs of school leaders.

### *Induction*

Induction programmes are particularly valuable to prepare and integrate newly recruited or appointed school leaders. These programmes should be a combination of theoretical and practical knowledge as well as self-study package. The focus of the induction programme will be about introducing school leaders to assume their role as leaders at respective levels. The length and the provider of the induction programme can vary depending on the context.

### *Continuous professional development*

School leaders are expected to continuously update their skills and keep up with new developments. The content, length, mode of delivery and the provider of the in-service programmes for school leaders should be clearly defined but they can vary depending on the needs and context of the country. The professional development of school leaders may cover a range of topics and modalities to enhance their leadership skills, address current challenges in education, and promote continuous improvement.

The topics and modalities are tailored to the unique needs and context of each school or district. Here are some examples of topics that the professional development of school leaders may focus on: leadership and management skills, instructional leadership, curriculum development and assessment, technology integration, school improvement planning, equity and inclusion, human resources management, financial management and budgeting, community engagement, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), data literacy and assessment, crisis management and school safety, etc. The modalities may include but not limited to workshops and seminars, online courses or blended programmes, mentorship programmes, action research projects, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), job-embedded Professional Development, etc.

Governments can create a comprehensive and adaptable professional development framework or policy guidelines for school leadership preparation and development, ensuring that school leaders are well-equipped to navigate the evolving educational landscape.

This framework should define national PD programmes for school leaders and develop incentives to ensure that school leaders participate. The framework should also clarify the content, length, mode of delivery and the provider of the programme depending on the needs and context of the country. Participants and other agencies might share the cost of the programme or subsidies might be granted.

## Certification and licensing for school leadership

In Africa and various parts of the world, it is a widespread practice for numerous professions across different sectors, including nursing, medicine, law, and engineering, to hold advanced certifications or licenses signifying expertise beyond basic entry-level skills. Similar to the ongoing education or relicensing requirements for lawyers, accountants, architects, and nurses to uphold their certifications, school leaders should follow a comparable practice. Licensing implies that professionals with advanced certificates possess a specialized set of experiences within their respective fields.

Licensing not only regulates practices but also signifies a comprehensive knowledge base and skills set. The crucial question remains: do current school principals or headteachers in Africa possess the necessary skills to transform persistently underperforming schools and ensure academic success for every student? Certification, achieved through extensive, specialized training and supervised practice, denotes professional accomplishments surpassing minimal qualifications. Consequently, licensing for principals or headteachers should reflect significant professional achievement and thorough preparation for their roles, rather than merely fulfilling minimum qualifications (Adams & Copland, 2005).

Licencing for school leadership could be aligned with or adapted from the leadership career path developed by the African Union (2019). Minimum criteria of licencing for school leadership could be successful completion of a National Diploma in school leadership and management and passing the competency assessment.

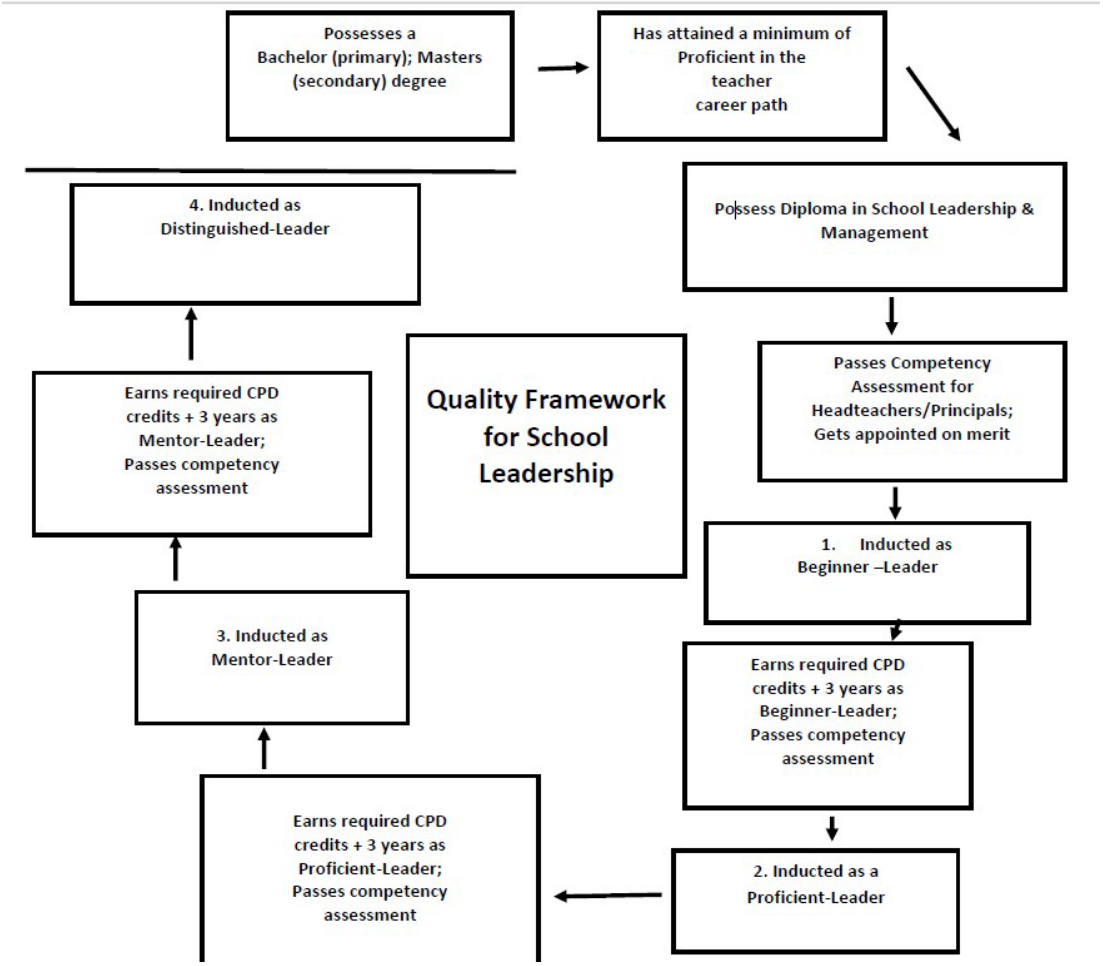



*Figure 1: School leadership career path in Africa (African Union, 2019)*

Considering the importance of enhancing the skills and capabilities of school leaders in Africa, it is recommended to develop a comprehensive policy for licensing school principals or headteachers. The policy should align with or adapted from the leadership career path outlined by the African Union. This approach aims to elevate the quality of school leadership, ultimately contributing to improved educational outcomes in Africa.

## Removing gender barriers in school leadership/women in school leadership

Gender in school leadership appeared as one of the emerging topics from a recent review of empirical research on School leadership in Africa that was commissioned by VVOB and conducted by Bush et al, (2022). This study was carried out for the purpose of building the theoretical foundation of the African Centre for school leadership. The main finding from this review was that women are under-represented in school l leadership and management. This is an issue that needs to be addressed to achieve gender balance in educational leadership and management. To address this issue, it is important to examine the underlying reasons behind the barriers faced by female teachers aspiring to assume leadership roles, particularly in comparison to their male counterparts. Bush, (2017) explains that leadership roles are linked to gender stereotypes and bias, where primary school management positions are highly feminized, whereas headships at high school level are more commonly held by men. The imperative now is to confront and rectify this gender disparity to foster a more equitable and inclusive landscape in educational leadership.

Educational policy makers in Africa are encouraged to develop a Gender and Inclusive School Leadership Policy with the purpose to eliminate gender barriers in school leadership, fostering an environment that promotes equal opportunities and representation for all genders in educational leadership positions. This policy will among other things provide guidance on the school leaders' recruitment processes to eliminate biases that may hinder the selection of female leaders.

## Professional organization of school leaders

In some countries, school leaders are united into professional organizations, which function as platforms for professional discussions, knowledge exchange, and the sharing of best practices among peers, as well as between professionals and policymakers (OECD 2011). By providing a forum for networking and professional development, these organizations can contribute to the continuous improvement of educational leadership, and, by extension, the quality of education provided to students. To achieve their mandates, these organizations require a supportive policy environment that enhances their effectiveness and, consequently, contributes to the overall improvement of education systems. Research is needed to understand the existence and nature of these professional organizations, especially on the African continent.

It is important to create a supportive policy environment that enhances the effectiveness of school leaders' professional organizations and, consequently, contributes to the overall improvement of education systems. The following points can be taken into consideration for policy development in this context:

- Recognize and officially acknowledge school leaders' professional organizations as important contributors to the education sector.
- Provide institutional support, both financially and administratively, to help these organizations fulfill their roles effectively.
- Encourage regular communication and collaboration between school leaders' professional organizations and policymakers.
- provision of incentives for school leaders to actively participate in professional associations, such as recognition, awards, …
- Establish mechanisms for the active involvement of these organizations in the development and review of education policies.

## Conclusion

Enhancing effective school leadership in Africa demands attention and action at the policy level. This includes formulating relevant policies to fortify the existing efforts in school leadership systems and to address the challenges and gaps identified within the system. It is with this vision that this framework was initiated to provide insights and recommendations for school leadership policy development focusing on some key topics. The framework recommends the formulation of a policy on conceptualization of school leadership competences in the African context. This policy will include defining school leadership from a distributed perspective, the role of context in school leadership, as well as the importance of expanding leadership beyond the school setting to involve the school communities. The framework also includes a recommendation for the development of standards defining the main characteristics, roles and responsibilities of effective school leaders. The same standards will serve as criteria for assessment of effective school leadership. Another recommendation for policy development is on school leaders' career stages including recruitment and placement, school leadership preparation and development as well as licensing for School Leadership. To address issues related to gender inequality in school leadership roles and advocates for strategies to promote equal opportunities for men and women in school leadership positions, policy development on removing gender barriers in school leadership is recommended in African countries. The framework finally recommends the formulation of a policy encouraging the establishment and recognition of professional organizations for school leaders as they can serve as

channels to support education reform and for school leaders to collectively voice their concerns and suggestions, ensuring their perspectives are considered in education policymaking.

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