School Management Positions and Women Empowerment – A Rwandan Case

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Abstract

Women as managers and their roles in management has become a topic of special interest and importance in the present decade. This study was conducted to find out the general concept of the woman educator and her role as a school administrator in the society. The central research question here is "Have women Managers/Principals performed in their various managerial capacities?" To answer this question, data were collected from teachers in seven government secondary schools in Kigali. A total number of 100 questionnaires were sent out but a total of 88 respondents which involved male and female teachers responded. Simple statistical method of data analysis was used and it was discovered that female school managers can perform with regards to aspects of school management and administration including instructional supervision, relations with students, parents and community. The findings of this paper are imperative for educational planning and management. The study also shows that in terms of abilities in all the areas reviewed, women are able to attain management positions and can perform creditably in school management. Therefore, equal opportunities should be given to both sexes in order to tap their talents and abilities for societal progress.

Keywords: Women empowerment, School management, Rwanda

1. Introduction

After the destructive genocide of 1994, there was a great need to mobilize and guide the population to reconstruct its own lives as well as their communities and country. The Government of Rwanda demonstrated its willpower to give women the trust and responsibility of rebuilding the nation by appointing them to all positions of leadership and responsibility in society. Women are serving in the executive, legislative and judiciary arms of the government. These women in different positions of leadership played critical roles in mobilizing fellow women to live together and to find common solutions to their own problems and those of their country. In the last fifteen years women have stood as exemplary leaders at policy level as well as community level. The mere presence of women in cabinet, parliament, judiciary, police and all spheres of life serves as role models and also helped to develop and continues to help in developing confidence among women. This also opened up women's role in decision making.

Progress in reaching gender equality is assessed in three areas: education, employment and political decision-making. Global data demonstrate that gender inequality persists in many countries and regions of the world, but Rwanda stands out among other nations in spearheading gender equality and women empowerment. In Rwanda, women have been promoted to visible positions of responsibility at all levels. This commitment has been incorporated into the Constitution, the Rwanda Vision 2020 strategy, the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) and other government plans, which clearly stipulate that ensuring gender equality and women's political, social and economic empowerment is a national concern. Discrepancies in gender equality are addressed by all actors in society at all levels.

A law that eliminates gender discrimination on inheritance rights was promulgated in late 1999. In 2000, the cabinet adopted a five-year gender action plan, the Comprehensive Action Plan for the Elimination of all Discrimination against Women. Women's political representation has increased significantly, most notably in the Parliament where fifty three percent (53%) of the current representatives are women. Rwandan national authorities actively promote women, including through the institution of the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, which is mandated to spearhead the elimination of gender imbalances in all sectors. In addition, local chapters of the National Women's Council are operational.

Under the labour law passed in April, 2009, women on maternity leave earn 100% of their salary for the first 6 weeks, but are only entitled to between 60-67% of the income for the last 6 weeks. So what mothers have been doing is give less time to the newborn to stay at work longer so they earn all the salary. Breastfeeding mothers on maternity leave in Tanzania get 100% of their salaries for 12 weeks. In Burundi, a woman in the same situation earns 50% of her salary for the first of the 12 weeks stay-away. As for Uganda, mothers are entitled to an eight-week maternity leave, with a 100% of her payment for only one month. Whereas for neigbouring Kenya, a woman undertaking her maternity leave gets an eight week maternity leave with her full salary. For Botswana, the new mother gets 12 weeks with 25% of her salary. However, for the mothers in Lesotho, they spend 12 weeks without earning any thing.

2. Aims of the Study

In Rwanda, important restructuring processes are taking place in the educational system. Authorities focus more on educational output and schools are given greater autonomy in the way they strive to reach the national goals which focus on effectiveness. The focus of the study is to find out the teachers' perception of the female principal's supervision abilities, their knowledge of teaching methods, assistance of teachers and their awareness of student's problems. It also focuses on teachers' perception of female principals' relationship with students, parents and the school community. Finally, it hinges on the perception of teacher's on the female principals' general school administration.

3. Women in the Professions

Lately, women are making efforts to step out of their traditionally assigned roles as kitchen managers and human producing machines to that of people who can meaningfully contribute to development in various aspects of life, particularly in educational institutions and the management of human resources.

Rwanda is a country that is standing up firmly and constantly for women's rights and equality. Women's prominence and parity in the political organization and country's governance are conspicuously recognized.

All the professions in Rwanda today are open to men and women equally and no barriers are erected on grounds of gender. Rwanda is a unique country in the world where women have a significant representation in all the sectors of life, including justice, parliament, and police among others. Boys and girls are given equal opportunity to do a particular type of secondary education considered as necessary preliminary to particular professions. This representation goes against an age long issue of the concept of gender roles in every society where women are seen not to be equal to men, as a result there are professions for men and lower ones for women.

It is interesting to know that the President of the Supreme Court of Rwanda, Deputy Commissioner General of Police, Ministry of Agriculture & Animal Resources, Ministry of East African Community, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Regional Cooperation, Ministry of Infrastructure, Ministry of Trade & Industry as well as the Executive Secretary of the Gacaca courts are women. Of the 12 judges in the Supreme Court, 5 are women or a representation of 41.7%, among others.

It is known that women are given prominent chance to compete with men in employment, so the Rwandan female sector is preparing itself more and more, and the result can be seen with the statement of Mary Gahonzire – Rwanda's first female Deputy Commissioner General of Police (DCGP): "I have enjoyed my work serving mankind, but more specifically to have been given a chance to serve my motherland" (New Times, 28th May 2009).

So often when issues of peace and security are discussed, women and children tend to be the ones under protection, with men being those ensuring the peace. The maintenance of law and order has been a sole male preserve over the years. However, Gahonzire challenges this stereotype, as she stands out world-wide, being one of the few females at the helm of the Rwanda National Police (RNP), as the Deputy Commissioner General of the Rwanda National Police. Gahonzire, has worked in this male dominated field all her life, breaking the glass ceiling at various leadership levels, within the nerve centre of the Police Force, over the years (New Times, 28th May 2009).

4. Women's Achievements in Rwanda

Women worked together to forge solidarity and unity among themselves as the first step toward mobilization of other women, for example, the Unity Club as a forum of top women leaders and spouses of top leaders in government aimed at creating unity among themselves; and then be able to preach the message of unity and reconciliation among the communities.

These women conducted concrete activities such as helping orphans, fostering them, supporting victims of famine and flood and always championing unity as their goal. The forum of Rwandese women leaders' caucus also started as a caucus that brings women from different backgrounds together. They were able to lobby together and influence enacting of laws that protect and promote the rights of women. For example the inheritance laws, the law on the rights of the child, the rights of women at the place of work, etc.

Besides, the caucus of women parliamentarians was able to advocate for women rights and gender equality and also mobilized grassroots women to contribute to the making of the constitution so that the issues of gender equality takes centre stage and at the same time monitor the budget and ensure that the budget addresses the needs of women and men. Women leadership was demonstrated by the setting up women structures, which came to be known at later stage as National Women Councils (NWC). National women councils provided platform to enable women gain visibility and be able to contribute to national debate and influence policy development and democratic processes of the country. For example mobilize fellow women to participate in Gacaca courts, decentralization, poverty reduction processes, fighting HIV/AIDS pandemic and dealing with the consequences of the 1994 genocide.

Research shows that women can influence peace and reconciliation if they are empowered to participate and taking major decisions at community, local, national and international levels.

5. Rwandan Women in Decision Making

The government of Rwanda has in the last fifteen years put in place several measures to ensure that women are given power to fully participate in decision making in different organs. The government has put in place a legal framework facilitating national women councils to provide a forum through which women exchange views on national issues and the overall development of the country. Through these councils, women have been able to make input into national policies and programmes. These include Vision 2020, the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS), the decentralization policy, the national Land Bill, the land policy, the Succession law, the traditional participatory system of justice (Gacaca courts) and many other areas of critical importance to peace building including the new constitution.

It is worthy of note that the decentralization favours the representation of women at the various administrative levels, a department in charge of gender issues exists at the district and provincial levels, likewise, women's representatives become automatic members of the consultative committees at the sector and district levels. The Constitution of Rwanda stipulates a minimum representation of women at decision-making bodies of at least 30%. Sensitization campaigns have been organized to encourage the high participation of women in decision making bodies. Private universities offer evening classes attended by a significant number of women, thereby enabling them to acquire the training that will help them to compete for decision-making posts. An association for the promotion of the Rwandan women participation in decision-making organs, the Rwanda Women Leaders Caucus was created in July 2002.

6. Women in School Management Positions

Principals are administrative managers of schools in that they intervene in the school curriculum and enhance student achievements. Instructional and administrative leadership is demanded in order to monitor school effectiveness. Leithwood, Begley and Cousins, 1990 are of the opinion that Principals spend more time on instructional matters and in actual practice occupied with administrative tasks.

According to Bolam and Wieringen, (1999), only scarcely, gender comparative research has been done regarding the role of Principal. He says the main reason for this deficiency is that the percentages of women school principals are very low in most countries. Even though the majority of teachers in schools in many countries are female (about 70%), only a small percentage of these are school principals. For secondary education in the United States of America, the Digest of Education Statistics reports that 12% of secondary principals are women in recent years. In European secondary education the general percentage is about 20%, while in Netherlands, it is even not higher than 7% (Bolam and Wieringen, 1999). This under-representation of women principals could be called 'quantitative gender inequality' which can be noticed due to the fact that principals, teachers and students, do not work in a gender-neutral environment.

The social debate about the under-representation of women in school management positions revolves around the conflicting roles of heads but it lacks research-based knowledge about specific qualities of women and men in school management positions (Kruger, 1996). The research of Lee, Smith & Cioci, (1993), teaches that female teachers feel empowered when working in schools headed by female principals, while male teachers consider themselves less powerful in those circumstances. In Lee's opinion, the interaction between teachers' and

principals' gender contributes to understanding the persistent under-representation of women in the secondary school principalship.

In the last decade, there has been much discussion and literature on the under-representation of women in school management positions (Bolam and Wieringen, 1999). The arguments for increasing the number of women in school management were usually limited to the principle of equal opportunities. Arguments referring to specific contributions made by women to school management were hardly brought under discussion, caused by a deficiency of knowledge upon which such an argument could be found. The lack of scientific knowledge necessarily leads to a public debate on the position of women in school management which is mainly based on prejudices and stereotypes with regard to characteristics and qualities of female as well as male principals.

Imanyi (1987), in a study of how female and male managers in some public service organizations in Nigeria perceive work-related variables and their implications, observed that the statistics in her study indicated that for a country which has a ratio of one female to one male clearly suggests that the females are grossly under-mobilized and under utilized in the country's public life. The study reveals that indispensable qualities for public management, such as "efficiency consciousness, people-centeredness, ethical up-rightness" and many others which the female managers confirmed by the study have been better endowed when compared to their male counterparts who have denied them because of chauvinistic tendencies.

7. The Role of Women in Management

The role of women in management has become a topic of special interest and importance in the present decade, an era when women have come to limelight in our society. However, affirmative action and equal opportunity programs have not yet significantly increased the number of women managers in industries, companies, banks, schools, and so on. This however is due to the marginalization of women in most societies.

Women are more adapted to "run the household" than men. Therefore, the more women we will have in leadership and management positions in the world, the more stable and dependable the world will become (Laitman, 2009). Generally, female managers are faced with certain kinds of conflicts. The first real problem she must handle is a domestic one. More often than not, she is a mother and a wife with the responsibilities of the house. New priorities at home have to be established at this time and the person most affected is her husband. The spouse situation is often the most difficult problem of all. Since the woman manager usually has little encouragement from outsiders, it is imperative that her spouse must be by her side all the way. If he is not supportive, she has two obvious choices: either to give up the goal of being a manager or give up the spouse. Usually, the former alternative is chosen, which has implications for the woman's career.

Society and social priorities in the past had demanded that women remain in the "appropriate" service careers of nursing, secretarial work, home economies or teaching, because of the influences or usefulness of those careers for future homemakers and mothers. Consequently, women have for the most part chosen these compatible role arrangements. As such moving out into a profession such as management or administration is considered a precarious challenge for women (Amdii, 2002).

The question now is, have the woman managers been performing in their managerial capacity and can they perform in school management issues? It is in an attempt to answer this question that this study is undertaken. Some scholars are of the opinion that women do not fare well in appointment to administrative/managerial positions. A popular rationalization for appointing men rather than women as principals of secondary schools is that men are supposedly better suited to be principals. Many studies have compared the various aspects of the behavior of men and women principals. The findings of these studies are reviewed in order to determine what, if any, empirical evidence exists to demonstrate that characteristics of successful principals are gender-linked. The most significant results are categorized according to four areas and are presented thus: instructional supervision; relations with students; relations with parent and community and general administration. These behavioral studies indicated that in terms of ability to supervise and administer a school and to maintain good relations with students, and parents. The few who have been able to achieve administrative positions have performed as capably, if not more capably than male counterparts.

8. Methodology

For the purpose of data collection, each school was visited by an undergraduate student in Computer Science at Kigali Institute of Science and Technology (KIST), who is also an indigene. The central research question here is "Have women Managers/Principals performed in their various managerial capacities?" To answer this question, data were collected from teachers in seven government secondary schools in Kigali. The schools are listed in

Table 1. A total number of 100 questionnaires were sent out but a total of 88 respondents which involved male and female teachers were sampled.

A 15-item inventory questionnaire was used. The issues are supervision of principals, relationship with students, parents and the community. The questions were structured using scale style. This is a ranking method which provides several categories into which the observed trait can be placed. Table 1 shows the names of the schools where data were drawn from.

8.1 Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents summary of the responses received on the perception of teachers on principals' supervision abilities, knowledge of teaching methods, and assistance of teachers and awareness of problems of students. On women supervisory abilities, the table showed that both male and female teachers perceived that women generate productive behaviour in teachers as the high number of teachers responses (52%) showed strongly agreed (27% of the female and 25% of the male). In the exhibiting of teaching methods, the female responses 26% were also higher than the male compared to the 23% of the male. In the areas of problems of studies both sexes indicated that female principals were more willing and able to assist 24% of male to 24% of female. The table indicated that only 20% of the male strongly agreed that female principals are more aware of potential problem of studies as against 26% of the female. However, 27% of the male agreed. Although there were variations in responses and some respondents were undecided, the strongly agree section had higher responses apart from the fourth variable. This indicated that female principals were perceived to be good in supervision of work, knowledge of teaching methods, teacher assistance and awareness of problems of academic work.

Table 3 shows positive response by strongly agreeing to all the four variables, which indicated that female principals had some good relationships with parents and the community, although some respondents were undecided, indicated in the figures on the table. The respondents' perceptions on the female principal's democratic style agreed to the notion. On the maintaining of school discipline it showed low agreement by both sexes. The general findings for the variables in Table 4 depicts that generally more democratic, emphasis placed on maintaining school discipline, exhibit more administrative techniques and maintain a more closely knit organization scored higher in the strongly agreed column. While the respect for teachers' dignity and their reconciling conflicting demands and emphasis in exercising stronger leadership, scored higher in the agreed column. This shows that there are some chauvinism and stereotype with regard to the characteristics and qualities of female principalship compared to that of male, caused by the fact that we still face a deficiency of knowledge in this field. Obviously, no single individual can embody every one of the many variables in Table 4. In exploring such issues, we must allow for the sweep of imperfect generalizations. The study discussed here enables us to replace some of the prejudices by scientific knowledge.

9. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study attempted to demonstrate the role of women in school management issues. The analysis from this study has weakened the position of some authors' opinion in the various literature reviewed which indicated that women should just take their natural places in the home. For, instance, findings confirmed that women are better teachers. This result confirms the views of the outcome of the study in general and specifically buttressed Imanyi's position, which insisted that women/females have indispensable qualities for management. The paper concludes by recommending that it is the duty of society to perceive and insist that the female children should receive the very best preparation for adult life as their male counterparts. Girls should therefore be taught to grow up as women who will shoulder responsibilities on equal footing with men in all spheres of life. From the Kigali study, it can be contended that if boys and girls are given equal opportunity and identical curricular in their education process, more women managers will be produced and will do better in careers which were erstwhile dominated by men. Furthermore, more female principals should be given opportunities for school management as they will act as role models to the girls in their various schools.

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Table 1. Study sample for the research

S/NO	NAME OF SCHOOLS	NUMBER OF TEACHERS
1.	Ecole Secondaire Kacyiru	8
2.	Ecole Secondaire Gikomero	12
3.	Eto Muhima	4
4.	FAWE Girls' School	10
5.	Lycee Notre Dame de Citeaux	20
6.	Lycee de Kigali	20
7.	Kagarama Secondary School	14
	TOTAL	**88**

Source: Fieldwork (May, 2009)

Table 2. Perception of teachers on principal's supervision abilities, knowledge of teaching methods, assistance of teachers and awareness of problems of students

S/NO	VARIABLES	STRONGLY AGREED		AGREED		UNDECIDED		TOTAL
		M	F	M	F	M	F	%
1.	Supervision abilities of women Principals emphasis brings about a greater amount of productive behaviour on the part of the teachers.	25	27	23	20	5	0	100
2.	Women Principals exhibit greater knowledge of teaching methods and techniques.	23	26	22	20	8	1	100
3.	Women Principals are more willing and able to assist new teachers with instructional problems.	24	24	23	23	6	1	100
4.	Women Principals are more aware of potential problem of studies.	20	26	27	18	5	3	100

Source: Fieldwork (May, 2009)

Table 3. Perception of teachers on women Principals relationship with students, parents and school community

S/NO	VARIABLES	STRONGLY AGREED		AGREED		UNDECIDED		TOTAL
		M	F	M	F	M	F	%
1.	There is higher student moral in school having women Principals	25	27	20	18	7	2	100
2.	Women Principals make greater efforts to involve students in community affairs	25	28	24	16	3	3	100
3.	Parents approve more often the way in which women Principals handle student discipline	20	17	27	23	5	8	100
4.	Women Principals are often guided by community practices	35	23	11	23	6	2	100

Source: Fieldwork (May, 2009)

Table 4. Perception of Respondents on Women Principals General Administration

S/NO	VARIABLES	STRONGLY AGREED	AGREED	UNDECIDED	TOTAL
					%
1.	Women Principals are generally more democratic in the way they operate their schools	45	35	20	100
2.	There is no difference between men and women Principals in the emphasis placed on maintaining school discipline	51	39	11	100
3.	Women Principals display greater respect for the dignity of the teachers in their school	45	51	4	100
4.	Women Principals are better in reconciling conflicting demands	38	49	14	100
5.	Women Principals exercise stronger leadership	44	47	9	100
6.	Women Principals exhibit more administrative techniques	48	44	8	100
7.	Women Principals maintain a more closely knit organization	48	43	10	100

Source: Fieldwork (May, 2009)