

POLICY BRIEF

Advancing Gender-Transformative Leadership: Equal Education for All in Tanzania

ECHIDNA GLOBAL SCHOLARS PROGRAM





Executive Summary

Women's leadership in education is essential for achieving gender equality and improving learning outcomes. While Tanzania has made progress in increasing girls' access to education, significant gender disparities persist in leadership roles, particularly in secondary schools. Men continue to dominate both teaching and administrative positions, limiting the influence of women in decisionmaking processes that shape education policy and practice.

Despite Tanzania's strong commitments to gender equality through national policies and international frameworks, women's representation in school leadership remains low. In rural secondary schools, only 19% are led by women, while urban and peri-urban schools fare slightly better at 36%. Key barriers include social norms that prioritize men in leadership, structural inequalities in promotion pathways, and limited access to professional development and higher education for women teachers. The absence of gender-specific targets, accountability mechanisms, and structured mentorship programs further hinders women's advancement into leadership roles.

However, evidence highlights that women-led schools lead to better student performance and help break gender stereotypes, fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Women leaders employ collaborative and inclusive leadership styles, which have been linked to improved school governance and learning outcomes. Addressing the barriers to women's leadership is therefore crucial for both equity and education system effectiveness.

I. Introduction

Women's participation in leadership is crucial for social and economic development and essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (UN Women, 2024). However, with less than six years until the 2030 deadline, leadership roles across the world remain male-dominated. Women hold only 27% of parliamentary seats and represent only 35.5% of local government leadership, and only 28% in the workplace globally (UN Women, 2023). And growth is slow; at the current pace, women's leadership and participation in public life is projected to reach only 30% by 2050 (UN Women, 2024).

The education sector is a key entry point for improving women's leadership participation. Women dominate the teaching workforce globally, though their representation declines at higher levels of education: 94% of pre-primary teachers, 66% in primary, 54% in secondary, and 43% in tertiary education (UNESCO, 2020). However, this dominance has not translated into school leadership roles, where women remain underrepresented (UNICEF, 2022).

Evidence shows that increasing women's representation in school leadership brings significant benefits, both within and outside schools. Research in Africa suggests women principals often employ more collaborative and inclusive leadership styles (Bush et al., 2022). Women's leadership is also linked to improved learning outcomes for students (UNICEF, 2022) and one study across 14 African countries found students in women-led schools performed better than those in schools headed by men (Weinstein et al., 2021 in UNICEF 2022).

Women's leadership in education is also crucial for advancing gender-transformative education, which challenges power relations and redefines gender norms (UNICEF, 2021). Having women leaders in schools can break gender stereotypes and inspire children to view leadership as equally accessible to all (UNICEF, 2023). Schools are the first places where children experience leadership; failing to promote women into school leadership risks perpetuating existing gender inequalities.

In Tanzania, while gender parity in school enrollment has improved (MoEST, 2023), gender disparities persist in the teaching profession. Men still constitute over two-thirds of secondary school teachers and 69% of teacher trainees (MoEST, 2021). Additionally, an analysis of data from 493 secondary schools found that only 19% of rural schools and 36% of urban or peri-urban schools were led by women¹. While gender equality efforts have focused on students, little attention has been given to teachers and to leadership pathways within the education system.

This policy brief examines women's leadership pathways in Tanzania's secondary education sector. It explores the enabling and hindering factors influencing women's leadership, identifies key relationships that support or inhibit progress, and highlights structural challenges that fail to address gender barriers. The brief concludes with concrete recommendations to enhance women's leadership in the education system.

¹ I analyzed data from 493 secondary schools working with CAMFED, which accounts for about 10% of the 4,905 government secondary schools in Tanzania (BEST, 2024).

II. Context

To ensure women's leadership within secondary education, it is key to understand Tanzania's efforts to advance gender equality and women's leadership more generally and within the education sector. Gender equality in education is not isolated but supported by global, regional, and national commitments and policies. Strengthening women's leadership in education requires aligning sector-specific initiatives with national gender strategies to address systemic barriers and create an enabling environment for women to thrive in leadership roles.

TANZANIA'S COMMITMENT TO GENDER EQUALITY: FRAMEWORKS SUPPORTING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Tanzania is a signatory to several global, regional, and national frameworks and agreements aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. It endorses the Global Education 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which call for women's full participation and equal opportunities in decision-making at all levels.

Regionally, Tanzania aligns with frameworks that promote the advancement of gender equality and women's leadership, such as the 1997 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Education and Training and the 1998 SADC Gender Declaration, along with its Addendum on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children.

Other commitments to women's leadership include the 2000 Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All and the Africa Agenda 2063, which envision women holding at least 50% of leadership positions across public and private sectors. Tanzania also adheres to the East African Community (EAC) Gender Policy and the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality, as well as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women (2003) both of which advocate for the promotion of women's leadership and gender equality, emphasizing implementation of policies that ensure women's full participation in decision making and create enabling environment for women to thrive in leadership positions.

Nationally, Tanzania established the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children (MCDGC) in 1990, now the Ministry of Community Development, Gender, Women and Special Groups, to spearhead gender development efforts. Over time, the Ministry has expanded its mandate and now includes a dedicated department for gender and women's issues. The Ministry's primary objective is to mainstream gender equality and equity across all sectors². The Tanzania Development Policy incorporates these goals, ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into all policies, programs, and strategies. The Gender and Women

² <https://www.jamii.go.tz/>

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Development Policy, initially established in 2000 and revised in 2023, promotes gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender focal points are established in most ministries, government departments, and regional and local authorities. Additionally, the National Strategy for Gender Development (NSGD), first developed in 2005, has been revised to address current gender challenges and ensure its relevance and effectiveness.

Despite these commitments and structures, progress in gender equality remains uneven, particularly in relation to women's leadership. Gains have been made in political leadership, as highlighted in the 2024 parliamentary budget speech (Tanzania Parliament, 2024). However, similar strides have not been achieved in educational leadership. The lack of systematic tracking of progress further complicates efforts to address disparities.

TANZANIA'S COMMITMENT TO INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Tanzania demonstrates a strong commitment to gender equality in education through various policies and strategies. The 2014 Education and Training Policy, amended in 2023, recognizes and promotes gender equality in education and training to ensure the right to education for all. This policy emphasizes gender-sensitive practices to encourage women's participation and leadership in educational institutions. These objectives are operationalized through the Education Sector Development Plans (ESDP), developed every 5 years. The latest "final draft" of the ESDP III includes explicit goals, such as providing leadership trainings to school managers (with a focus on women), establishing a succession planning model to promote more women into senior roles, and prioritizing leadership training for female staff in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

Despite these efforts, these policies might lack gender-specific targets, measurable outcomes, and accountability mechanisms that are associated with advancing progress in gender equality (CGD, 2020). Without clear targets, tracking representation and holding institutions accountable becomes challenging. For instance, the objective to "prioritize and fast-track female staff" lacks detailed guidance on implementation. Furthermore, data on women's leadership in the education sector remains limited, highlighting the need for targeted data collection and analysis.

LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES IN TANZANIA'S EDUCATION SECTOR

The education sector is managed by two main ministries with distinct mandates. The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) is responsible for overseeing education from early childhood to higher education. Its primary role is to formulate and implement policies in education, science, research, technology, and innovation while ensuring quality assurance and accreditation in schools and teacher training. The ministry focuses on "identifying and nurturing" talent, developing local expertise, and promoting science, engineering, and mathematics. Additionally, it oversees educational publications, manages national awards, and addresses the country's skill development needs. MoEST also coordinates training in Folk Development Colleges, enhances human resource productivity, conducts research in science and technology, and supervises various agencies, programs, and projects under its jurisdiction (MoEST, 2025). The second key ministry is the President's Office for Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG), which handles decentralized education administration, collaborating with regional and local authorities to implement policies at the grassroots level (PO-RALG, 2025).

At the national level, MoEST is organized into various divisions and units, each headed by an Assistant Director, with additional units beneath them. Similarly, PO-RALG has an organizational structure that includes divisions and sections, each led by directors and assistant directors (President's Office, 2025).

Locally, leadership extends from Regional Education Officers (REO) to school-level leaders and are responsible for ensuring the effective management of educational activities across different administrative levels. REOs report to the Regional Administrative Secretary, who operates under the authority of PO-RALG. District Education Officers (DEOs) coordinate

education in districts and are accountable to the district council, and the Ward Education Officers report to DEOs. At the school level, leadership is provided by the Head of Schools (secondary) and Head Teachers (primary) who report to DEOs.

Top level education leadership—in both the MoEST and PO-RALG—remains male-dominated (see Figure 1). As these national roles are often filled with those who have previously held local leadership positions, including school leaders, efforts to achieve gender parity should focus on increasing women's representation across the education system, starting at the school level.

Figure 1. Top education sector leadership in Tanzania by gender

LEADERSHIP LEVEL	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL	% WOMEN
Ministry of Education, Science and Technology				
Top-level leadership (Minister-Commissioner)	4	1	5	20%
Mid-level leadership (Directors of Division)	9	6	15	40%
Total	13	7	20	35%
President's Office for Regional Administration and Local Government				
Top-level leadership (Minister to Permanent Secretaries)	6	2	8	25%
Mid-level leadership (Directors of Division)	10	5	15	33%
Lower-level leadership (Assistant Directors)	14	4	18	22%
Total	24	9	33	27%

Source: Data from key informant interviews within MoEST and PO-RALG, August and September 2024.

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GUIDELINES FOR LEADERSHIP PROMOTION IN TANZANIA'S EDUCATION SECTOR

In 2022, the PO-RALG introduced “Guidelines for the Appointment of Education Leaders in Local Government Authorities and Regions” to address gaps in the previous promotion process. Prior to this, school leadership appointments followed general guidelines drawn from the National Education Act No. 25 of 1978, which outlined the Minister of Education’s duties, the roles of

Local Education Authorities, and teacher registrations, which includes hiring, placement, and promotion (The United Republic of Tanzania, 1978). These were further detailed in the “*Education Procedure and Qualification of Appointment to Education Posts Regulations*,” which required special committees to analyze and recommend appointments and promotions. However, the implementation of these regulations was inconsistent (PO-RALG, 2022).

BOX 1

HEAD OF SCHOOL QUALIFICATIONS (PO-RALG, 2022)

To qualify for the head of school position, a candidate must:

- » Hold a bachelor’s degree or higher.
- » Be at level IIC or IC of the employment grade.
- » Have at least 5 years of teaching experience in government schools.
- » Have no criminal convictions.
- » Have never been demoted from a Head of School position.
- » Maintain good behavior and a positive relationship with the community.
- » Have a proven track record of good performance according to public service employment management.
- » Be computer literate, with proficiency in MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, spreadsheets, and Internet use.
- » Provide evidence of good performance in previous roles.
- » Be innovative and courageous in supervising educational matters.

Source: Guidelines for the Appointment of Education Leaders in Local Government Authorities and Regions, PO-RALG 2022.

The new promotion guidelines clarify leadership roles at the school, ward, council, and regional levels, outline qualifications required for leaders in local and regional government authorities, including heads of school, and set structural and operational criteria for selection committees (PO-RALG, 2022; See box 1). These committees

evaluate candidates and recommend appointments to authorities, ensuring a transparent, consistent process. Understanding how these guidelines facilitate or hinder women’s advancement and leadership pathways is critical to informing strategies to promote gender equality in educational leadership.

III. Methodology

The research for this brief examined women's leadership pathways within Tanzania's secondary education sector. It sought to identify factors enabling or hindering women's advancement into leadership roles and explore how current policies and practices support or impede this progress.

The research questions included:

- **What do the leadership pathways for Heads of Schools look like? How are they structured and experienced? What influences them positively or negatively?**
- **What policies and strategies exist with regards to promotion into leadership positions within the education sector, and how do these facilitate or hinder the advancement of women's leadership?**
- **What challenges and supportive factors do women encounter in practice when seeking leadership roles in education at the school and district levels?**

The research deployed a qualitative research methodology, with study areas purposefully selected to represent rural and urban or peri-urban settings in Tanzania. The district of Chalinze was chosen for its rural context and low percentage of women HoS³ while Kinondoni is an urban district with one of the highest percentages of female Heads of Schools (see Figure 2)⁴. Data was collected using focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews (see Figure 3). In addition to conducting research in 10 secondary schools, five within each district, we also sought to include education system leaders at district, regional and national levels. This multi-level approach allowed us to triangulate information and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing women's engagement in education leadership.

3 In Chalinze, 23% of HoS were women, compared to other rural districts where only around 7% of HoS were women. This difference may be due to its proximity to Dar es Salaam.

4 The permit to conduct research was granted by the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG). The Ministry introduced the researcher to the two regions of Dar es Salaam and Pwani, and later to the Districts of Kinondoni and Chalinze. The researcher was introduced to schools by the District authorities.

Figure 2. Study areas

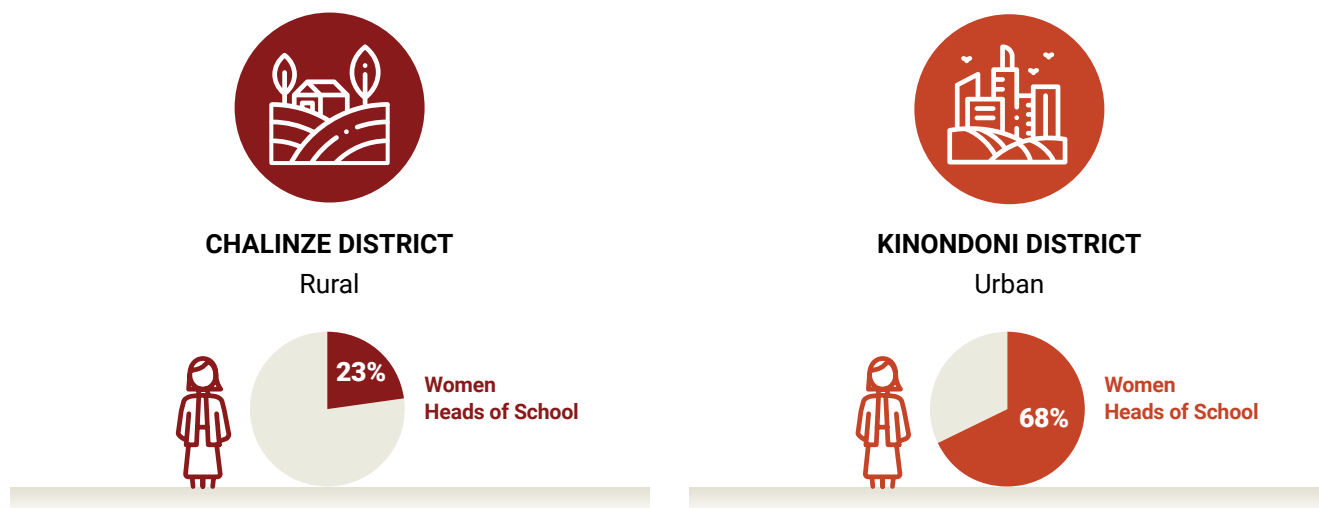


Figure 3. Study participants

SYSTEM LEVEL	ROLE	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	GENDER DISTRIBUTION (FEMALE-MALE)	METHOD
National	Ministry of Education Officials	3	25% - 75 %	Interview
	President's Office Officials	1	0 - 100%	Interview
District	District Education Officers	2	50% - 50%	Interview
School	Heads of School	10	60% - 40%	Interview
	School Management Team Members	30 (across 4 schools)	47% - 53%	Focus group discussions



Photo credit: Lydia Wilbard

IV. Findings

Women's leadership in Tanzania's education sector is hindered by systemic barriers, including entrenched social norms, structural inequities in leadership promotion, and a lack of targeted policies to address gender disparities. While Tanzania has made commitments to gender equality, these have not translated into meaningful progress in education leadership due to the absence of clear gender targets, accountability measures, and accessible pathways for women to advance. However, the research also highlights that when women attain leadership roles, they drive positive change in schools, improve student outcomes, and challenge restrictive gender norms. Addressing these barriers through policy reforms, leadership development programs, and structural support systems is crucial to fostering gender-transformative leadership in education.

The findings section is organized into 2 main sections; the pathways to education leadership and a systemic analysis of women's leadership which includes the social narratives, relationships, and structures that influence women's advancement into leadership positions.

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PATHWAYS TO EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

While uniform guidelines for promotion exist, this research revealed that while men and women in Tanzania's education system often start their leadership journeys at similar educational levels, their progress differs markedly due to systemic gender barriers. Pathways to leadership for both women and men in the education system begin typically at the diploma or bachelor's degree level. However, progression to leadership differs, influenced by their distinct experiences. An analysis of pathways to leadership for four sample participants (see Appendix) indicated that men are often promoted more quickly to leadership roles within their first year of employment, while women typically take longer, facing delays primarily due to family responsibilities and societal expectations.

The women and men in this study faced different challenging experiences throughout their leadership journeys. Men were challenged mostly by the lack of opportunities to advance their level of education, particularly in rural areas, while women reported additional challenges related to family responsibilities, such as caring for sick children or needing permission and support from their husbands. Analysis also showed differing motivations for pursuing leadership roles. Men were often driven by personal development, while women were more motivated by a desire to contribute to others' development and to serve as role models.

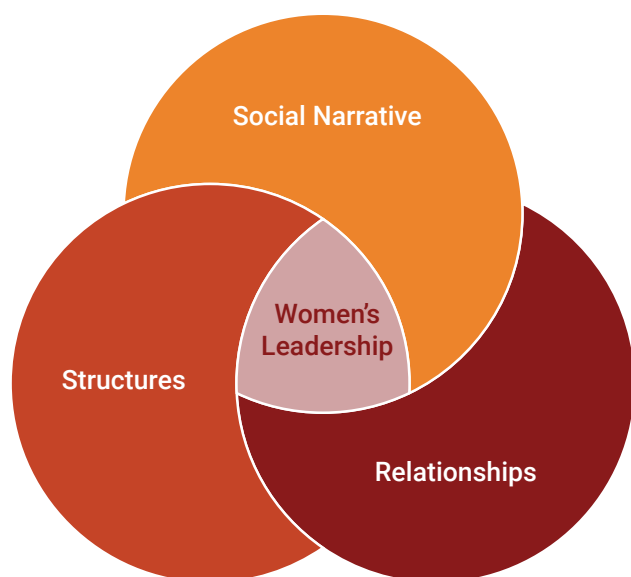
Analysis of leadership pathways showed that these differences stemmed from intertwined systemic factors that disproportionately affected women's leadership journeys, functioning either as enablers or barriers, highlighting the necessity for a comprehensive systems analysis. This analysis shifts the focus from attributing the differences in leadership pathway advancement to individual attributes of women or men to identifying the systemic factors participants shared which perpetuate gender disparities in education leadership.

SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Data from this study was analyzed using the “waters of system change model” (FSG, 2018) that looks at conditions for system change at three levels: the transformational (mental models), relational and structural (see Figure 3).

Women's leadership in the Tanzania education sector is a systemic issue rather than an individual challenge; there are existing systemic **social narratives** about gender roles and about leadership that translate into either opportunities or barriers to women's leadership. These narratives influence (and are influenced by) their **relationships** with others around them, which in turn interact with **structures**—i.e., policies, practices and uses of resources (see Figure 4). Across these three levels, we were able to identify the “push” (enabling) and “pull” (limiting) factors that affect women's leadership in secondary schools and the ways in which existing promotion policies and guidelines often fail to address the barriers women face.

Figure 4: Systemic analysis of women's leadership framework



WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN TANZANIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

A. Contrasting social narratives limit opportunities while highlighting leadership potential

» **Patriarchal norms prioritize women's caretaking roles and frame leadership as “male”**

Patriarchal norms that position men as leaders and women as caretakers lowered expectations for women in leadership. Women are expected to prioritize family responsibilities, including caring for husbands and household chores, limiting their availability for leadership roles. As one HoS noted during interview,

“Women have family and social duties, and some need approval from husbands to take up leadership roles especially if transfers are involved. As a HoS responsible for recommending or appointing teachers into leadership, I have to think if their husbands will approve them before giving them leadership roles.”

A district-level officer also mentioned that husbands would not “allow [women] to go take up opportunities in the rural areas.” And officials with authority to recommend teachers for promotion⁵ doubted women's ability to balance leadership with family and social duties, assuming they should or would prioritize home responsibilities. One HoS noted:

“Sometimes I have to think if a female teacher will be available. If you are a head of school, you often need to be the first in and last out, but women have to prepare breakfast for their husbands.”

⁵ In the case of promotion to head of school, promoters include the head of school of the respective school where the teacher is working, plus higher level officials like the District Education Officer.

Although no female Heads of Schools mentioned needing approval from their husbands, these societal views and perceptions can lead to biases favoring men, particularly if policymakers share these views, ultimately denying women opportunities for advancement (see next section).

In addition, women of reproductive age were frequently perceived to be “unreliable” because it is assumed they will get pregnant and/or have children, which is believed to disrupt continuity and create leadership “gaps.”

Social narratives around men being better suited for leadership shaped how participants perceived and responded to the idea of women’s leadership. Importantly, many of the women in this study expressed internalized negative narratives in the form of low self-esteem, self-doubt, and lack of confidence in their leadership abilities. Stereotypes embedded in the way women are socialized in society, limited experiences and opportunities for leadership, and scarce exposure to women leader role models all generate self-doubt and feelings of incompetence. One member of a school management shared, “I don’t want to go higher than this. I think this level is enough for me. I will leave others, especially men, to lead. I am a last born, and my family didn’t raise me to be in front of many people.”

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» **Women leaders are helping to change the narrative, being seen as committed, trustworthy and effective leaders**

In contrast, the presence of women in leadership positions has disrupted some of these narratives and created space for positive ideas about women’s commitment, trustworthiness, and ability to solve complex issues. A DEO mentioned that,

“More women are currently educated, and the number outweighs that of men in my context. Their education level has influenced their entry into leadership. Women are accountable, committed to certain issues, and have the ability to solve problems and handle complex issues that no one else can.”

Women currently in leadership were described as responsible, empathetic, inclusive, and trustworthy. Women leaders had demonstrated a strong commitment to their work, fostering teamwork, cohesion, and collaboration. They were said to excel at adhering to and enforcing rules and regulations. This narrative emphasizes the qualities women bring that are seen as essential for effective leadership.

In addition, there is an emerging narrative around women’s solidarity, which was seen as creating opportunities for women’s leadership. There was an expectation that women would actively support, uplift, and inspire other women to pursue leadership roles, as noted during the interview with a female national level government official.

“There were only 2 out of 26 Regional Education Officers (REO) 5 years ago. Since I arrived in the Ministry, I have worked with others to intentionally increase the number; now there are 8 out of 26”.

B. Relationships both limit and enhance women's leadership

Women's advancement into leadership was influenced by the people around them and the ways in which they enacted the social narratives mentioned above.

» Family support is critical for women's leadership, but not consistently provided

Women in school management often have caregiving roles, making family support outside of schools crucial for women's leadership success within them. But this is not always guaranteed. Women with supportive families, including spouses, were said to progress faster. For example, one female DEO advanced her career significantly with her husband's encouragement to pursue higher education. Another woman HoS noted, "I received high support from family members, society, and employer, especially since my first child needed special attention."

Conversely, several women talked about the challenges stemming from a lack of family support amid societal expectations that women should prioritize home responsibilities. One HoS shared, "My husband was not happy when I got the promotion ... my mother-in-law was watching to see if I would still serve food to my husband." These perceptions or realities of inadequate family support for women's leadership often led to fear of failure and limited women's leadership aspirations.

» Relationships with actors within schools are key, but are influenced by limiting social narratives

Promoters—those who identify, nominate and support new HoS—expressed similar concerns about women's ability to balance leadership with family and social duties, assuming they should or would prioritize home responsibilities.

This mindset may lead promoters to deny women leadership exposure and opportunities based on assumptions about their domestic responsibilities. Promoters were also reported to make assumptions about women's (lack of) availability or interest in leadership, often limiting their exposure to leadership opportunities, professional development experiences, and career advancement.

Additionally, women leaders still face backlash, not only from the broader community but also within schools and among peers. In interviews with Heads of Schools (HoS), women leaders reported resistance to female leadership from male teachers and confrontations from male students or parents. One HoS shared, "I was told, 'How can we be led by a woman?' It's a continuous battle; you always have to think of being tough every day." Support from higher authorities is crucial in such situations. A female District Education Officer (DEO) mentioned having to transfer eight male teachers who resisted a new female HoS simply because they were used to having a male HoS. The DEO noted that school is "as we speak ... among the five best schools in the district."

» **Women leaders expand opportunities for others**

Relationships with women leaders who could serve as role models was critical to motivating women and opening opportunities for more women to take on leadership roles. The promotion of women to the position of District Education Officers (DEOs), for example, has impacted school leadership in those districts, which have seen an increase in the number of women Heads of Schools (HoS). As one male member of a school management team noted:

"In our district, when I joined four years ago, there was only one female HoS, but now we have eight out of 27. I think our DEO influenced this number. Since she came, we have seen huge improvements [in women in leadership] through role modeling."

Similarly, a ministry official spoke of the importance of relationships among women in leadership. In describing how the Ministry identified potential female DEOs to appoint to the higher level of REOs, she explained how they had to reassure some of the women. "Some turned down the appointment, mentioning that they weren't sure they can lead the regional education staff, who are mostly male." Having more women already in leadership positions would have provided some levels of reassurance and role modeling.

In some situations, building relationships with women leaders also served to change perceptions about women's leadership more broadly. Several participants reported increased confidence in women leaders — especially as they demonstrated improved academic performance. One DEO reported, for example,

"Initially, there was skepticism about appointing women as Heads of Schools (HoS) in my district, but their success has proven their capabilities. When I started appointing women as HoS, my colleagues thought they would fail. Now they say, 'They are really capable.' I believe we should continue appointing women as leaders because that is one way to disrupt the narrative and change the embedded negative beliefs."

C. Structural and institutional barriers create uneven opportunities for women leaders, while also laying the foundation for enhancing their leadership.

» **Current promotion policy both creates and fails to address gender barriers**

Most of the participants in this study perceive that the presence of national policies and promotion guidelines has contributed to progress in increasing women's leadership. The policies referenced by the majority of participants include: 1) Tanzania's Education and

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Training Policy, amended in 2023, that seeks to advance women's representation in education leadership, and 2) Local leadership promotion guidelines, set in 2022, that provide guidance for the promotion process and outline the qualifications required for education leaders in local and regional government authorities, as well as structural and operational criteria for selection committees. Participants perceived these to guarantee fair access and minimize bias, with DEOs and HoS adhering to these to reduce favoritism and ensure thorough selection processes.

Participants indicated that the policy framework is a key enabler for women's education leadership. There is an understanding that there is an emphasis on having equal gender representation in leadership and that policies are meant to provide equal opportunity regardless of gender. One member of a school management team said, "There is now an emphasis on 50:50 and an eye to it, especially from advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations, so policy makers are trying to live up to it."

While progress has been noted, these policies fail to account for the unique barriers women face which hinder their access to leadership roles and limit the pipeline of qualified women. In this case, "equal opportunity" has not necessarily translated to equal chances for promotion and access to leadership positions. As one female HoS noted,

"Previously, promotions were based more on experience and abilities. Now, there are more transparent guidelines that do not explicitly discriminate, but equal opportunity does not necessarily mean an equal chance to be promoted. Women face it hard; it took me 14 years to go back for my bachelor's degree, I was taking care of my first child who has special needs."

The formal education credential requirement can exclude women, who historically have had fewer years of higher education. In other words, the need for formal qualification can overshadow other skills that women without bachelor's degrees might have developed over time. One male HoS noted:

"I have some female teachers with long work experience and diploma level of education, which disqualifies them from being promoted to higher leadership positions because, according to the policy, you need to have a degree."

In establishing promotion guidelines with minimum educational standards, the policy can have gender impacts. Analysis of the Basic Education Statistics of Tanzania (BEST) published by PO-RALG shows that, while the past 5 years have seen a slight increase in the proportion of teachers holding bachelor's degrees (64.25% to 66.4%), the proportion of women teachers with bachelor's degrees has decreased (37.7% to 36.45%). As a result, the pool of qualified women from which to promote is reduced, excluding many highly experienced women teachers with diplomas from leadership roles.

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Women in Tanzania face greater challenges than men in advancing their education and careers due to limited professional development and access to higher education. Currently only 30% of teacher trainees at the bachelor level are women (analysis of BEST data for 2023). Looking back even earlier in the education pipeline, there are fewer girls transitioning to high school than boys, despite gender parity in enrollment in earlier years. One participant noted:

"We have not reached the level where women are in equal numbers to men who have bachelor's degrees, especially in rural areas, so if there are no women who qualify, automatically the opportunity will go to men, and those men will be the ones who will make decisions and develop other guidelines."

When mapping leadership pathways as part of this research, it is worth remembering that men and women did not attain leadership positions at the same pace, even when they started at the same educational levels. Women spent far more years gaining "on-the-job experience" before being promoted than men. This is especially true for women who are married, have families, and live in rural areas.

Despite this, there are no targeted support programs to build a pipeline of women leaders. Women often have less access to financial resources to invest in the higher education now required to pursue leadership roles. And when resources are scarce, they report prioritizing family needs over personal advancement, further delaying their qualification. As one woman from a School Management Team (SMT) explained,

"I have been advised to study by my HoS, to go for a bachelor's degree. He sees potential in me for stepping up into HoS. I want to, but I am limited financially. When it comes to going to school, I ask myself if I need to prioritize myself or my child. I haven't been able to take a step, and therefore I don't qualify for the position yet."

Finally, the absence of gender-specific targets within the education sector is among the factors contributing to gender imbalance in leadership. A school management committee member emphasized the need for clear targets to ensure gender balance, as their absence allows for a lack of accountability in promoting women's leadership representation

» **Policy gaps can lead to discretionary and gender-discriminatory processes at the school level**

Another limitation of the existing policy is that it does not address the procedure by which promoters should recommend candidates for leadership positions nor the appointment process for school management teams. In practice, these decisions are left to the discretion of HoS, who report using varying methods to make their decisions. Findings revealed that HoS most often select teachers from the SMT to step up into HoS positions, yet there are no clear guidelines or criteria for how HoS select these teams. Some HoS identify and discuss potential candidates with their teams before deciding, while others rely on their own judgment and experience. This lack of structure creates the potential for favoritism and can introduce bias against women—especially if decision makers hold negative personal beliefs informed by discriminatory social norms and lack of experience with women leaders.

In addition, the criteria for becoming a HoS are not fully known to teachers, which limits their aspirations. As one teacher noted,

"We have seen new HoS being appointed, but some female teachers who have consistently performed well and been voted as best teachers for three years are not promoted. We are not aware of the promotion criteria and how they go about deciding who to promote, which creates uncertainty among teachers."

» **Practices at the school level pigeonhole women into low-visibility administrative and “care” positions**

At the school level, participants reported that women teachers who wish to move into school management are often assigned roles related to caregiving, nurturing, or “honest” work. Examples of these include being a school matron, managing school projects, and providing guidance and counseling. While these opportunities can get women teachers into school-level management teams, they rarely provide the higher-visibility experiences with district and regional officials afforded by roles like academic headteacher and deputy HoS. While both opportunities allow women teachers to join school management teams (SMTs)—the pathway for selecting Heads of Schools (HoS)—positions such as Academic Teacher and Deputy HoS provide greater exposure to higher authorities than roles like Matron or Guidance and Counseling Teacher. This visibility plays a crucial role in influencing promotion decisions for HoS positions.

Indeed, many schools have adopted a structure with two deputy Heads of School (DHoS): one for academics and one for administration. When women are appointed as deputy HoS, they are often assigned the administrative role, while men are assigned to lead on academics. Participants reported that academic roles—which often involve presenting to district, regional, or national authorities—are more favorable for promotions to HoS. In contrast, administrative and care roles—which involve working with students, parents, and communities—do not necessarily provide the skills and exposure needed for promotions to higher levels of leadership.

As participants in this study expressed, there are a variety of systemic issues at the structural level that limit women’s leadership in the education sector. Nonetheless, participants were unable to identify any targeted support strategies or programs for women aspiring to advance into leadership positions. As one HoS mentioned, “I don’t know any specific program, except when HoS are appointed. They are provided training, but that is general for both men and women.”

The criteria for becoming a Head of School (HoS) are not fully known to teachers, which limits their aspirations. As one teacher noted, “We have seen new HoS being appointed, but some female teachers who have consistently performed well and been voted as best teachers for three years are not promoted.”

V. Recommendations

To interrupt limiting social norms, expand positive narratives, leverage key relationships, and address the structural barriers to women's leadership within the education system in Tanzania, the government must prioritize gender equity in educational leadership through a comprehensive, multi-faceted, and multisectoral approach that addresses systemic barriers, promotes inclusivity, and ensures accountability. At a minimum, this involves the following actions:

RECOMMENDATION	RESPONSIBLE INSTITUTION
<p>Develop a Gender Strategy in Education and Training</p> <p>The Ministry of Education, with stakeholders, should conduct a gender analysis to further identify barriers to educational leadership and develop equitable strategies to address them.</p> <p>Policies should be updated with targets for women's representation, and gender-disaggregated data should be included in annual education statistics for accountability. Regular gender audits and a leadership database should support evidence-based interventions and track gender parity trends in leadership.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology should convene a coalition to drive the gender strategy. This should include development partners and civil society organizations (CSOs) leveraging on the education dialogue structure.</p>
<p>Establish a Female In-service Teachers' Education Fund</p> <p>The Government should build on the success of President Samia's student scholarship initiative and establish a targeted fund to provide grants or low-interest loans for financially constrained in-service female teachers seeking to further their education and leadership training. This fund will also leverage collaboration with other ministries and the private sector. These would include the Ministry of Community Development, Gender, Women and Special Groups (utilizing the 4% share of group loans allocated for women), and banks like the National Micro-Finance Bank, which is already partnering with the government on higher education student loans schemes.</p> <p>A practical approach in Tanzania could include creating a mentorship framework where beneficiaries of these loans and grants commit to mentoring other female teachers as they transition into leadership roles. The initiative could also integrate with existing teacher development programs like the Education Program for Results (EPforR) to maximize impact. Establishing local hubs for leadership training by leveraging regional teacher training colleges can reduce costs and make programs more accessible. These combined efforts will empower female teachers while building a sustainable pipeline for educational leadership in Tanzania.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (to link it to the existing Samia Student Scholarship), and the Ministry of Community Development, Gender, Women, and Special Groups (to link it to the 4% share of the group loan to ensure sustainability).</p>
<p>Build Awareness and Transparency around Promotion Criteria for Teachers</p> <p>Local government administrations should establish transparent promotion criteria for teachers, shared through meetings and published on the Ministry's website to ensure equal access. Kenya's JPAD system, which improved morale and accountability by outlining promotion criteria and reducing bias, serves as a model.</p>	<p>Local governments, through regular teachers' meetings (including at the school level).</p> <p>PO-RALG and MoEST (to publish the criteria on the website).</p>
<p>Promote Women's Leadership Development and Engage Role Models</p> <p>Education stakeholders, including Development partners and civil society organizations (CSOs), should set gender parity criteria in educational leadership and support initiatives addressing social barriers. Collaboration with government agencies can raise awareness of the norms affecting leadership representation. They should support programs that build women's confidence and leadership skills through training, mentorship, and workshops. Ministries should mobilize resources from the private sector via Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) to support such initiatives. PPP is part of the ESDP.</p>	<p>Development partners (e.g., UNICEF, SIDA, USAID, FCDO coordinated by UNESCO) and CSOs via Tanzania Education Network/ Mtandao wa Elimu Tanzania or individually like CAMFED, TWaweza, HAKIELIMU, MSICHANA INITIATIVE, and the Ministry of Education.</p>

Strengthen Research on Gender and Leadership in Education

Research institutions and CSOs should collaborate with the government and education stakeholders to drive a comprehensive research agenda focused on policy implementation action for leadership in the education sector. This research should investigate the intersections of barriers such as gender, geographic location, disability, and socio-economic status that limit access to leadership roles in education. Institutions like Tanzania's Centre for Communication Studies and the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) can gather data to inform gender-sensitive policies and strategies. The government, in turn, can use this research to develop evidence-based policies that promote inclusive leadership by incorporating findings into national frameworks, like the Tanzania Education Sector Development Plan. Civil society groups can share knowledge, advocate for these policies, and lead public awareness campaigns to address the challenges marginalized groups face in educational leadership. This collaborative effort ensures more equitable leadership opportunities for all.

CSOs and research institutions (e.g., Twaweza, CAMFED, TGNP), and via TENMET members



Photo credit: Lydia Wilbard

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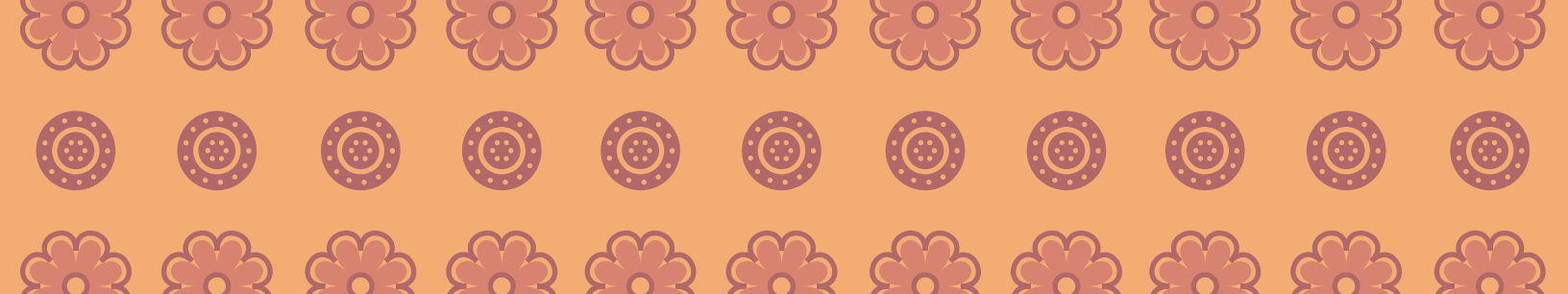
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Appendix A

SAMPLE LEADERSHIP JOURNEYS FOR 6 HEADS OF SCHOOL

PARTICIPANT NO.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sex	M	F	F	M	F	M
Year entered teaching profession	2005	2008	2002	1996	2009	2006
Education level at entry	Diploma	Bachelor's degree	Diploma	Diploma	Bachelor's degree	Diploma
First leadership role (prior to HoS)		School matron	Interim HoS, School matron	Academic and scout supervisor	School matron	Head of Biology department
Number of years before first leadership role	3	6	3	1	8	1
Additional leadership roles before becoming HoS	Discipline, G&C, school accountant, academic master, deputy HoS	Academic teacher, deputy HoS	School matron, school secretary, teacher, representative in the school board, CAMFED teacher mentor	Deputy HoS	Academic teacher	Head of Chemistry and Maths departments
Number of years taken to go back for Bachelor's degree	4	N/A	14	21	N/A	2
Experience (years worked before promotion to HoS)	14	17	18	10	12	10
Transfers	Transferred		Transferred to girls' school			

Challenges	<p>Overcoming opposition from teachers, especially as an academic assistant.</p> <p>Balancing high responsibilities with personal life.</p>	<p>Pushing for academic performance, dealing with accidents and tragic incidents (loss of five students in a motorbike accident).</p> <p>Uncooperative teachers.</p> <p>Managed conflicts with parents who were reluctant to send their children to school, sometimes involving authorities.</p> <p>Juggling family and school responsibilities, especially with husband being far away.</p>	Caring for a sick child.	Supervising peers (teachers with similar or higher qualifications).	<p>Fire at school. Lack of school supplies (e.g., books, chalk, desks, and chairs).</p> <p>Societal stereotypes about women's leadership.</p>	Keeping students motivated.
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LYDIA WILBARD is a seasoned gender equality advocate and education systems leader with over 15 years of experience driving policy reforms and scaling impactful programs across Africa. She founded the CAMFED Association (CAMA) in Tanzania, a powerful network of young women leaders mentoring and supporting the next generation.

As CAMFED's Executive Director of Learning & Engagement, Lydia forges partnerships with governments and communities in Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya, Ghana, Malawi, and Zimbabwe to expand girls' education and leadership. A key architect of the Learner Guide Program, she has influenced policies and driven innovative peer mentorship models to break barriers for marginalized girls.

Lydia speaks at global forums like Skoll World Forum, Women Deliver, and WISE, advocating systemic change and inclusive leadership. A recipient of the Excellence in Education Leadership Award (2021), she holds a Master's in Public Health from Johns Hopkins University. Passionate about gender equity, she champions transformative leadership globally.

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This brief is dedicated to all the women breaking barriers in leadership and inspiring future generations.

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The Echidna Global Scholars Program at the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings seeks to catalyze and amplify the impact of local leaders working to advance gender equality in and through education across the Global South.

During a six-month fellowship, Echidna Global Scholars conduct individual research focused on improving learning opportunities and life outcomes for girls, young women, and gender non-conforming people, develop their leadership and evidence-based policy skills, build substantive knowledge on gender and global education issues, and expand their pathways for impact. Upon completion of the fellowship, scholars transition to the Echidna Alumni Network, a growing community of practice aimed at promoting their significant, sustained, and collective influence on gender-transformative education globally and locally.

