

# Gender Factor in Decision Making: Challenges Facing Women Leadership Development in Primary Schools' Management in Kenya

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## Abstract

The degree of attention given to women leadership in Education in Kenya has increased considerably in the recent years especially after the government introduced the affirmative action for both girls and women in education and employment in support of Millennium Development Goals, World Conventions, the Kenya Vision 2030 blue print for economic development and the Constitution of Kenya, 2010. In spite of all that, women are still underrepresented in leadership. Therefore, this paper presents a study on the Challenges facing women Leadership development in Kenya. The study was guided by Fullans' theory of educational change combined with Riggs theory of Prismatic Society. The study utilised quantitative and qualitative methodologies and adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study was carried out in selected primary schools in Nandi County. Stratified random sampling and purposive proportionate sampling techniques were used to select the participants. District education officers, head teachers and teachers were the target population. The total sample was 364. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, and documents analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The study found that good leadership is not specific to gender. The study found out that the respondents attributed female head teachers' success to their traditionally perceived characteristics, such as caring leadership, multitasking and ability to develop good human relations. The respondents acknowledged that cultural practices and stereotyping may have influenced male Perceptions to women leadership in the past, but argued that good leadership is not specific to gender, but part of the qualities a person possesses, regardless of gender. The study concluded that, female Head teachers are effective and equal to their male counterparts and sometimes even more effective because they are caring, well organized, can multitask and are good at communicating and establishing good relationships with others. The challenges facing female teachers in leadership were identified as; lack of promotion since most of them had never been promoted, unequal advancement opportunities, motherhood responsibilities, and career immobility due to geographical immobility due to family responsibilities, lack of role models, dominance of males in the leadership network and lack of self esteem to seek the administrative posts aggressively. The study recommended that there is need to stop cultural practices hindering women from progressing into leadership. Women should challenge the traditional beliefs by negotiating domestic responsibilities, have self confidence and seek mentorship, training and coaching from other leaders. Finally the study recommended that teacher education and training should be structured to incorporate development of leadership knowledge and skills. Gender mainstreaming in educational organizations' management should be prioritized so as to enhance capacity building and implementation of Gender Policy in Kenya.

**Keywords:** Women, Leadership Development, Challenges

## Introduction

Entrenched socio-cultural stereotypes against women cut across color. At this modern age there are people who still believe that women are incapable of leading. Women, in most cases, find themselves undermined especially, if they may happen to climb the social strata. Thus such type of thinking devalues human liberation effort. "The absence of women from political life and leadership positions undermines democracy and women's empowerment" (New York, UN Headquarters: 28 February - year? Women in leadership positions in rural areas are hard hit by prejudices because most men in such areas are the staunch custodians of culture.

According to Nandi culture, which forms a greater part of the Nandi County, a woman is not supposed to lead. It should, however, be noted that amongst some African cultures, such as, Kikuyu and Luiya women are elected as chiefs such as Luanda Magere among the Luos. The public opinion prevailing in Kenya does not encourage women to occupy leadership positions; hence there are still less than 50% of women head teachers in the schools. Heferran (2008:1) maintains that while rural women are often silent, hidden and under-appreciated, they represent probably the world's most powerful untapped natural resource, and they are surely more than ever before a key to world stability and understanding. There is a saying that says "if you educate a man you educate an individual and that if you educate a woman you educate the whole nation". Thus the saying alludes to the strategic position that the women occupy in society and in their homes. The study was conducted in the three areas of Nandi County in Rift-Valley Province. Nandi County in which this study took place is one of the 47 Counties of the Republic of Kenya (Republic of Kenya (2010)

The aim of the investigation was to probe into challenges that female teachers face both in their schools and in their communities as they seek to progress into leadership. It was found that women head teachers find it hard to make a significant impact in terms of knowledge due to the prejudices that are prevailing in their communities. Furthermore, women head teachers found themselves disadvantaged in the sense that they have to work extra hard to prove to their communities that they are capable of leading than their male counterparts. In most cases, they work in environments that do not fully support them.

African perception on knowledge and leadership has a lot to do with its colonial historical background. Most Africans were made to believe that their knowledge system was primitive and that as Africans they needed white leadership to survive. Songca (2006) states that African indigenous knowledge systems were ignored and undermined. This was further filtered to women who according to the African tradition, were being classified together with children and thus undermined.

In Kenya the ideology of looking down upon African women with respect to their leadership skills was further perpetrated by colonial government, which segregated people according to race and culture. Women received the double oppression as they were oppressed by political regimes and by their communities. Their knowledge and personal experiences were rated as zero.

The degree of attention given to career development of women in the teaching profession in Kenya has increased considerably in the recent years, especially after the Government introduced the affirmative action for both girls and women in education and employment. The recent trends in the world concerning human rights, paved way to human rights, social equality and non-discriminative activities that bring into focus women issues being sidelined in the leadership. Since independence, the Kenya government has followed policies geared towards social equality and non-discrimination in education sector. It is however important to note that considerable efforts have been made to ensure that regional, special needs and gender disparities are adhered to (GOK, 2007).

Kenya has always strived to achieve gender equality in employment and leadership. Over the years, in its continued commitment to the removal of all forms of discrimination in the society, the Government has supported several national and international gender declarations and conventions. Among these are the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), Jomtien World Conference (1990), Dakar Framework for Action on Education for all (2000), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Goals of The African Union (Ministry of Education, 2007). All these documents reiterate the need to eliminate all forms of discrimination, enhance the right to education, and promote gender equality particularly in education and gender inclusion and empowerment. In the process, many policies were put in place to advance gender equality. The Presidential Gender Affirmative Action Policy of 2002 and Gender Policy in education of 2007 are illustrative. However, in spite of these measures there appears to be little impact in practice. For example, in the education sector, there are far fewer women heads than men in Kenyan primary schools.

It was as a result of these conventions that the Government of Kenya developed the Gender Policy in Education (2007) and the creation of the Ministry of Gender and Children (2008). Studies on the status of women and men leadership in education in society, have never been fully exhausted. However, women's large influx into the Labour market has not changed the nature of work for the vast majority neither has it reconciled women's productive and reproductive roles (Schmuck, 1996).

This has not significantly narrowed the gap between men and women because discrimination still persists in many forms especially, in recruitment procedures, training and promotion. Promotion policies and career development opportunities still favour men. Women tend to be concentrated in narrow range of fields and in jobs considered to be of lower responsibility. Women are clustered in dead end jobs with low pay and little potential for training and advancement, (Ostergaard, 1992).

In colonial Kenya, womens' primary obligation was to farm the family land and to produce food for family's consumption; this was to supplement the meagre salary paid to their husbands by the colonial masters. These patriarchal forms, combined with the indigenous culture to create unequal opportunity structures between men and women in employment (Zezela, 1988). The colonial employers preferred male workers because women were considered unreliable and more costly due to maternity leaves.

Curriculum was designed in such a way that it strengthened the ideology that women were inferior and that they could govern. Girls were also not given equal opportunities within african communities to attend as boys. They were left to assist with the household chores. Hence the saying, a woman's place is in the kitchen. Versfeld (2005) observed the following concerning the then curricula: That highly significant movement of people in Africa was generally omitted. Some individuals were selected for study over others. Florence Nightingale featured in many textbooks while Cecilia Makiwane, the first qualified black nurse in the whole of Africa, who came from the Eastern Cape, seldom found a place in textbooks. Irrespective of great examples concerning the contribution of women in society, like in the case of Cecilia Makiwane and Florence Nightingale,

society refused to embrace the capability of women to influence and even to lead (Kanjeere, 2011).

Women leaders need to be developed with the purpose of uplifting the lives of the African community. Knowledge paradigm shift should encourage Africans at large and Kenyan women in particular, to acknowledge and use their experiences, as well as, expertise within their context, (Mbigi, 1995: 99) maintains that Africans need afro-centric leadership model with its emphasis on visibility and constituent sensitivity, as well as, service. He further emphasized that within that context of leadership, “shifting of perceptions and expansion of perspectives is a must” (Mbigi 1995). Leadership in Africa will have to play a major role in shifting the perception of people about leadership and knowledge. African leaders will have to serve as examples in recognizing the leadership of women. That will have to start with tribal leaders and other male traditional leaders. According to Teffo (2006) indigenous leaders should adopt from culture those traits that typify people as Africans and promote peace and harmony in the universal order of things.

Oplata (2006), recognizes that it might well be the situation that women across the developed and developing worlds that do not aspire to leadership for a variety of reasons. However, this is not to suggest that women “lack” aspirations to be leaders; it might be the case to preclude the active pursuit of career opportunities. Furthermore, a number of professional and career development programmes occur away from home and in non teaching times, family and community obligations may take precedence. Long hours at work which is increasing the norm for both men and women leave little time to pursue activities on either a professional or personal level outside of the school (Fitzgerald and Moore, 2006). For those women who wish to be leaders and managers in education there are significant barriers to be overcome that are essential for both men and women to confront in any professional development.

Kenyan women leaders should be encouraged to be proud of their culture, leadership and communities. This however, should be done with care as Jansen (2007) has observed that even though Kenyans have about 50 years in democracy, they are still struggling with who they are. Thus women will have to define who they are in their communities and professions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The management of primary and secondary schools, including appointment of head teachers, deputy head teachers, senior teachers and heads of departments, also shows a trend of male dominance. The Boards of Governors and School Management Committee compositions and leadership, indicate inequalities in gender representation in favour of men (Ro K, 2007). In the primary schools, the situation is replicated where less than 10% of female teachers are in leadership positions that are dominated by their male counterparts who possess similar qualifications. The Ministry of Education 2011 reported that female head teachers were 1998 (12.8%) and the male counterparts were 13630 (87.2%) in primary schools and 1099 (27.3%) female head teachers and 2933 (72.7%) male in secondary schools, nationally. In Nandi County the number of female head teachers were 71 (11.5%) whereas the male counterparts were 547 (88.5%) in primary schools.

Although the Government has put in place policies to address some of these challenges it continues to engage with stakeholders to gain their consensus on modalities of addressing gender issues in education. It is apparent that underlying causes and factors militate against the achievement of gender equity and equality in education and leadership do persist.

Zezeza (2006) states that african studies showed that the production of african knowledge has concrete and conceptual, and material and moral contexts which create the variations that are so evident across the world and across disciplines. Therefore, the Africa Studies Centers or structures need to be reinforced and supported so that a change in perception on women leadership can occur. Luhabe (2007:4) observed that a constant question that the people ask is the “fitness of africans including women, to be in leadership positions”. She further stated that the media is a threat to democracy and that lack of robust debate by the public about the role of media in building a nation could result in the media assaulting the characters of the African women leaders. Therefore, Kenyan women will have to develop a peculiar way of facing the challenges of being undermined and of reconstructing the development of the nation.

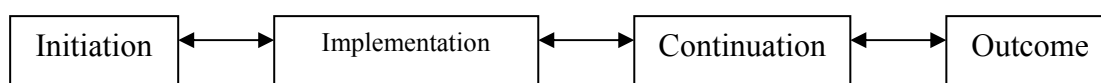
### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory that guided this study was Fullan’s theory of educational change. Fullan’s theory (2001) of educational change argues that policy once developed should be implemented and put into practice. The researcher utilised this theory because women leadership development could be having challenges in the development processes while educators have challenges in putting into practice. Therefore, the theory presents and discusses factors that affect implementation of policies especially, those that deal with women leadership development. This is because women leadership is rather a new concept within traditional African context, especially in Kenya. According to Fullan’s theory, change does not happen automatically but goes through a process of education and dissemination of new concepts pertaining to the process.

The theory explains three features for change. First: the characteristics of change. These include the need, clarity, complexities and quality of change. Secondly, the local characteristics that affect that change, these include female teachers' perception, male teachers' perception on women leadership, culture, training and strategies to improve women leadership development, and thirdly the external factors that affect or influence change which include both internal and external factors of the world arena, for example, the World Conventions, Gender Policies and the Constitution.

According to Fullan (2001), the change process goes through three broad phases namely: (i) Initiation, mobilisation or adoption of the idea on women leadership. These are the processes that lead up to and include the decision to proceed with a change. (ii) Implementation and development process - change commences and reform starts and (iii), Institutionalization - change becomes a part of the organisation, is absorbed and fades away. In Fulani's opinion, this is a more simplified model of change. It suggests the outcome and the results of the innovation, as a fourth stage as shown in Figure 1.

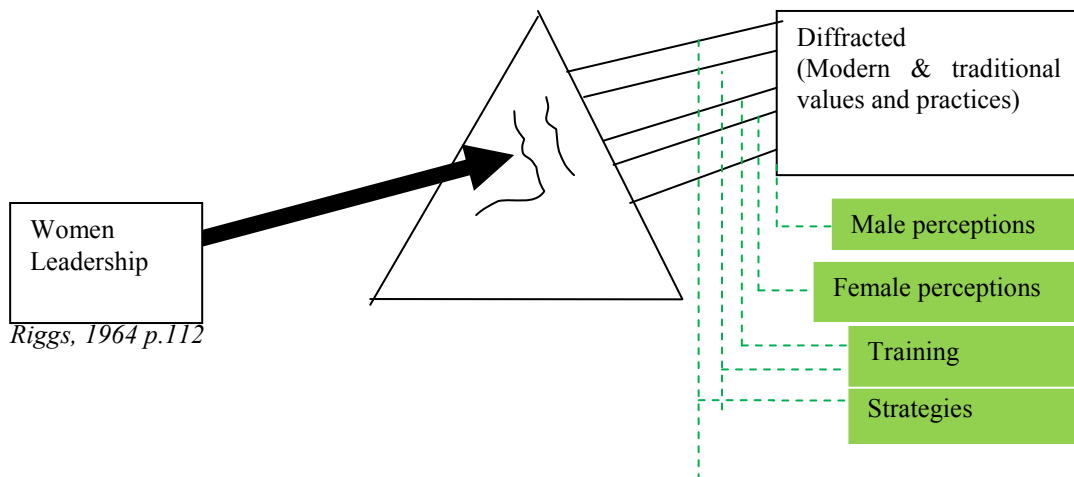
**Figure 1 A simplified view of the change process**



*Adopted from: Fullan, 2001:51*

The process is not linear as it may appear because stages feed back into earlier or preceding stages allowing for continuous feedback. These are aspects that need to be taken on board in women leadership development processes in educational institution. The feedback from the respondents showed that women are still underrepresented in leadership positions in primary schools in Kenya, despite the implementation of the constitution, gender policy and affirmative action. This theory notwithstanding, the researcher also adopted Prismatic Model to further illustrate women leadership development issues. Riggs (1964) used the metaphor of fused white light rays passing through a prism and emerging diffracted as a series of different colours to portray change in general. This is illustrated in figure 2.

**Figure 2: The Prismatic Model**



*Riggs, 1964 p.112*

Within the prism, there is a stage where the diffraction process starts but remains incomplete. This stage represents elements of both traditional (white light) and modern values (diffracted light). The Prismatic Society Theory, therefore, describes a society in which both traditional and modern values are in co-existence as a mixture of the two. The Prismatic model holds that in a transitional society, the traditional and modern values co-exist side by side with overlaps resulting from the mixture of both values (Harber and Davies, 1997; Riggs, 1964). Thus, it could be concluded that a prismatic society is a society in transition and tends to retain both sets of values.

Fullan's theory of educational change and Riggs prismatic model were singled out as appropriate theories to the study of women leadership development. These theories assisted in investigating and understanding the challenges facing women leadership development in primary schools. The continuous feedback presented by Fullans theory was utilised to advance concussions and recommendations for improving

women leadership development in primary schools in Kenya

### Research Methodology

A qualitative research approach was used in the study to gather data. Questionnaires and interview schedules were designed and used in the investigation. Questionnaires that were used were first given to an expert in the field for validity and verification. Questions in the questionnaire were divided into three sections. The first section required that the participants give biographical information, the second set of questions required yes or no answers and the last section was based on open-ended type of questions items. Sample was selected through Purposive Sampling method since other areas were inaccessible and the sample was limited by the nature of the study. Thus the total sample of 364, respondents participated in the study selected from each of the five districts in Nandi County. The respondents selected were from primary schools and district education office.

### Findings and Discussions

The respondents were asked to state factors which affect women leadership development in primary school management, and the respondents listed patriarchal setting of community's leadership, gender roles and responsibilities, cultural orientations and socialisation process as the major factors. From the interviews, DEO (1) stated that:

*'patriarchal and dominance of men in leadership positions was a factor, the exposure and orientation of boys and young men to leadership provided them with role models and mentorship while the absence of women in leadership denied women mentorship resulting in development of stereotypical perceptions which made them shy away from responsibility'.*

In fact the respondents stressed that, the underrepresentation of women in leadership is a challenge in itself.

However, DEO (3) further elaborated that:

*'certain cultural values were pertinent to women leadership, in the sense that honesty, commitment, transparency, caring and respect were values that had been consistently portrayed by the few women in leadership, and it was the same values that had made them outstanding'.*

The following factors were identified by the study as challenges female teachers face in their leadership endeavors:

1. They have to convince men in their schools and surrounding communities that they are capable of leading. They have to work extra hard in their schools as compared to their male counterparts who are readily accepted in their communities.
2. Long and winding processes of training and preparation for leadership.
3. They are scrutinized for what they wear especially if they have to address parents' meetings. Some communities do not accept women who wear trousers
4. Boys from initiation schools tend to undermine their authority, such boys tend to associate discipline with physical power
5. Male educators find it difficult to submit to the authority of a woman. Women headteachers in most cases find themselves not being fully accepted by the communities they work with. They do not get the support from other female colleagues who would also like to work with male leaders. They are made to feel that their contributions to society are not important
6. They are challenged by educators who think that women headteachers are not knowledgeable on labour issues
7. Tribal authorities undermine their leadership by being vocal about their wish for a male headteacher in their area, Lack of parental involvement becomes rife in female headed institutions, some male parents refuse to serve in the SMCs of female headed schools
8. Some male colleague head teachers do not give them support
9. Cultural issues become more conspicuous especially if the female headteacher works in a different cultural set up

Women's prioritization of family roles at the expense of their career advancement is not new. For example, Logan (1999) observes, culturally defined, desirable feminine behaviour was nurturing and caring for others, placing importance on relationships and the quality of life. This may be the reason why women teachers in this study gave preference to the family roles rather than to their own career advancement and so shunned away from applying for posts especially, those far away from their families.

Women are perceived as caring, nurturing and collaborative, while men are supposed to be much more analytical, decisive, data-rational and competitive. Stereotyping is a reductionist process. Collard (2001) has drawn attention to the fact that the use of essentialist typecasts has been disputed by Reynolds (1995), Grogan (1996), Coleman (1998) and Council (1995) among others. Yet typecasting is still used as an investigative tool in the examination and analysis of educational leadership. In contrast with these simplistic polarities, there is the view of androgyny in leadership and management. Successful leaders and managers are seen to employ an

amalgam of male and female characteristics and leadership styles, irrespective of their gender.

The Kenyan traditional society like most other African societies is highly patriarchal. Men are considered head of the family with women as dependents. Kereteletswe (2004), emphasises that, in some cultures, women and children are grouped together as children, or as part of the male property or household. In urban areas, people adopt the modern values while in the rural areas they live according to traditional norms and values and there is a clear division of labour with the male expected to provide for the family. Most of the cultures have elders (male) who are seen as the custodians of the traditional norms and values, the culture of the people. They also help retain or preserve the social order. Therefore, this structure makes it difficult for female teachers, especially, those who were brought up to be timid to seek leadership.

The findings are also supported by Harber and Davis (1997:95), in the following statement;

*“The actual functioning of educational institutions’ leadership and hence their effectiveness is affected not just by global patterns but also by continuities and contradictions stemming from their cultural and social economic locations within particular societies”*

Women headteachers find themselves fully accepted as leaders in their respective communities after a lot of hard work and sacrifices. This is not the case with their male counter parts that are readily accepted as leaders in their various communities. Women head teachers also cited the fact that some male parents would not want to serve in their SGBs on the basis that they cannot work with women or work under a leadership of a woman. Such type of occurrence depict how stereotypes can actually make one lose on an important issue such as, contributing meaningfully to the education of a child.

The respondents were also asked to identify strategies in which women representation in primary school management could be improved, and the following responses were received:

1. The fact that women are already leading in their households should not be ignored. This occurs mostly whereby husbands have to migrate to other areas in search of gainful employment.
2. Cultural stereotypes and other prejudices against women make it impossible for women to actualize their potential. Thus women should not be disadvantaged on the basis of their gender. They should be judged on the basis of their actions just like men.
3. Rural communities will have to be taught to respect women leaders and put aside their traditional mindset. Communities should be made to look beyond themselves and think globally. They should be made to see the great contributions made by women. Thus change in the local arena will facilitate change in the global village.
4. Women should not be made to view the world as being male dominant. They should be in the position to see their role in the whole society. An enabling environment should be created to enable both males and females to influence the public sphere equally. Women headteachers and all the other people should not feel obliged to work only amongst people of their cultural group.
5. The minority speaking headteacher should not feel disadvantaged to work with a dominant speaking community. Such type of thinking leads also to instances of xenophobia.
6. The constitution should be implemented to the latter and all other related legislations

The study recommended that there is need to stop cultural practices hindering women from progressing in their careers such as woman’s first priority is to be a mother and wife, women also need to challenge the traditional believes by negotiating domestic responsibilities, having self confidence and seeking mentorship and coaching from the female leaders. Zikhali (2007), in his study advocated for an integrated organizational management approach to be used to integrate all leadership systems and processes into one complete framework, enabling people to work as a single unit, unified by organisational goals, shared vision and common values. The system should depend on a balanced mix of the masculine and feminine attributes. The approach should put its weight towards adoption of measures to attract, advance and empower women so as to benefit from their qualifications, experience and talent.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of the study presented a mixed picture of female leadership in the context of leadership in Nandi County. The respondents identified and portrayed traces of stereotyped thinking as regards the suitability of women to leadership as factors which contribute to the low number of females in primary school headship in Nandi County.

Thus social change will inform knowledge perception as women will view themselves in the right context. This implies that women are, to a certain extent, solely responsible for the transformation of the mindset of people around them. They will have to reflect on their history, be patient, set goals, work systematically towards change and be committed to their course. They will have to defy capitalist exploitation, whereby women are included in higher position just for window dressing and conformity to affirmative action. Women want to be placed in higher positions because they are capable and not only to be unfairly affirmed. Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are made.

1. Stereotypes that exist against women in general and against those in leadership, in particular, should be addressed. Communities should be made aware that sound leadership does not depend on gender.
2. A space for women to actualize their potential will have to be created. Women should be allowed to influence communities they work in, just like their male counter parts, or even better.
3. There is a need in society to move towards a paradigm shift towards women's capability to lead. Issues surrounding a person's cultural group should also be dealt away with.
4. Cultural practices influence women in their quest to leadership positions. Culturally defined, desirable feminine behaviour was nurturing and caring for others, placing importance on relationships and the quality of life. This may be the reason why women teachers in this study gave preference to the family roles rather than to their own career advancement and so shunned applying for posts especially those far away from their families.
5. The study also indicated that men tend to be much more purposeful about planning their careers and lobbying for leadership, while women tend to shy from the same. From an early age, daughters are groomed for their marriage roles of wife, mother and food provider and they are conditioned from an early age to believe that a woman is inferior to a man and that her place is in the home.

### Recommendations

Arising from the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Schools should develop more sensitive courses that will assist both boys and girls to develop new orientations about the roles and capabilities of both men and women. A mentoring system should be established within the educational administrative preparatory programmes in order to increase women's confidence and help them to stay focused in leadership development. The study recommended stopping cultural practices hindering women from progressing in leadership, women need to seek mentorship, training and coaching from female leaders
2. Women should be more purposeful about working on the personal factors that hinder them from taking their rightful place in society by working out on issues of self-esteem and confidence in relation to career development and leadership. Women aspiring to be leaders should be prepared for the various challenges that go with leadership by consciously seeking mentoring and coaching from those who have excelled in leadership.
3. Communities should be sensitised on women leadership so that they can be able to appreciate and support female head teachers. Cultural practices and traditional beliefs hindering women from progressing into leadership should be stopped. At individual level, women should learn to challenge the traditional gender roles, which leave most domestic responsibilities in their hands.
4. Graduate programmes that reflect the needs of women leaders with emphasis on leadership skills should be designed and offered in universities. Teacher education and training should be structured to incorporate development of leadership skills.
5. An integrated organizational management approach should be developed to integrate all leadership systems and processes that will enable people work as a single unit, unified by organisational goals, shared vision and common values. The system should depend on a balanced mix of the masculine and feminine attributes. Affirmative action policies should be monitored both in headship positions and in programmes that prepare women for leadership roles. Educational Leaders should conform to the new constitution in the process of striving towards gender equity in educational leadership. (the Constitution of Kenya 2010)

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