

**THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE HEAD TEACHERS  
IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA**

by

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## DECLARATION

I declare that **THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE HEAD TEACHERS IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA** is my own work and that it has not been submitted at any other university.

The sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Date

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## **ABSTRACT**

The under-representation of women in positions of leadership in primary schools is common in many developing countries, raising issues of equity, social justice and sustainable development. Studies on gender and leadership have revealed that a number of barriers existed for women seeking positions of educational leadership. This includes social-cultural factors, the expectations of the society, as well as women's perceptions of themselves, and of leadership.

This study was concerned with the representation of women in leadership positions in Kenya's rural primary schools. In particular, it explored the educational leadership experiences of women working in schools in the rural areas within Kajiado County. It sought strategies to enhance the participation of women in leadership roles in rural primary schools.

The data were primarily gathered by means of qualitative methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen female head teachers drawn from public primary schools. Unstructured observation was done during visits to the schools, and during the interviews, field-notes were taken. The women gave rich descriptions of the various aspects of their work-lives within the context of sharing the challenges and strengths experienced in their careers. Secondary data were gathered by means of research, where the researcher reviewed the existing literature on women and leadership.

The data that were collected were analyzed, categorized, synthesized and interpreted. The findings were presented in rich descriptions, which also included anecdotes from the participants.

The key findings revealed administrative challenges, which included the grievances of the parents, limited resources, issues with accountability, time-management and the handling of difficult teachers. Personal challenges included wavering self-confidence, problems with trying to balance work and social lives, as well as home-work conflicts. The findings revealed the participants' inadequate preparation for their leadership roles, and society's initial skepticism on women's school leadership. The study also revealed women's reluctance to take up leadership positions, as was evidenced by their reluctance in applying for the positions.

The study found that the participation of women in primary school leadership positions could be enhanced by means of attractive remuneration, effective mentoring, positive role-models, programmes for the preparation for leadership, and the assurance of limited geographical movement on promotion.

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>TSC</b>	Teachers' Service Commission
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>ADB</b>	African Development Bank
<b>DEO</b>	District Education Officer
<b>ROK</b>	Republic of Kenya
<b>AEO</b>	Assistant Education Officer
<b>KNEC</b>	Kenya National Examination Council
<b>ROWE</b>	Results-only work environment
<b>KESI</b>	Kenya Education Staff Institute
<b>PRISM</b>	Primary School Management

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# CHAPTER 1

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Women have both a right and an obligation to active participation in leadership. Researchers from different parts of the world (Cubillo & Brown 2003, Fitzgerald 2003, Madsen 2007, Sherman 2005, Adams & Hambright 2004 and Sperandio & Kagoda 2010) have given attention to the topic of women in educational leadership positions at various levels of the education ladder. Most of these studies have concluded that women are under-represented in educational leadership, and that they face various challenges in their aspirations to attain and maintain these positions. The researchers also noted that women bring a special kind of leadership to the table.

The teaching profession internationally, with the exception of a few countries, is dominated by women, but despite the large numbers of women in the profession, they are greatly under-represented in positions of management (Cubillo & Brown 2003:279). The report on gender equity of the American Association of University Professors, 2006, indicated that of the top twelve universities with the largest share of female tenured professors, only two consisted of an above 50% of women, namely 68.8% and 72.7%. The rest ranged from 37.5% to 48%. The bottom twelve universities had percentages of women representation ranging from 7.6 to 15.9 (Brioso 2009:16).

When Mwai Kibaki was elected as President of Kenya in 2002, he relinquished his position as Chancellor of all the public universities, and appointed individuals in his positions. Only one woman was appointed as head of one of the seven public universities in Kenya. To date the situation has remained unchanged. Gender gaps in school management in Kenya are also glaring (Republic of Kenya 2007:28). The management of primary and secondary schools, including the appointment of head teachers, deputy head teachers, senior teachers and heads of departments indicate the trend of male dominance. The composition and leadership of the Board of Governors and School Management Committees show inequalities in gender representation in favour of men (Republic of Kenya 2007:28).

The disadvantaged workplace status of women is due to a set of historical, social, economic and organizational factors (Powell & Graves 2003:239). Although the reasons for these persistent and pervasive inequalities vary somewhat across national, cultural and occupational contexts, Kellerman and Rhode (2007:3-6) revealed that common obstacles to the leadership of women included the choices the women make, namely some opt out of full-time professional work to keep the home fires burning, and also gender bias in leadership opportunities. They referred to the fact that careers are waylaid by gender stereotypes, also gender bias in evaluation and mentoring, gender differences in family responsibilities, and inadequate work place structures and public policies. Women internalize some of these barriers, and it creates a psychological glass ceiling. As a result, they appear less willing to engage in promoting themselves, or of assertive behavior, or in taking the risks necessary for leadership roles. Chege and Sifuna (2006:126) associated the factors that have restricted women's access to and persistence in a teaching career in Kenya with

- financial constraints;
- the increasing devaluation of the teaching profession, especially at primary school level;
- difficulty in recruiting and retaining female teachers, particularly in rural and hardship areas; and
- the lack of mobility for women because of family responsibilities and cultural considerations.

It has been argued that women themselves are often reluctant to run for public positions (Kiamba 2008:12-13). In a paper aimed at investigating the factors accounting for the lack of ambition among Greek female teachers in reaching managerial positions, Kyriakoussis and Saiti (2006) found that 94.1% of the female respondents had not applied for promotion. In the Kajiado District, Kenya, of twenty primary school teachers who applied for the post of head teacher in public primary schools in July 2008, only three were women. Twenty-seven teachers applied for the post of deputy head teacher - only six were women (District Education Office, Kajiado, Kenya). Omukaga, Panyako and Wanjiku (2007) studied the readiness of female teachers in rural areas of the Western Province, Kenya, and found that the majority of female teachers in primary schools were reluctant to take up leadership responsibilities.

This reluctance of women to take up leadership positions in schools has been ascribed to, amongst others, various administrative factors. Pont, Nusche and Moorman (2008:2) attribute the hesitation to overburdened roles, insufficient preparation and training, limited career prospects, and inadequate support and rewards. Other researchers have identified low pay in comparison to job responsibilities, too much stress, too great a time-commitment, dealing with difficult parents, students and staff, and internal and external political issues inherent within administrative jobs (Adams & Hambright 2004:209). Priola and Brannan (2009:386) mentioned the lack of emotional support (for the leaders), work based on a male model - strong competition, a culture of long hours (which is difficult if one has a family), and the lack of formal training to support the promotion to a managerial position. Powell and Graves (2003:239) asserted that when women believe that they are disadvantaged, they may be less likely to express an interest in vacant top management jobs than equally qualified men.

Historically, leadership has carried the notion of masculinity and the belief that men make better leaders than women (Kiamba 2008:8). Public perception tend to favour men as being better able to handle discipline than women, to work with predominantly male Boards of Education, and to deal with political influence. Recent changes in the nature, structure and composition of many organizations have brought about opportunities for women to embark on managerial careers that were previously overwhelmingly occupied by male employees (Priola & Brannan 2009:379). Changes taking place in today's schools open a window of opportunity for more women to move into education administration. Schools that have traditionally had male leaders are experiencing changes in leadership - some primary schools have their first female head teacher ever.

School leaders act as buffers as they are expected to attend to all matters arising in the school that affect learners, teachers, parents and other stakeholders. Slater, Garcia & Gorosave (2008:704). With reference to the Macmillan English Dictionary, a *buffer* is "...a thing or person that reduces a shock or protects somebody/something against difficulties". When teachers are appointed as head teachers, they find themselves in a different world altogether, namely a world with new responsibilities, commitments, new problems and in most cases, less free time. In many situations they have to absorb the pressure and responsibility stemming from problems among teachers, learners, parents, supervisors and the community. Administrative

positions require hard work, and long hours, and are stressful. While much of what confronts school leaders is gender neutral, women clearly face their own set of challenges (Archer 2003:1). For women, administrative work is added on to their child-care, home and family responsibilities (Kiamba 2008:12-13).

Although not much research has been done on the conditions of women in the teaching profession in Kenya, it is apparent that the need to juggle the double burden of teaching duties and domestic responsibilities accounts for a reportedly high rate of absenteeism, sometimes leading to the abandonment of the profession, or a decline in productivity among female teachers (Chege & Sifuna 2006:126). At times, the disciplinary measures taken create new and more serious problems, which may include interdiction and a deduction in the teachers' salaries. Motivating female teachers to become school heads is crucial to the education system. When more women become principals, changes are needed to encourage and retain them as principals and as education leaders. Strategies should be directed to women who manage to enter the leadership field, who succeed and advance in their careers.

In Kenya, female heads play an important role in the management of schools and other educational institutions. Through efficient management and leadership, as well as support for female teachers and students, female administrators can help improve the quality of girls' education (Chege & Sifuna, 2006:127). The vast majority of head teachers in rural primary schools in Kenya are men. Women head teachers stand out, because they are rare. A good example is Isinya Division, which forms part of this study. Of the thirty-six public primary schools, only four are headed by women (Assistant Education Officer's office, Isinya Division). Just recently, however, there has been an increase in the number of women heading rural primary schools. Most schools, especially in the rural areas, are experiencing their first female head teachers.

This research will examine the lived experiences of women heading primary schools in the rural areas of Kenya. It will assess the factors that may have led to their having been chosen in leadership positions, and include the administrative and personal challenges faced by the women head teachers. The study hopes to shed light on the career experiences of women who have managed to enter education leadership positions in rural primary schools in Kenya. It will



assess their readiness at the entry point, the challenges they face, and how they deal with these challenges.

## **1.2 EDUCATION IN KENYA**

“Education is a key pillar towards the realization of (Kenya) vision 2030”, the 2009 census report says (Daily Nation, 1 September 2010:5).

Since the attainment of political independence in 1963, the Government of Kenya has placed huge emphasis on the role of education in socio-economic and political development (Republic of Kenya 2007:1). All education in Kenya is governed by the Education Act (1968) which has been amended several times (1980, 1986) to take account of the changing socio-economic circumstances over time. Other related Acts of Parliament include the Teachers’ Service Commission (TSC) Act, the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) Act, the Adult Education Act, the University Act, and Acts and Charters for universities. Various commissions, committees and task forces have also been set up to tackle issues arising in the education sector. Recent policy initiatives have focused on the attainment of education for all, and in particular, universal primary education.

Kenya’s education system consists of early childhood education (three years), primary school education (eight years), secondary education (four years) and university education, which takes four to six years, depending on the course. There are also mid-level colleges that offer certificate and diploma courses for two and three years training. Public and private schools exist for all levels of education, including colleges and universities. Public schools are run by the government while private institutions are managed by individuals or organizations. Additionally, there are a number of international schools catering for various overseas education systems.

The Government of Kenya has committed itself to providing universal education to all school-going children (Republic of Kenya 2007:4). There has been a remarkable increase in school enrolment in the past decade. Free primary education (re-introduced in 2003) and subsidized secondary education (introduced in 2008), are the reasons for this rise in enrolment. The re-introduction of free primary education by the NARC Government in 2003 raised the primary school enrolment from around 5.9 million in December 2002, to an estimated 6.9 million in

January 2003 (Republic of Kenya 2007:4). The 2009 census reports an estimated 9.4 million pupils in primary schools, 1.8 million in secondary schools, and 200,000 students at university. Mid-level colleges and youth polytechnics consist of 290,000 and 35,000 students respectively (Daily Nation, 1 September 2010:5).

One of the major challenges in education in Kenya is the availability of manpower. International standards require that one teacher should teach not more than forty pupils, but in Kenya the load is much higher, with nearly double the number. Currently there are only about 240,000 teachers (Sunday Nation, 15 August 2010:8). With school enrolment increasing faster than the employment rate of teachers, this hurts the quality of education. The government has, however, embarked on a campaign to recruit teachers on a three year-contract basis. Other aspects include administrative challenges, such as the management of the curriculum, of people and of resources. At school level these are handled by the school heads in collaboration with their School Boards and School Management Committees.

Kenya continues to strive to improve the education and training of her people. The vision for the education sector for 2030 is “...to have globally competitive quality education, training and research for sustainable development’ (Government of Kenya 2007:17). Specifically, the government aims to increase access to education, to improve the transition rates from primary to secondary schools, and to raise the quality and relevance of education (Government of Kenya 2007:16).

In accordance with Kenya’s 2030 vision in respect of gender, namely to have “...equity in power and resource distribution between the sexes and specifically ‘to increase opportunities all-round among women”, this study focuses on women head teachers and their experiences in respect of the various challenges in the implementation process.

### **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The issue of the empowerment of women is such a major concern that it is the focus of the Millennium Development Goal number 3 which seeks to “...promote gender equality and empower women.” In line with this, one of the guiding principles of Kenya Vision 2030 is the “equality of citizens” where it is stated that,

“Kenya shall be a nation that treats its women and men equally. It will not discriminate any citizen on the basis of gender, race, religion or ancestral origin” (Government of Kenya 2007:22).

Over the years the women in Kenya have protested against their minimal representation in public offices. According to a presidential decree on 20 October 2006, 30% of all new jobs in the civil service and government parastatals have to be reserved for women (CEDAW 2009:12). The new constitution of Kenya decrees that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective and appointive bodies shall be of the same gender. This effectively guarantees women’s representation within local and national governance structures.

The Teachers’ Service Commission (TSC, 2007) accords equal opportunities for both male and female teachers wishing to enter the administration of education. Vacant positions for the post of head teacher are advertised in newspapers and at relevant education offices. The selection for a position is done from the teachers who apply, and the suitable candidates are selected and interviewed for the job. The National Policy on the Appointment, Deployment and Training of school administrators and managers state that “...the posting and deployment of head teachers shall be based on gender balance”, amongst other factors (MoEST 1999:8). One of the principles of a more specific Teachers’ Service Commission policy on the identification, selection, appointment, deployment and training of heads of post primary institutions is to “...be sensitive to gender and disadvantaged groups” (TSC 2007a:8).

A major issue addressed in this study is the extent to which female teachers in public primary schools in Kenya are taking up the opportunities to participate in leadership offered by set government policies by applying for promotional positions, and also their experiences as heads of primary schools, and what can be done to encourage more women to enter educational leadership positions.

The main research question for this study is:

What are the lived experiences of women head teachers in public primary schools, and how can strategies for women’s participation in the leadership of rural primary schools in Kenya be improved?

To provide the context and direction of the study in order to answer the research question, a specific aim and objectives are necessary.

#### **1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of women heading public rural primary schools in Kenya, and to explore possible strategies that may be applied to improve women's participation in educational leadership in rural primary schools in Kenya.

The specific objectives were as follows:

- to determine the lived experiences of female head teachers in rural primary schools in Kenya; and
- to explore possible strategies that may improve women's participation in the leadership of rural primary schools in Kenya.

#### **1.5 THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

A research design is used to structure the research to indicate how all of the major parts of the research work together to address the central research questions (Kombo & Tromp 2006:70). The principle method of investigation in this study was a qualitative exploration of the experiences of women head teachers in rural primary schools.

##### **1.5.1 The use of qualitative research methodology**

This research study was shaped in qualitative terms by the researcher's interest in the *why* and *how* of women's school leadership (rather than *how many*). A qualitative method of investigation was considered appropriate because it enables "...face-to-face situations by interacting with the selected persons in their settings" (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:395). Qualitative research is advantageous in that it permits research to go beyond statistical results usually reported in quantitative research. Human phenomena that cannot be investigated by direct observation, such as attitudes and other emotions, are best studied by means of the qualitative method (Mugenda & Mugenda 2003:156). In seeking to understand the experiences of female head teachers, the researcher was interested in the context of the situation. This context could only be revealed by the respondents themselves, namely by them telling their own stories. This could best be understood by means of a qualitative approach.

### **1.5.2 Sampling**

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. In this respect the researcher purposely targeted a group of people believed to be reliable for the study (Kombo & Tromp 2006:82). This involved the selection of ‘information-rich persons’ or situations known to experience the concept being studied (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:402). In this case, fifteen female head teachers from rural primary schools were selected. Samples were drawn from public primary schools in the rural areas of Kenya. The study involved female head teachers employed by the Teachers’ Service Commission.

### **1.5.3 Data collection**

Primary data were obtained by means of semi-structured interviews. Fifteen individual interviews were conducted with female head teachers. In an attempt to enhance the validity of the data collected, the interviews were recorded on audiotape and the tapes were later transcribed. In addition to this, the researcher conducted ‘participant review’. This involved asking each participant to review the researcher’s synthesis of the interview to guarantee the accuracy of the representation (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:408). Unstructured observation was done during visits to the schools, and during the interviews. Field-notes were taken throughout the study in order to provide an avenue for documenting observations, anecdotes, quotes, questions and other necessary information.

Secondary data were obtained by means of desk research. This involved a thorough review of the existing literature (Bush, Clover, Bisschoff, Kholeka, Heystek & Joubert 2006:3). It included work published internationally and in Kenya, and included books, articles in academic journals, official literature, namely government reports and documents, and masters and doctoral theses. Internet data on women and leadership, with particular focus on school leadership, were also consulted.

### **1.5.4 Piloting**

*Piloting* was done to help the researcher discover any weaknesses in the research design, and to gain useful suggestions to improve the research questions. It was done by administering the interview schedule to a small representative sample identical to, but not including the group being surveyed (Orodho 2009:182). In this case it was done at two schools which were not part of the final study. Interviews were conducted with two female head teachers with the aim of

finding out whether the interview questions provoked a response, whether the wording was clear, and whether the respondents interpreted the questions in the way it was intended. Piloting also helped to detect any bias in the questions.

### **1.5.5 Data analysis and presentation**

The data were analyzed throughout the collection period. The information gathered was analyzed by "...categorizing, synthesizing and interpreting to provide explanations of the phenomena of interest" (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:462). The findings were presented in descriptions, which also included anecdotes from the participants.

A more detailed account of the methodology, data collection and data analysis procedures will be provided in chapter four of the study.

## **1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The social cognitive theory is important in understanding gender and leadership. This theory, as proposed by Albert Bandura (1986,1998, in Santrock (2000:8), stresses that behavior is determined, not only by its controlling environmental conditions, but also by how thoughts modify the impact of the environment on behavior. It states that behavior, the environment and personality/cognitive factors are important in understanding the personality (Santrock 2000:424). Personal factors (beliefs, expectations, attitudes and knowledge), the physical and social environment (resources, consequences of actions, and other people and physical settings) and behavior (individual actions, choices and verbal statements) all influence and are influenced by one another. Bandura calls this *reciprocal determinism* (Wolfolk 2007:330). Although Wolfolk uses this theory to explain factors that affect learning, these same factors are likely to affect women in their choices to become or not to become leaders. Women's attitudes and their perceptions of themselves, societal expectations and interaction with the environment are all factors that can influence women's aspirations to leadership positions.

Personal or internal factors begin with cognition. The cognitive perspective focuses on understanding the mental processes by which people gain knowledge about themselves and the world around them (Nevid 2003:12). This knowledge is internalized, and usually determines future actions. Through previous achievements people increase their self-efficacy. *Self-efficacy* refers to the individual's estimate of his or her own ability to perform a specific task in a

particular situation (Hellriegel & Slocum 2004:108). People with a high sense of efficacy in a given area will set high goals, be less afraid of failure and find new strategies when old ones fail (Wolfolk 2007:333). Conversely, low levels of self-efficacy can affect a leader's ability to deal with job-related stress. This can have a direct effect on their workload, and may lead to burn-out and a lack of creativity, of innovation and of problem-solving abilities (Santovec 2010:8). Self-efficacy and success go hand-in-hand (Nevid 2003:487). Effective leaders are likely to possess a high sense of self-efficacy or belief in their own personal effectiveness.

Other internal factors include attitudes and self-expectations. Madsen (2007:116) refers to the *growth task model* of human development, which proposes that individuals develop because of imagination, self-motivation, inquisition and curiosity- common attributes in those who enjoy continuous learning and growth. Ten women university presidents interviewed by Madsen (2007:116) described themselves as always having been obedient, respectful, reflective, smart, self-directed, helpful, with a sense of competency, and they were usually highly confident. All ten loved learning, education and development. These women's driving internal desires for growth and development had propelled and prepared them for leadership.

Often women, however, lack internal drive. Their reluctance to put themselves forward for promotion is attributed to a lack of ambition, among other factors (Kyriokoussis & Saiti 2006). Cubillo and Brown (2003:281) mentioned internal barriers such as a lack of confidence, of competitiveness, and fear of failure. They assert that fear of the unknown is hardly surprising, given women's exclusion from the male-dominated world of education management for so long. But they continue to say that this fear is greatly reduced once women are aware of the 'rules of the game'. A lack of intentionality was also evident in Eddy's (2008:52) study of women leading community colleges. Several participants noted that they did not have a 'presidential' position in mind when they started working in higher education. They were, however, influenced by an innate sense or awareness that they could do the job of college president or a mentor tapping their backs and convincing them that they could do the job. Their experiences in holding various positions in the college had also prepared them for when the leadership opportunity presented itself.

It is necessary to change the mindset of women, to empower them with the knowledge that they have the capabilities, and to instill in them the confidence to attain leadership positions

(Kiamba 2008:22). With gender equity policies in place in many countries, it is important for women to see themselves as leaders. Lange (2006:17) observed that for females to see themselves as leaders, it is suggested that they read about the role women have played in history. This information can become a foundational platform upon which to construct their future knowledge.

It is important to assess how cultural settings and societal expectations shape women's rise to leadership. Gage, Mumma and Fritz (2004:36) refer to the Social Role Theory, which explains how each gender becomes focused on whatever roles are available to them, based on the expectations of the society. Most cultures assign roles to gender. Although this may differ in different cultures and settings, it would help explain how individuals take information from the environment through the socialization process which they internalize, and which later informs their choices to take up leadership positions.

Gage, *et al.* (2004:37) divided gender roles into two main divisions - agentic and communal roles. They refer to *agentic* roles as being characterized by assertiveness, controlling, aggressiveness and independence. Men are primarily the individuals assumed to possess *agentic* qualities. Roles that are tied to these traits are deemed masculine. The second characteristic is what they call *communal* characteristics, which tend to be seen as caring, nurturing, helpful, gentle and kind. Those who are sympathetic, sensitive, affectionate and democratic are deemed as having communal traits. Roles tied to these traits are considered as feminine, and are thus associated with women. Marshall (1984, in Hopfl and Matilal 2007:203) noted that women are traditionally excluded from management jobs because they are judged as less serious and less highly motivated than their fellow male employees. They are seen to indicate low organizational commitment because they do not assign their jobs precedence over all other life areas, may leave their jobs to have children, and demonstrate less company loyalty than do their male colleagues.

Syed and Murray (2008:416), however, argued that women have specific attributes, characteristics and skills that are beneficial to organizations and teams. They said that the work place structures need to value the feminine attributes of nurturance and collaboration. Women have to prove themselves over and over again before they are recognized, and consequently



great psychological strength, confidence and commitment is required from them to cope with the pressure (Mitroussi & Mitroussi 2009:516).

In advancing the social cognitive theory in the study of women and leadership, it is important to learn how the socialization process and societal expectations shape women's choices in entering leadership positions, and their experiences once they attain these positions. It is also important to find out how women's perceptions of themselves and their perceived roles guide their aspirations to leadership.

## **1.7 ETHICAL ISSUES**

Ethical guidelines in research include, but are not limited to informed consent, deception, confidentiality, anonymity, harm to subjects and privacy (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:420).

### **1.7.1 Informed consent**

Participation in research must be voluntary, and people have the right to refuse to divulge certain information about themselves (Orodho 2009:199). For this research, it was important to obtain the necessary consent from the authorities to collect data from schools in Kajiado County (see Appendix 1). It was also important to get the consent of the head teachers to be interviewed (see Appendix 2). Being the first time for most of them to participate in a research project where they were expected to share their own experiences, it was important that they were supplied with all the necessary information in order to understand fully their involvement in the study. This information included the purpose and nature of the research, and their right to choose whether or not to participate. This was necessary, so that the head teachers may not feel nervous about the whole process. In turn, they were in a position to give their well-informed consent.

The process started by letters being written to the people identified for the research. These letters consisted of the introduction, a brief explanation of the nature of the research project, and a request for them to participate. They were also assured of their anonymity and confidentiality Mugenda and Mugenda (2003:192).

### **1.7.2 Confidentiality and anonymity**

When conducting research, it is important to protect the participants by keeping the information given confidential (Mugenda & Mugenda 2003:191). The participants have to be assured that

the information would be used only for the purpose of the research study. On being assured they would more likely feel free to give their honest and complete information (Orodho 2009:200).

Since the number of rural schools with female head teachers is not big, there was a risk of the respondents, as well as of the schools which they headed, being identified. To ensure anonymity in this study, the researcher used pseudonyms for the head teachers, and deleted their addresses and the names of the schools. The selection of the schools was also done over a very large area. The features of the school settings were disguised "...in such a way as to make them appear similar to several possible sites" (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:421). The researcher was able to identify the participants from the fact that she was the one doing the interviews. It was thus important for the researcher to ensure the participants' confidentiality by agreeing not to make such identification known.

### **1.7.3 Harm to subjects**

Harm may be caused to the subjects by asking embarrassing questions, by expressing shock or disgust, by using threatening statements, by compelling persons to say something that they do not believe, or by causing fear and anxiety (Mugenda & Mugenda 2003:191-192). The draft interview schedule was reviewed by four colleagues (two at the workplace and two fellow students) before the final schedule was adapted. This enabled the researcher to remove any sensitive or unnecessary questions. A disclosure script that prefaced the interview schedule was read to the participants before commencing with the interview. It informed the participants, amongst other things, which procedure to follow if they were uncomfortable with any of the questions, and that they could correct the researcher if they thought it necessary.

Specific ethical measures adopted for the purpose of this research are expounded on in chapter four.

## **1.8 DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPTS**

### **1.8.1 Woman head teacher**

According to the Teachers' Service Commission (2007a:10), the term 'head of institution' refers to all heads of secondary and primary institutions. The term 'female head teacher' in this study, refers to female teachers heading primary schools, specifically in rural areas. The main role of the head is that of coordinating the activities within their jurisdiction. They are also responsible for the day-to-day management of the institutions (TSC 2007a:2).

### **1.8.2 Lived experiences**

A *lived experience* is essentially one's own direct experience, a moment in the suite of occurrences that makes up a personal life (Burch 2002). It is a description of first-hand accounts and impressions of living as a member of a group, told as 'lived', 'felt' and 'undergone' (Knowles, Nieuwenhuis & Smit 2009:335). Research on the female head teachers' lived experiences enables the tapping of the unique nature of each of their situations. When women describe what it is like to be a female in predominantly male school headship, they are describing their lived experiences.

### **1.8.2 Public primary school**

A *public primary school* is an ordinary primary school or special primary school (TSC 2007a: 4). In this study the term is used to refer to a school offering basic education (standards one to eight). They are managed and monitored by the government. In Kenya the government offers free schooling in all public primary schools. It provides all the facilities in public primary schools, and also pays the teachers.

### **1.8.3 Rural primary school**

VanWyk (in: Lemmer, 2000:80) maintains that it is difficult to define what is meant by 'rural', but that there is agreement that schools found within rural areas differ from those found in urban areas. Gender-based constraints to education tend to be more pronounced in rural areas due to the fact that the environment is normally more accommodative of gender inequality (Mlama 2005:2). Rural areas also constitute the majority of the unreached populations, due to poor infrastructure in terms of transport and communication.

## **1.9 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

**Chapter one** introduced the study with a brief glimpse into the background, which summed up the motivation for the study. It also indicated the research question, aims and objectives, theoretical framework, ethical measures, the organization of the study and a brief summary.

**Chapter two** consists of a literature review, and involves an in-depth study of current literature on women and leadership.

**Chapter three** is an extension of the literature review, and explores the present state of women and leadership in Kenya with specific emphasis on women and educational leadership.

**Chapter four** presents a detailed account of the research design. It includes the methods and procedures used in sampling, the collection of data, and an analysis of the data collected.

**Chapter five** focuses on the findings of the study on grounds of the analysis of the data and the literature studied.

**Chapter six** presents a summary of the study, conclusions, recommendations, and areas for further research.

## **1.10 SUMMARY**

Studies done on women and leadership indicate that women are under-represented in the higher forms of leadership. It is also apparent that the leadership of women in schools and other education institutions is important. Some studies attempt to explain the barriers that women face in trying to enter educational leadership such as culture, family and discrimination. Other studies focus on administrative factors such as remuneration, the workload, stress, and others. Most studies involve institutions of higher learning and secondary schools. Female head teachers in primary schools, especially in the rural areas, have not received much focus.

This study intends to focus on female head teachers in rural public primary schools in Kenya. The next chapter is a review of various studies done on women and education leadership.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **WOMEN AND EDUCATION LEADERSHIP**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

To understand women and leadership, an overview of the available studies on women and leadership is necessary. It is important to understand women's perceptions of education leadership as a career, and the cultural and organizational barriers they face. Also important is an understanding of women's personal motivation that would lead or led them to enter into educational leadership. In order to understand this, a literature study was done with the emphasis on

- why women should participate in education leadership;
- what drives or would drive women to enter into education leadership; and
- what challenges women have to face.

An insight into the challenges faced in school leadership is also included.

#### **2.2 WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

International research indicates that in educational leadership women are a minority, both in countries that are developing and those that are at advanced levels of development (Celikten 2005:209). Studies done in various countries, like Greece (Kyriakoussis & Saiti 2006:abstract), California (Wickham 2007:vi), the Solomon Islands (Akao 2008:38), Turkey (Celikten 2005:207), Uganda (Sperandio & Kagoda 2010:22) and Papua New Guinea (Vali 2010:i) reveal an under-representation of women in leadership at all levels of the education system, including primary schools, secondary schools, universities and other educational institutions. The researchers documented numerous factors that make it difficult for women to attain leadership positions in education, such as gender discrimination, pressures of family responsibilities, and social-cultural factors, amongst others.

The following section looks into reasons why it is important to have women participate in educational leadership.

### **2.2.1 The participation of women in leadership promotes gender equity**

The attainment of gender equity and equality in leadership should be a core development issue and a goal in its own right. Women should have the same access to power and resources as men but, as Syed and Murray (2008:414) indicated, despite a plethora of laws and organizational policies on gender equality, women in general remain disempowered in the workplace. “We will all be better off if women’s life experiences, needs and values are fully reflected in decision-making positions”, according to O’Connor (in: Kellerman & Rhode 2007: xiv).

It is important to create opportunities that will enable women to occupy positions of influence, both politically and economically, in order to enhance decision-making. This is because women on the leadership track have unique opportunities and corresponding obligations to promote changes that will make leadership accessible to others: as citizens, women can support policies, politicians and practices that will advance gender equity; as professionals and community activists, women can make equalizing leadership opportunities a priority; as parents, women can model effective leadership, and challenge the child-rearing patterns that work against it (Kellerman & Rhode 2007:26).

When women achieve positions of influence and participate in policy decisions, they have the opportunities to open up access to knowledge and resources to those with less power. Women from all levels of the social hierarchy, not only those occupying official status positions, work to alter the undemocratic culture and structure of institutions and society, improving the lives of those who have been marginalized or oppressed (Normore & Gaetane 2008:182). Educated women who enter the labour market earn an income by engaging in productive economic activities. Participation in productive economic activities enables them to attain financial independence, to reduce poverty, and to enhance gender equity and equality (Republic of Kenya 2007:1-2).

Besides enhancing equity, women bring into institutions different ways of leading. If more women are given the opportunity to participate in leadership, society and institutions would benefit from their talented and distinctive ways of handling leadership.

### **2.2.2 The distinctive role of women leadership**

It is argued that women lead differently to men. Women in general have specific attributes, characteristics and skills that are beneficial to organizations and teams (Syed & Murray 2008:415).

Female heads tend to be more supportive, approachable, sensitive, understanding, nurturing, organized, creative, and receptive than their male counterparts (Adams & Hambright 2004:207). Wickham (2007:32) observed that women are perceived as being more likely to be collaborative in their working relationships, and tend to use democratic leadership styles and power which, in turn, contribute to achieving high levels of job satisfaction among staff members. She added that women are viewed as change agents who are deeply involved in reform, and who work toward creating common visions of schooling for children, as well as climates conducive to learning. They are regarded as being relational, community sensitive and politically savvy.

According to Jones (2006:29), the language used by female leaders is more likely to express courtesy, gratitude, respect and appreciation. Women show respect for their audience by listening, echoing and summarizing, by using polite speech, electing non-antagonistic responses. They remember more of what is said by all the participants. Women also pick up on emotional and personal issues in conversation. This kind of reaction is likely to encourage community-building.

From a cultural feminist perspective, women value intimacy, and develop an ethic of care for those with whom they are connected (Syed & Murray 2008:421). Kelly (2008:23) describes an ethic of caring as an internal commitment to learn about other people in an effort to promote their well-being. An ethic of care, she says, may be characterized by acknowledging multiple perspectives, being open to hearing other's perspectives and valuing collaboration. This view agrees with the leadership style demonstrated by women school leaders in Normore and Gaetane's (2008:194) study of female secondary school leaders who practiced an ethic of care towards those who worked for and with them. As leaders, the women demonstrated a self-less desire to both serve and prepare others, and simultaneously created an organizational system that was committed to sharing and developing relationships that drove to goodness. In a study by Kelly, Ammon, Chermack and Moen (2010:296), it was found that women heads expressed

concern about knowing where and when employees were working, in a way they called 'monitoring by mothering'. The women heads often asserted that it was common courtesy to tell others when they were working off-site.

Women's unique traits and abilities can especially be observed and experienced from a woman's perspective. Hence there exists a need for aspiring women to observe those who reflect their leadership styles, in order to demystify negative myths on women and leadership, and to encourage more women to desire to attain educational leadership.

### **2.2.3 Role-models are required for women aspiring for leadership positions**

The presence of women in positions of leadership is essential to encourage aspirations in the younger generation and to counter reservations about women's capacity for leadership roles (O'Connor, in Kellerman & Rhodes 2007: xiv). It is important for women to be included among the public officials, for symbolic reasons as well (Thomas & Wilcox 2005:4-5). The role-modeling of women is important for future generations. If children grow up seeing both women and men in public offices, they will be able to choose from a bigger array of options for their future career.

According to a study by Lockwood (2006:39) from the University of Toronto, the visibility of female role-models is particularly effective for those who are attempting to determine their potential for future achievement. It helps to undermine stereotypes that threaten some career paths. Role-models can serve as talent scouts, and can provide a social network and bonding for newly-appointed and aspiring female administrators. Role models can also provide information about job vacancies, and also administrative strategies (Jones 2006:19). Lockwood (2006:39) found that men are not differentially affected by the gender of the role-model, but that females are more inspired by female role-models.

Lange (2006:17) noted that the creation of a knowledge-base that consists of examples showing how notable women rose to greatness, and what it was like for them to move forward in society in order to accomplish their goals, is a way to help females envision their dreams of the future, that could include seeing themselves as leaders. If women aspiring to administrative positions are provided with greater opportunities to connect with practicing women administrators, they



may have more opportunities to discuss strategies for successfully juggling both family and school responsibilities (Sherman 2005:712).

Without a great number of female role-models in the most coveted school leadership positions, women teachers simply do not perceive themselves as potential administrative candidates (Sherman 2005:11). Hence, it is important for women to be mentored so that they can become the great leaders they have the potential to be.

## **2.3 FACTORS THAT ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO EDUCATION LEADERSHIP**

Certain prevailing factors do or would encourage women to take up education leadership positions. These include policies, organizational motivators, and also women's own motivators.

### **2.3.1 Policies on equal opportunities**

Economic and legal developments have benefited women into managerial positions (Priola & Brannan 2009:379). Norris (2000, in: Kiamba 2008:17) outlines three policies, amongst others, that are used worldwide to enhance women's participation in decision-making positions. He indicates the following:

- Rhetorical strategies –an informal means of getting women to participate in decision-making structures articulated through political and other public speeches. An example is a 2006 presidential decree in Kenya that aimed at a target of 30% representation of women in the public service.
- Affirmative action, which Norris (2007, in: Kiamba 2008:17) describes as meritocratic policies that aims to achieve fairness in recruitment by removing practical barriers that disadvantage women. Affirmative action programmes provide training (on public speaking, for example), advisory group goals, financial assistance, and the monitoring of outcomes.
- Positive discrimination strategies, which set mandatory quotas for the selection of candidates from certain social or political groups. Quotas can be set at different levels (to indicate proportion of representation), or at different stages of the selection process. Kiamba (2008:17) observed that when quotas are legally specified as part of the constitution, they are more likely to be implemented, and guarantee women's inclusion in leadership.

### **2.3.2 Academic credentials**

In exploring women's route into leadership, Priola and Brannan (2009:379) noted that education and self-determination are perceived to be at the core of a career in leadership. They mentioned that the increased education attainment and the enhancement of academic credentials of women have subsequently accompanied an increased commitment to professional and managerial careers. A respondent in Normore and Gaetane's (2008:192) study on the leadership experiences of four female secondary school heads, cited "...a strong knowledge base and value on having attained a doctorate" as a motivator for joining education leadership.

(Wickham 2007:16) studied perceived barriers and successful strategies used to attain the superintendency (sic) in California, and discovered that obtaining a doctorate degree was considered one of the successful strategies. Fifty-two percent of the respondents in the study held a doctoral degree. The academic attainment could be attributed to the fact that, as Mitroussi and Mitroussi (2009:517) asserted, women need to feel well-prepared before they apply for a leadership position. They choose to become heads when they feel adequate, that is, when they have become competent teachers, and they have their own agenda for headship.

### **2.3.3 Access to preparation and leadership programmes**

The availability of preparation and leadership programmes for aspiring head teachers is also a motivator for women to venture into educational leadership. Preparation for school leadership is concerned with developing the capacity of individuals by means of initial or pre-service preparation, socialization and induction, and opportunities for in-service professional learning development (Sperandio & Kagoda 2010:22). Formal mentoring and leadership development is one way of promoting and uniting women in education administration, namely by offering them the chance to engage in mentoring relationships and to network with other practicing leaders and aspirants (Sherman 2005:712).

Cowie and Crawford (2008:689) asserted that preparation for headship can help to develop the professional identity of aspiring head teachers, to broaden their outlook, and to develop confidence and self-belief. In their study of school principals in Scotland and England, they noted that working with one another in preparation programmes, helped develop the identity of

the principals. Through collaborative activity and networking with colleagues, a sense of trust was developed, allowing the principals to share and to learn from each other's experiences.

Women who participate in aspiring leadership programmes and more formalized types of mentoring, advance to administrative positions more readily than women who do not (Sherman 2005:712). Nealy (2009:8) cited the Kaleidoscope Leadership Institute which provides "...through a cultural prism, intensive training, tools for self-analysis and other skills to navigate the academy", and where women leaders go, wanting "...to sharpen their leadership skills, connect with other sisters and to celebrate their successes together". Nealy (2009:9) reported that when these women leave the leadership institute "...they know who they are; they understand what they bring to the table and understand that there is a seat for them at the table".

#### **2.3.4 Women's own motivators**

Some women may be attracted to management by the promise of status and power to influence others, and also themselves. Others may be seduced by the wish to prove themselves and others that they can do better, and can achieve success in environments which are traditionally male-dominated and highly competitive, or that may represent difficult challenges (Priola & Brannan 2009:387). Some of the reasons cited by women that would or did encourage them to join educational leadership include:

- knowing that they could initiate change, and provide the necessary leadership skills to implement those changes; support, encouragement and sponsorship; having a supportive staff (Adams & Hambright 2004:208);
- an intrinsic need and a moral responsibility to make a difference in the lives of students and others; a need to empower teachers to make positive decisions about teaching and learning (Normore & Gaetane 2008:192);
- to be role models; to improve the schools in terms of their academic performance and student outcomes; having the skills and interest to be successful school leaders; to utilize their talents that have not been exploited as a teacher; to be more useful in the community (Sperandio & Kagoda 2010:24).

In Kelly's (2008:106) study of conceptualizations of leadership among five female counselor educators, the participants reported that they had sought out leadership initiatives as they were

compelled to do so by an inherent passion for leadership. As they advanced in their careers, their interest to participate in leadership intensified. Through their leadership contributions, they were able to model leadership to others, in the hope of motivating them to become interested in leadership. The participants, however, emphasized that interest alone is not sufficient, and that leadership is earned by means of the hard work, commitment and dedication of the individual.

Women may be motivated to participate in leadership, but they encounter challenges on their path there. The next section examines some of the perceived hindrances.

## **2.4 BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ENTRY INTO EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

The lack of female leaders in top positions is the result of both internal and external barriers women encounter and have to overcome on their journey to become educational leaders (Jones 2006:18). Some of the challenges women face include the masculine nature of institutions, women's reluctance to apply for promotion, home-work conflict, stereotypes associated with gender, fear of geographical mobility, lack of role models and mentors, and lack of self-efficacy. Each of these challenges will be examined in detail below. It should, however, be noted that although these barriers have been separated for the purpose of this study, they may have been experienced independently or interdependently with others.

### **2.4.1 The masculine nature of institutions**

The reasons why women do not move into the higher echelons of leadership may be related to pressures inherent in the job situation (Celikten 2005:210). Existing work structures and organizational routines are predominantly male-oriented, which tend to impede women's participation in decision-making roles in organizations (Syed & Murray 2008:418). Cultures that exclude or alienate women can possibly be based on masculine activities that are less appealing to women, and a work environment that might strike women as 'cut-throat' and macho (Eagly, Carli & Sampson 2009:14).

Investigating the results-only work environment (ROWE), as implemented in the corporate headquarters of Best Buy, Kelly, *et al.* (2010:287) found that the employees believed that long working hours were an indicator of dedication and productivity. Working long hours was seen as a sign that the employees were readily available and eager to meet other's needs. It further

reinforced the perception of the ideal worker- most often a man- who does not have or attend to other pressing commitments outside of work.

#### **2.4.2 Women's reluctance to apply for promotion**

Women's under-representation in leadership positions may be attributed to their own decisions not to apply for promotion (Oplatka 2006:610). Although it is assumed that teachers are eager to participate in decision-making processes and serve on governance structures, research suggests that they do not jump at the opportunity (Squelch, in Lemmer 2000:143). Forty percent of the female teachers interviewed in Adams and Hambright's (2004:211) survey, conducted on the reasons why women teachers seem to lack interest in applying for administrative positions, said that nothing would encourage them to become school administrators. Several of the participants in Eddy's study (2008:52) of community college presidents revealed that they did not have a 'presidential' position in mind when they started working in higher education. They got the position by either being encouraged by search committees to seek promotion, by being appointed by their chancellors, by seeking the position for fear of the alternative, or simply by following the hierarchy, which naturally left presidency as the next logical step in their career (Lange 2006:54).

It is necessary to explore how home responsibilities can affect women's career advancement.

#### **2.4.3 Home-work conflict**

Women's productive activities are often hampered by the unofficial and private domestic responsibilities that compete for women's labour in terms of time and energy, not to mention the increase in workload and long working hours (Chege & Sifuna 2006:9).

The issue of children and/or family is one that deters many women when they have to make the decision to take up a leadership position. The responsibility that comes with a family is a significant barrier to women attaining top jobs. Many mothers feel exhausted and overwhelmed trying to balance paid work commitments with the commitments of being a parent, thus they feel psychologically, intellectually and emotionally drained (Knowles, *et al.* 2009:333). Women often reduce their hours at work when they have children. Some women even quit work and spend one or more years devoting their efforts to their families (Eagly, Carli & Sampson (2009:12). Derrington and Sharratt (2009:21) observed that women with children aged between

one and nineteen, represented the smallest percentage of superintendents, compared to women with no or grown children.

In their investigation of gendered division of household labour, Cornwall and Legerski (2010:462) noted that women's gender identities were embedded in responsibilities for care that extended beyond mothering young children, and included the care of husbands, adult children and grandchildren. In some cases, women intentionally avoided work outside the home to have time to maintain family relationships. Some of the women in the study who had started college did not finish, usually dropping out on getting married, or with the birth of their first child. Respondents in Derrington and Sharratt's study (2009:18) maintained that these are 'self-imposed barriers' to leadership. They define *self-imposed barriers* as "...the failure to attain the superintendency (sic) or the decision to avoid it because of family responsibilities". Thus, these women made a conscious choice to put family considerations and responsibilities before those that come with assuming the job of superintendent.

Seelinger (2000:77) studied Central Appalachian women in school leadership, where the majority of the women interviewed acknowledged that choosing to become administrators necessitated difficult personal accommodations along the way. She reported that they spoke eloquently and sometimes regretfully of the borders they had to negotiate to maintain their primary personal relationships, while doing what was necessary for career advancement. Among the women in her study, three were divorced and had no intent to remarry, and two had not borne any children, and did not regret the decision.

Some women have, however, achieved harmony in the home-work conflict. Derrington and Sharratt (2009:21-22) identified them as those who

- have an unwavering resolve to stick to their career goals;
- have a network of family support, including spouse, mother and siblings;
- negotiate flexi-time; and
- set clear boundaries for personal time, and make part of the weekend off-limits to outside commitments.

Some of the women in Seelinger's (2000:78) study also did not view the integration of family and career as overly problematic, and they maintained that educational leadership was a

workable career. The women had willingly timed their careers around the needs of their husbands and children, becoming administrators when their families were grown-up.

#### **2.4.4 Stereotypes associated with gender**

Female socialization practices inhibit women from attaining leadership positions because women are historically encouraged to develop personality traits and behavior that prevent them from participating in leadership (Kelly 2008:29). Societal values and traditional roles combine to have a detrimental effect on how women are valued as leaders (Vali 2010:32). In many societies women are still assigned a secondary position by the prevailing customs and culture (Kiamba 2008:12). As a result, role incongruence occurs when a woman exhibits the behaviour expected of leaders (Wickham 2007:33). The Role Congruity Theory can help explain how this incongruence occurs and how it affects women's choices of whether to participate in leadership or not.

According to the Role Congruity Theory, the perceived incongruity between the female gender role and the leadership role leads to two forms of prejudice against women leaders (Eagly & Karau 2002, in Hoyt 2005:3). First, the descriptive aspect of the gender stereotype leads people to perceive women as more communal and less agentic, thus perceiving them as less qualified for leadership positions. Second, the prescriptive component of the stereotype suggests that when women leaders successfully demonstrate favourable leadership characteristics, they are perceived less favourable, because it is inconsistent with expectations of appropriate (or desired) female behaviour. Together these two forms of prejudice can account for research findings that indicate less favourable attitudes toward female than male leaders, and for the greater difficulty for women to attain top leadership roles, and to be viewed as effective in these roles.

Knowles, *et al.*'s (2009:341) study of four women mother-educators found that it was difficult for them to balance their multiple roles of mother, wife and educator. The goal of the women interviewed was to become better educators and better mothers. They had convinced themselves that they needed to reshape their desires and actions. They held on to the culturally entrenched idea that expected patterns of behavior existed, and that they had to live up to them. Such stereotyping affects the women's self-esteem and confidence because they may come to

see themselves as unfit for leadership roles, or unable to perform outside their domestic roles (Vali 2010:32).

Jones (2006:18) indicated that social stereotypes associated with women at the work-place showed that women are too emotional, not task-oriented, talk too much, are unable to gain control and discipline, or to handle conflict and community issues. Women are often perceived as lacking confidence, as having low aspirations, and a negative self-image. These attributes are viewed as contradictory to the role of headship, and thus may hinder women from being considered as potential school heads.

#### **2.4.5 Fear of geographical mobility**

Due to the fact that schools are found everywhere in a country, teaching is seen to "...provide many opportunities for women to be employed without it adversely affecting the family situation" (Mitroussi & Mitroussi 2009:511). Conversely, Wickham (2007:29) identified a lack of the willingness to relocate as one of the barriers to the attainment of leadership positions for women, as it involves separating them from their families, or sometimes relocating the entire family. Relocation was considered by 88% of female superintendents in Wickham's study as one of the major barriers for women aspiring to be a superintendent. A respondent in Eddy's (2008:56) study reported that she loved her job but that her priority would always be her family. She continued by stating categorically that if someone offered her a job that would take her away from her family, she "...would not even think about it in a heartbeat".

In her study of factors influencing gender mobility to the top levels of education management in Kenya, Wanyama (2002:49) found that most women preferred staying at their middle ranks for fear of seeking promotion and being transferred up-country to work at district or provincial headquarters, as this would affect their families.

#### **2.4.6 The lack of self-efficacy**

Women's self-determination to progress and succeed is fundamental to their career progression (Priola & Brannan 2009:379), but as Sherman (2005:711) noted, few women perceived themselves as capable of holding leadership positions in schools. One of the respondents in Normore and Gaetane's (2008:192) study revealed that she had never envisioned herself becoming an administrator, and that she was perfectly comfortable in the classroom.



Oplatka (2006:604) identified a variety of reasons that caused women not apply for promotion, such as the lack of the necessary aspiration, a lack of confidence that they will succeed, fear of failure, and a lack of competitiveness. The think-leader-think-male stereotype can also have deleterious effects on women leaders' self-perceptions, as it is associated with decreased performance and a most menacing outcome of stereotype activation on the targets of the stereotype, in that it may have the potential to contribute to women's disengagement from leadership roles (Hoyt 2005:3).

Nealy (2009:9) reported that research shows that women in higher education typically have a low self-worth, often being perceived as timid, and preferring to maintain a low profile. No matter how skilled women leaders are, a lack of confidence is a deal-breaker (Santovec 2010:9). Santovec continued to say that confidence spreads to those one is leading, and that if a leader does not have confidence, the followers will not have confidence in the leader. Hoyt (2005:5) also noted that while cultural stereotypes are likely to impact on women leaders, the level of the leader's self-efficacy for leadership will likely play a role in determining the responses to stereotype activation.

#### **2.4.7 The lack of role-models and mentors**

Eddy (2008) observed that mentors have a critical role to play in the advancement of women in leadership. Support by means of advice, opportunities to acquire diverse experiences and access to leadership development, all provide critical career skills. She added that some women may not consider upper level positions on their own, adding on to the increased importance of well-placed suggestions by mentors. Fifty-six percent of the women leaders Eddy interviewed had had a mentor, and they recounted how their strong mentoring relationships provided them with resources to draw upon in their first year of leadership.

Sperandio and Kagonda (2010:24) decried the lack of role-models and mentors in education leadership. They asserted that women in leadership positions may be breaking new ground, and are unable to offer the mentoring and encouragement to other women who may find it necessary to overcome their lack of confidence and self-esteem. They added that others may be so beset with problems created by resentful teachers, both male and female who are unwilling to accept a woman 'boss', that the example they provide does not encourage other women to

undertake the same trial by ordeal. Such kinds of leaders are likely not to be effective role models to aspiring women leaders.

Same-sex role-models are crucial for women, but unfortunately there are not enough to go round for all of the aspiring female leaders (Jones 2006:19). When women work in isolated environments (dominated by men), they need those ‘who look like them’ to reinforce their feelings of self-worth and excellence (Nealy 2009:9). It is important then that more women participate in school leadership in order for others to feel encouraged and confident.

Even as there are challenges that are unique to women aspiring to school leadership, school leadership comes with its own challenges, whether the leader is a man or a woman. Some of these challenges are explored below.

## **2.5 CHALLENGES FACED IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

School leadership has become a priority on education policy agendas internationally, and plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment (Pont, *et al.* 2008:1-2). Skillful school leaders influence school and classroom processes that have a direct impact on student learning, thus schools and colleges provide a better education for their students if they are well-managed (Mitroussi & Mitroussi 2009:506). This means that heads of schools need the appropriate interpersonal professional ability in day-to-day situations that often demand confidence and courage to resolve (Cowie & Crawford 2008:682).

School heads face various personal and organizational challenges in the course of their work. In many countries the men and women who run schools are overburdened, underpaid and near retirement, and there are few people lining up for their jobs (Pont, *et al.* 2008:1). The work is perceived by many potential candidates as undesirable and/or impossible. Ninety-four percent of persons in a national sample reported working more than fifty hours a week, with forty-eight percent declaring a work-week in excess of sixty hours (Valentine, Clark, Hackmann & Petzko 2004, in: Petzko 2008:225). According to Pont, Nusche and Moorman (2008:2), potential candidates are often hesitant to apply for the vacancy because of overburdened roles, insufficient preparation and training, limited career prospects, and inadequate support and rewards. Among those who accept the positions, there appeared to be a 45% to 55% attrition

rate of principals during an eight year period, with the highest attrition occurring during the first three years on the job (Grogan & Andrew 2002, in: Petzko 2008:225).

Hobson, Brown, Ashby, Keys, Sharp and Benefield 2003, in: Slater, Garcia and Gorosave (2008:704) identified the issues faced by newly-appointed principals in the United States of America, The United Kingdom and other parts of Europe as

- feelings of professional isolation and loneliness;
- having to deal with the legacy, practice and style of the previous head teacher;
- dealing with multiple tasks, managing time and priorities;
- managing the school budget;
- dealing with (*e.g.*, supporting, warning and dismissing) ineffective staff;
- implementing new government initiatives, notably new curricula or school improvement projects; and
- problems as regards the school buildings, and site management.

These issues pose challenges, and school heads have to deal with a variety of emotions as they deal with the tensions and dilemmas involved in their decision-making. The emotion of headship can be viewed as a process that requires continuous and unconscious management (Cowie & Crawford 2008:682). When the participants in a research study by Jones (2006:86) described their experiences the adjectives ‘stressful’ and ‘demanding’ permeated their stories, and were used interchangeably with the word ‘challenging’, as they spoke about the issues they faced on a daily basis in their jobs as middle school principals. They cited their main causes of stress as the commitment requirements of the job, parent grievances that they had to deal with, accountability issues, legislative changes, and lack of support from others.

In Guzman and Guillermo’s (2007:219-220) study, one of the school heads described her metamorphosis in the course of her school leadership. She started off with a feeling of fear, which initially made her rigid to the policies in place. She subsequently learnt the art of total trust and surrender, which meant that she could then freely delegate, and rid herself of some of the school duties. Being transparent and open led to gaining the trust of many, and openness led to open lines of communication with teachers, students and parents.

These experiences are echoed in the feelings of a head teacher in Cowie and Crawford's (2008:683) study, who is quoted as saying:

“My reflections this month are about my health and well-being in relation to leadership. I feel totally exhausted but like many other new heads, you keep going because you do not want to appear to lack the drive needed. It's tiring being the inspirational leader whom everyone is looking towards”.

The above quotation indicates the stress heads have to suffer in the performance of their duties. Considering the fact that women face unique challenges in leadership, they are likely to find it more difficult to enter into and to sustain themselves in school leadership in the face of all these challenges. It is comforting, however, to observe that women are still venturing into leadership, albeit only but a few. These women leaders are in a position to act as models for women aspiring to positions of leadership.

## **2.6 SUMMARY**

From the literature study it is clear that the issue of women and leadership is complex. The inclusion of women in educational leadership cannot be taken lightly by stakeholders, as it has been seen to promote equity, create role-models for other women aspiring to leadership, and also bring into leadership a different style of leading. Various theories have impacted on the inclusion of women in leadership, either by enhancing their exclusion, or by affecting their willingness to seek leadership positions.

Women still face certain barriers on their journey to leadership. Although these barriers may affect some women who shy away from leadership, it is encouraging to note that there are many who feel encouraged to lead, with the aim of improving themselves and the school systems which they head.

Most important, when dealing with the issue of women and educational leadership, is the consideration of context, as this differs in different settings. Fitzgerald (2006:210) reported that gender and ethnicity do matter in educational leadership, and that walking between the two worlds is a complicated, contested and difficult terrain.

In the next chapter women and leadership in schools in Kenya will be looked at

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **THE KENYAN CONTEXT OF WOMEN AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Although the presence or not of women in leadership has been researched in numerous overseas countries, very little data exists with regard to female leadership in Kenya. Even less research is available on women in specific programs and departments, such as education. No research has specifically looked into the contribution of women educational leaders to ascertain their leadership perspective, or their experiences. The lack of current data showing participation of women leaders in primary schools in the country also makes it difficult to indicate the actual representation of women in that area.

In an attempt to understand the plight of women leaders in primary schools, it was deemed necessary to take a look at the status of women leadership in Kenya, specifically in the wider education sector. This insight will expose us to the general picture of women's educational leadership in Kenya.

### **3.2 WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP IN KENYA**

Advances have been made globally towards the recognition of the principle of women's political, economic and social equality. In Kenya, however, even though women form more than half the population, they are grossly under-represented in leadership and decision-making positions (African Development Bank 2007:40).

The legislation on women's participation on decision-making bodies on equal terms with men is guaranteed in the constitution of Kenya (Republic of Kenya 2006:7). Nevertheless, the absence of women in decision-making positions defeats the implied equality in the constitution. Little achievement has been recorded with regard to the involvement of women in positions of decision-making. The government has taken steps to ensure the full development and advancement of women, including the enactment of quotas that will ensure that at least one-third of all new recruitments to the civil service will be women, but it appears to send the

opposite message to Kenyans, with some of the appointments being made in high-profile office positions (African Development Bank 2007:41). A case in point is the recent appointments made by the head of state of the Attorney General, Chief Justice, Director of Public Prosecutions and Budget Controller, which have since been contested and revoked because, among other reasons, "...there was no gender face reflected" in the appointments (Daily Nation, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2011:5). Where women are picked to high profile appointments, they are appointed the deputies of men, in a trend that an unnamed woman in Karanja's (2011:1) article calls the 'deputy syndrome'. Karanja (2011:1) gives examples of the 'deputy syndrome' as the recent appointments in the Constitutional Implementation Commission (CIC) and the Commission on Revenue Allocation (CRA).

Kenya's first-ever government audit of the civil service report, released by the Public Service Minister in June 2011, exposed some gender imbalances in the civil service. The report indicated that only four of the forty-eight ministries and government departments employed more women than men. Overall, only 28% of the staff in the government was women, two points lower than the 30% constitutional requirement. According to the report, most women in government worked in the technical (39%) and support (25%) divisions, which fell between job groups A and N. The upper cadres, job groups P to V, consisted of 18% women in policy and 25% in management positions. There was no female government official in job group V (Daily Nation 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011:4). This report showed that only a few women were in government employment, and their presence thinned out up the employment ladder, where the salaries are higher and there are more opportunities of being involved in decision-making.

A brief exploration of the wider education sector is vital to understand the status of women in primary school leadership positions.

### **3.3 WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP IN THE KENYAN EDUCATION SECTOR**

The importance of research in the field of women and educational leadership in Kenyan rural primary schools becomes apparent when the importance of research on women and educational leadership is stressed. Research on women and educational leadership in Kenya is essential, because much research on women in educational leadership relates to research and observations made in the United Kingdom, Western Europe, Australia and United States of America.

Although the research may be comprehensive in its scope and direction, it may lack context, specificity and relevance, as most of it are based mainly on Eurocentric or Anglo-American perspectives, values and beliefs (Walker & Dimmock 2002, in: Akao 2008:13). Fitzgerald (2003:9) criticizes western leadership theories, which claim that the functions and features of leadership can be transported and legitimated across homogeneous education systems. She argues that there is a need to formulate indigenous and non-western theories of educational leadership that are grounded in research that accounts for and explains indigenous ways of knowing and leading. This means that the knowledge, production for and about educational leadership need to be dismantled, in order to provide a standpoint from which to theorize and research the realities of leadership through the experiences of women from a variety of ethnicities.

Sperandio and Kagoda (2010:22) called for the consideration of the context when dealing with women and leadership issues in Uganda. They argued that educational leadership operates by means of the cultural and gendered understanding of education and leadership, and the availability of resources to support preparation for leadership. They professed that the desired outcome of education leadership must also guide the design of any preparation program for a specific population.

The arguments above find support in the work by Sanga (2005, in: Vali 2021:25) who reflected on leadership theory and practice in the Pacific, and declared that:

‘Leadership is contextual. It is cultural. It involves social interactions and takes place within social settings. Its expression in behavioural terms is situational. Measures of appropriateness and desirability of leadership are determined by the values of the context and culture.’

An important aspect of this study is to view leadership through the experiences of women educational leaders within the context of the rural areas of Kenya, as it may be possible that the Kenyan rural women head teachers have different experiences in educational leadership from women head teachers in other areas. This is better understood by looking at the status of women and leadership in the Kenyan education sector.

The education sector strategies and policies on gender are very well ‘mainstreamed’(sic), perhaps due to the fact that the Ministry possesses an active gender unit and a documented

gender policy (African Development Bank 2007:52). However, as the 2007 African Development Bank report indicated, the effectiveness of laws, however progressive, is largely dependent on their being applied. A look at the education sector reveals that the governance and management of education is generally male-dominated. Within the current structure of the Ministry of Education, of the five Directors of Education, only one is a woman. Of the eight Provincial Directors of Education, only two (25%) are women. At the district level, less than 20% of the District education officers are women. Furthermore, women make up only 25% of the chief executives of the Ministry of Education Semi-autonomous Government Agencies (Republic of Kenya 2007:27).

The participation of women in higher education is very insignificant in Kenya. They are under-represented in the teaching and administration of these institutions. Furthermore, women academics are concentrated in the lower ranks of the hierarchy and in the traditional 'female' social science and education disciplines, while there are only a few administrators in the higher ranks of the administration of higher education (Nyaigoti-Chacha 2004:8).

Studies that focus on secondary schools, as done by Mulwa (2005), Munene (2005) and Nzioka (2006) revealed an under-representation of women in the leadership positions of secondary schools. Munene's (2005:50) study of administrative and social-economic factors hindering female access to leadership positions in secondary schools in the Nyeri district revealed that the community devalued women leadership. She found that the community preferred male to female head teachers. Mulwa's study in the Kitui district revealed that 64.5% of the teachers preferred working with male head teachers, due to the cultural stereotype that males are better leaders than females (Mulwa 2005:52). This contradicts Nzioka's study where she observed that teachers rated the performance of female head teachers very highly, and that they expressed no reservations to working with female head teachers (Nzioka 2006:57). These differences of opinion can be attributed to the fact that the different ethnic communities in Kenya vary in their valuation of women, thus the responses would be determined by the area of study.

Research that specifically focuses on women in primary school leadership in Kenya is very scanty, and the available research does not focus on their lived experiences. Obtaining data on the representation of women in primary school educational leadership is difficult, because of a



lack of current data showing the actual representation of women's participation in rural schools leadership from the Ministry of Education and the Teachers' Service Commission. Data with men and women in education leadership would be helpful in indicating the contributions of both men and women in the education sector, and also to "...improve the measurement of women's unemployment and underemployment in the education sector" (African Development Bank 2007:51-52).

Evidence exists that women face challenges in their rise to leadership positions and as leaders in primary schools, as is reflected by actions such as witnessed in a rural school in Nyanza province where pupils boycotted classes after a female teacher was posted to the school to replace a male deputy head teacher. The parents supported the boycott, claiming that they would not send their children to school until the Ministry of Education sent more male teachers to the school (The Standard 13<sup>th</sup> January 2011). In another school in the Rachuonyo District, the parents of a primary school were adamant that they would rather have the school close down than have a woman head teacher (Daily Nation 8<sup>th</sup> January 2009).

Despite the sometimes negative experiences, women are beginning to challenge the barriers that have denied them participation in leadership. With government support programmes in place, women are becoming encouraged to lead. Society has also started to appreciate and to utilize women's effective leadership styles.

### **3.4 ADDRESSING GENDER DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP**

Where a country finds itself with glaring gender disparities, efforts are made to ensure that all citizens are represented in employment. Empowering women starts with empowering the girl child, so that she may grow up with self-confidence and with the belief that she will have the opportunity to work anywhere, including in the highest leadership positions.

#### **3.4.1 Empowering the girl child**

Women develop their vision of leadership from the experiences they may have had as young girls (Kamau 2010: IV). Empowering women begins with empowering the girl child at each step of the education ladder. Education is essential for improving women's living standards, and it enables them to have a louder voice in decision-making. Being educated, indeed, grants women great autonomy when it comes to decision-making processes that involve choices

(Mareng 2010:1). Mareng's (2010:1) comparison of women with education and women without education in Kenya revealed that educated girls are more capable of making their own decisions. Improving the representation of women in educational leadership positions therefore begins with girls and women gaining access to education.

The government of Kenya has taken some measures to promote the education of girls and women through appropriate policies and programmes, which include affirmative action at university entry level, where girls are allowed to enter with one point less than boys, the review of the curriculum and teaching materials to ensure gender sensitivity, the re-entry to school of adolescent mothers, enhanced bursary funds for girls' education, the presence of a ministerial task force on girls, and the Domestication of Education For All document (Republic of Kenya 2006:23).

The realization of the empowerment of girls and women through education has been impeded by a number of factors, such as cultural and religious attitudes, infra-structural and geographical limitations, inadequate policy guidelines, poverty and HIV/AIDS, a lack of community awareness, as well as a lack of female role-models, especially in the rural areas (Republic of Kenya 2005:249).

The next section looks at what is being done in Kenya to empower women in their workplaces.

### **3.4.2 Empowering women**

It is recognized that the quality of the country's labour force, to a large extent, depends on the capacity and performance of women as mothers and custodians of family health and welfare. The women's capacities and performances are, in turn, dependent on the attention paid to their employment opportunities and status in employment (Republic of Kenya 2000:4). International and national agreements and conventions have persistently stressed the importance of women's equal participation in leadership. The Government of Kenya has signed various policy documents which aim at attaining gender equality. These policy documents seek to mainstream gender in all sectors, pledge to enforce a policy of equal opportunities, lay emphasis on the education of girls, and stipulate measures of mainstreaming gender in the education sector. Government documents that address gender issues in education include the Poverty Reduction Strategy paper (2001), the Narc Manifesto (2003), the Economic Recovery Strategy (2003-

2007), the National Development Plan (2002-2008), Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005, and the Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (2005) (Republic of Kenya 2007:2).

The government is also signatory to international protocols relating to education and the human rights of women and girls, which include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination against women (CEDAW) 1979, the Convention on the rights of the child (CRC) 1989, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for action (1995), the Jomtien World Conference (1990), the Dakar Framework for Action of EFA (2000), and the Millennium Development Goals (Republic of Kenya 2007:2).

The fact that the government recognizes such national and international documents indicates a willingness to have a nation that involves all its citizens in a democratic culture that offers opportunities for both men and women to participate in development, and this includes leadership. However, the marked educational expansion since independence has not been matched by sustained initiatives to train sufficient women teachers and administrators (Chege & Sifuna 2006:126). Some of these documents were signed more than twenty years ago, but the progress of women's involvement in leadership and decision-making is still slow.

Many challenges are still facing women with leadership ambitions, even though many initiatives and projects seek to promote women leaders. The socio-cultural attitudes and the stereotyping of women's roles in society have acted as a hindrance towards women seeking leadership positions, both in the private and the public decision-making units (Republic of Kenya 2006:7).

The leadership of women in Kenya is still held captive in the patriarchal cauldron in which most Kenyan communities find themselves (Republic of Kenya 2006:7). This is because gender issues in Kenya have been moulded by a combination of factors that draws from the influence of various traditions, customs and cultural practices, levels of education and awareness, economic development, and emerging patterns of social organization. The social cultural attitudes held by both men and women, the socialization processes, and women's perception of their status, roles and rights, are of particular significance in determining the status of women.

The challenge Kenya faces today, then, is how to create an enabling environment which recognizes the potential roles and responsibilities of women and men in the development of the

country, and which utilizes strategies that will address the socio-cultural barriers that have contributed to gender disparities, and the inability of women to realize their full potential.

### **3.5 PRIMARY SCHOOL HEADSHIP IN KENYA**

Head teachers play an important role in the development and management of educational institutions. They are expected to provide effective institutional management in order to realize quality education. In order to achieve this, there is a need for a policy that outlines the necessary qualifications and other criteria for the identification and deployment of head teachers.

#### **3.5.1 Policy on the identification and deployment of primary school head teachers**

For many years management in the education sector has been undermined by a system of staff recruitment and promotion based solely on seniority, without any attention being paid to the professional qualifications or competencies of the relevant staff. These practices have seriously undermined staff morale and performance, as many staff members feel they have no incentive to work hard to support the delivery of quality education services (Republic of Kenya 2005: xi). The secretary to the Teachers' Service Commission, Lengoiboni, in his foreword to the policy on the identification and deployment of primary school head teachers, noted that the earlier lack of documentation on the appointment and deployment, and the relevant training of heads of institutions led to the underperformance by some of those appointed (Teachers' Service Commission 2007a:iii). The situation was aggravated by a lack of clear guidelines and systems for succession management in education institutions. Due to this, the recruitment of school heads has been faced by external interference, promotions based on non-professional considerations, such as localization, patronage and other malpractices (Teachers' Service Commission 2007a:2). In order to address these challenges, the Teachers' Service Commission developed and documented a policy for the identification and deployment of institutional heads. The policy gives the general guidelines on qualifications, identification, appointment, deployment and training, as well as the performance of duties and the responsibilities of head teachers.

The policy guidelines outline the minimum requirements for a teacher seeking to be considered for promotion into administrative positions, including headship. Such a teacher should

- be a professionally qualified teacher with a minimum of a P1-grade, serving in the employment of the Teachers' Service Commission;
- have a minimum of five years' continuous teaching experience;
- have portrayed competence and ability, both as a classroom teacher and an administrator;
- be at the minimum grade of job group K;
- have attended at least one in-service course in institutional management offered by KESI;
- have indicated an interest by applying for the position; and
- have a clean personal record as per the TSC code of regulations.

(Teachers' Service Commission 2007a:9)

The Teachers' Body is, however, not clear on a scheme of service for primary school heads. In fact, the first mentioning of a scheme of service was done by the Kenyan Prime Minister, the Hon. Raila Odinga, at the annual delegates' conference of Kenya primary schools head teachers association in October 2010 (The Standard 8<sup>th</sup> January 2010). He directed the Ministry of Education to develop a comprehensive scheme of service for head teachers, reflecting their roles as chief executive officers of their institutions.

In a paper that looked at the challenges that have to be faced in order to ensure that sufficient numbers of competent and committed primary school teachers will be available to meet the goal of universal primary education, Bennel (2011:4) held that improved incentives and working and living conditions for teachers should be a top priority in almost every country. He observed that in most countries head teachers received little or no additional remuneration, and suggested that, in addition to having reduced workloads, head teachers should be paid substantially higher salaries than classroom teachers. In Kenya a recently released report on improved salaries for teachers indicated that heads of schools with single streams would receive seven-hundred-and -fifty shillings, while those with ten streams would take home seven-thousand-five-hundred Kenya shillings. Allowances for deputy head teachers ranged from two-hundred Kenya shillings to two-thousand Kenya shillings (Daily Nation 11<sup>th</sup> June

2011). This amount is hardly sufficient to motivate teachers to join education leadership, considering their numerous roles, as will be outlined below.

### **3.5.2 The roles of a primary school head teacher**

School heads have a key role in managing schools because they are the main decision-makers and the school-leaders, and they have more responsibilities than the other staff members. The success of a school and the degree of attaining the educational aims depend on the school head and his or her governance (Kocabas & Karakose 2009:129). In highly effective schools, as well as in schools which have reversed a trend of poor performance and declining achievement, it is the head teacher who sets the pace, leading and motivating pupils and his/her staff to perform to the best of their abilities.

In Kenya the management of primary schools is the responsibility of the head teachers who undertake the instruction, supervision and management in general. The government and all other stakeholders look upon the head teacher for the effective implementation of any program introduced at this level (Aketch & Simatwa 2010:486).

The Policy on the Identification and Deployment of primary school head teachers outlines the duties and responsibilities of a primary school head as follows, namely he/she

- does class teaching;
- is the head of the school, under the direction of the school management committee;
- serves as the accounting officer of the school, is responsible for the preparation of the estimates for the recurrent and development expenditure of the school; and interprets and implements policy decisions pertaining to training;
- serves as the secretary to the school management committee;
- is the overall organizer, co-coordinator and supervisor of all the activities in the school, and is responsible for improving and maintaining high training and learning standards;
- is responsible for the planning, acquisition, development and maintenance of the physical facilities at the school;
- coordinates specific training and learning activities in the school;
- promotes positive linkages between the school and the neighbouring communities and/or other nearby organizations;

- promotes the welfare of all the staff members and the pupils within the school;
- promotes liaison between the school and other private sector organizations;
- guides and counsels teacher trainees during teaching practice; and
- inducts new teachers.(Teachers' Service Commission 2007a:13)

The responsibilities of head teachers, as seen above, are numerous and varied. However, school heads may often be faced with choices that require them to make decisions, mostly about staff members, students, financial matters and relations with the public. All these decisions may not have clear-cut resolutions and are likely to be highly problematic (Kocabas & Karakose 2009:128).

According to Cheruto and Kyalo (2010:73), the implementation of free primary education in Kenya found the school heads off-guard; they were not prepared for the change, so they found it challenging. Many schools had an overwhelming increase in enrolments, while others witnessed a mass exodus. Even though the education officers reported visiting schools to advise and educate head teachers and the school management committees on the implementation of free primary education, the findings of the study suggested that the school management teams were not adequately prepared to manage the profound changes. A high percentage (73.7%) of the head teachers in Cheruto and Kyalo's (2010:73) study on challenges facing the implementation of free primary education, reported facing challenges on financial management, and especially on bookkeeping. School heads interviewed by Aketch and Simatwa (2010: 487) also quoted being accountable for the free primary education funds as one of their greatest challenges. The school heads found the updating of the accounts quite demanding, not having prior training, not to mention the delays in the disbursement of funds, that could take as long as three months.

Head teachers have the responsibility of promoting positive linkages between the school and the outside community, mostly usually the parents of the children but, as Cheruto and Kyalo (2010:75) indicated, another challenge faced by head teachers is conflicts with parents. This could have been precipitated by parents' resistance to any attempts to have them supplement the government's efforts in the funding of the primary schools, due to the misconception that education is free, hence the government has the entire responsibility of funding it. With the declaration of free primary education, school heads find it hard to convince the parents to fund

essential amenities that are not provided for by the government. They added that these conflicts, together with the suspicion of the misappropriation of funds, have even led to the frequent transfers of some head teachers. The involvement of parents in funding the schools has, however, worked in some schools, as some head teachers, according to Aketch and Simatwa's (2010:488) study of opportunities and challenges for primary school head teachers, reported that they had asked the parents to employ some teachers and to contribute money, but that this "was done with some amount of difficulty".

Head teachers are also faced with problems relating to administrative duties that sometimes limit their success as heads. Kenyan head teachers could identify with a head teacher in Slater, *et al.*'s (2008:712) study, who wondered how to handle the burden of paperwork which consumed most of his working time. These tasks include reports, account statements, project descriptions, registrations, statistics, and minutes of meetings, amongst others. Completing paperwork efficiently consumes part of the little time head teachers have on their hands.

Despite these challenges, some head teachers have devised coping strategies to be able to handle their work. These strategies include, monitoring work done daily by trying to be available; supervising the teachers' work by inspecting records such as schemes of work, lesson books, records of work covered, class attendance records and the clock in/clock out book; making use of volunteer teachers or asking the school management committees to employ teachers; and empowering deputy and senior teachers to help in the supervision and induction of beginner teachers (Aketch & Simatwa 2010:489).

### **3.6 SUMMARY**

The literature review in this section looked at the status of women and leadership in Kenya. It revealed that despite the government's commitment in terms of signing protocols and policies, women are under-represented in positions of leadership in the country. In the education sector, the under-representation is seen at all levels. The representation of women in the leadership of primary schools nationally is difficult to tell because of a lack of data showing the representation of women in rural primary school leadership. Lack of data that clearly shows the participation of women in rural primary school leadership indicates the need to improve gender statistics in all levels of the education sector, in order to be able to tell the contribution of



women, and to address issues of gender mainstreaming in leadership positions. There exists a working policy on the appointment and deployment of head teachers that has been in place since 2007. The policy will go a long way in streamlining matters of headship, but it may take some time, since most of the head teachers in the field were appointed before the policy was formulated and documented. The lack of a scheme of service for primary school head teachers has been noted, but there is hope for one, and it may also go a long way in making primary school headship more attractive.

The next chapter discusses the research design and methodology used for the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study focuses on women and school leadership.

In chapter two the importance of the participation of women in educational leadership was examined. Factors that prompt women into taking up positions as educational leaders, as well as the barriers they have to overcome were discussed.

In chapter three the research topic was addressed in context by analyzing women and leadership in Kenya, specifically women in educational leadership, and there was looked at how gender disparities are addressed.

The literature review in respect of chapters two and three revealed that very little research has been done on women and primary education leadership in Kenya, especially in the rural areas.

The researcher considered it imperative to learn more about the experiences of the female head teachers in Kenya, namely how they perceive primary school headship, and the contribution they make to educational leadership. The outcome of the study was expected to provide in-depth insight into primary school headship in the rural areas, and that suggestions would be given that would enhance the participation of female head teachers in rural primary schools.

In this chapter a discussion will be presented of the research design and methodology that were devised to investigate the aim and the objectives of the study. First a justification of the research design is discussed, and thereafter the research methods, including the data collection methods, sampling, piloting, data analysis, the measures to ensure validity and reliability, as well as the ethical measures. Finally, a brief summary of the chapter will be given.

#### **4.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

This study focuses specifically on women and primary school headship. An important aspect of this research relates to objective number one, namely to determine the lived experiences of female head teachers in rural primary schools in Kenya. The second objective takes the

research further by attempting to explore possible strategies that may improve women's participation in the leadership of rural primary schools in Kenya.

### **4.3 THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

In respect of the research problem stated above, this research required a methodological approach which places the women head teachers at the centre of the inquiry, by allowing them to articulate their experiences.

This research is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research aims to describe and analyze the culture and behavior of humans and their groups from the point of view of those being studied (Kombo & Tromp 2006:9). Qualitative researchers believe that studying social systems and problems should include giving voice to those being studied as a way of empowering them (Mugenda & Mugenda 2003:201). Bell (2005, in Biggam 2008:86) concurs with this view where he states that researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are more concerned to understand the individual's perception of the world. These researchers look for insight rather than the statistical interpretation of the world.

The researcher's central ambition with this study was to understand the experiences of female head teachers in primary schools in the rural areas of Kenya. This means that the results are considered from an interpretive perspective, namely to provide an insight into the complex world (in this case, headship) of the world of lived experiences of those who live it, in this case the female head teachers (Schwandt 1994, in Andrade 2009:43). The study was also constructivist in nature, namely that it was interactive (by means of the use of semi-structured interviews and observation), and it shared the social experiences of the female head teachers (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:396). The qualitative approach was thus apposite in this study, namely that it provided the female head teachers the opportunity to voice their experiences of headship from their own frame of reference (Schwandt 1994, in Andrade 2009:43).

### **4.4 THE RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **4.4.1 Data-collection methods**

As stated in section 4.3, qualitative strategies were used in this study as they are seen to be "...effective in addressing social issues that affect individuals because by using the qualitative

methods, the researchers are able to collect data and explain phenomena more deeply and exhaustively” (Mugenda & Mugenda 2003:197).

#### 4.4.1.1 Interviews

To understand the head teachers’ experiences required interactive field research, calling for face-to-face interaction between the researcher and the selected head teachers. This was achieved by means of interviews, which allowed for an in-depth discussion with the female head teachers, thus enabling the researcher to collect data on how the individuals made sense of their worlds (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:36). This technique, although time-consuming, provided the researcher with the opportunity to obtain qualitative data in a manner that has the benefit of providing an overall question and focus for the interviewer, yet also providing the interviewees with the opportunity to express their views. Additionally, the interview is not restricted to questions that the interviewer initially intended to pose. In other words, if issues arise during the interview process, and are deemed relevant to the research, then they will be pursued (Biggam 2008:228).

In order to establish a framework around the interviews and to focus on specific issues regarding headship, the interviews were semi-structured, with an interview-guide, containing a list of questions that needed to be covered by the interview, being prepared beforehand. The questions were open-ended to encourage meaningful responses from the interviewees (see appendix 5). Kombo and Tromp (2006:94) maintain that semi-structured interviews are advantageous in that they are flexible. The use of open-ended questions enables a researcher to get a complete and detailed understanding of the issues being researched.

In this study the respondents also had the opportunity to express their views, explain their individual perspectives and expand on their answers. The interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes, and were conducted at the participants’ workplace. Each interview was videotaped and transcribed, and eventually the transcribed work was confirmed with the participants through phone calls.

Interviewing different female head teachers from different schools was important as it allowed for a comparison of responses, encouraging different perspectives of headship.

It was expected that through the interviewing process, an enriched understanding of female headship in rural primary schools would emerge, one that would assist in enhancing the participation of females in primary school headship.

#### 4.4.1.2 Observation

One of the main goals of conducting interviews at the participants' places of work was so that the researcher may gain an understanding of the climate and the culture of the school, as well as a first-hand observation of the identified phenomenon, namely school headship. Unstructured observation was carried out in an attempt to help the researcher understand the behavior patterns of the head teachers in their physical and social settings (Kombo and Tromp 2006:96). The researcher focused on the involvement of the head teacher with the teachers and pupils, and also with visitors. Attention was also given to the 'talking walls' in the head teachers' offices and the school's notice boards, as these were likely to reveal certain aspects in respect of the school, such as performance, the teachers, and awards given to the school. Observations were likewise done during the interview process, in order to identify the "...nonverbal body language and facial expressions of the interviewee to help interpret the verbal data" (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:42).

Observations that needed clarification were discussed with the head teachers after the formal interviews, and later when the data were being analyzed. The researcher was keen to check on the congruence between the respondents' reactions and the observations that were made.

#### 4.4.1.3 Field-notes

Field-notes were taken by the researcher throughout the study (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:442). This was done in order to provide an avenue for documenting observations, anecdotes, quotes, questions, and other throughout the study. The researcher's personal thoughts and reflections were recorded in a journal. These field-notes provided evidence of on-going data collection. They were also analyzed by the researcher for emerging themes and patterns.

#### 4.4.1.4 Time-frame

The process of collecting the data for this research started in March 2011, with the researcher asking the permission of the District Education Officers to do the research, and obtaining a list of schools headed by female head teachers in the rural areas. During April the head teachers

were contacted through letters of introduction. In May further contact was made with the head teachers through phone calls. The interviews were conducted from June to August. They were transcribed as soon as they were done.

#### **4.4.2 Sample**

Purposeful sampling was used to select the female head teachers for the study. Having proposed to interview not less than fifteen women head teachers, the first step was to determine which primary schools in rural Kajiado County were headed by women. Contact was made with the District Education Officer (see appendix 1), from whom a list of all the schools headed by females was obtained. The researcher then proceeded to determine the location of the schools. Using data from each district's education office, thirty-three female head teachers were identified. The main criteria of selection for participation in the study were that the candidate had to be a female head teacher heading a primary school in a rural area, had to be employed by the Teachers' Service Commission, and had to be a practicing head teacher (retired head teachers were not considered for the study). Seven of the head teachers were disqualified by the fact that they were heading schools located in towns. Of the twenty-seven remaining, three declined participation, citing busy work schedules. Three of the head teachers could not be reached by phone by the time the researcher was planning the schedule for the interviews, so they were struck from the list. The researcher later learnt that one had been involved in an accident, and had passed away. One head teacher had resigned from headship, and went to teach in a secondary school. Four of the schools were quite a distance away with poor infrastructure, and it was thus inconvenient for the researcher to reach them.

The next task was to contact the head teachers. Letters of introduction (see appendix 2) were written and distributed to the female head teachers at a head teachers' meeting in the District Education Officer's office. Several telephone numbers were also collected for the purpose of the phone calls that followed the introduction letters.

#### **4.4.3 Pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted in two schools that were not part of the main study. The experiences of the female head teachers heading the schools were investigated. The pilot-study helped in ascertaining if the questions measured what they were supposed to measure, if the wording was clear, if the questions provoked a response, and whether there existed any

researcher bias (Kombo & Tromp 2006:90). The pilot study also helped in giving an estimate of the amount of time it would take to complete the interview (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:307), as well as of acquainting the researcher with the interview process, specifically the questioning technique, and also giving an initial idea of the pattern of responses that was likely. The interview-guide was adjusted, following the results of the pilot-study and a review of the guide by colleagues.

#### **4.4.4 Data analysis**

To help focus the interviews in terms of reflecting the main objectives of this research, and to assist in the analysis of the qualitative data, the interviews were structured according to the main areas that reflect the overall aim and objectives of this research (Biggam 2008:234). The main areas to be considered in this study are, preparation for headship, work-experience, which included experience with various stakeholders, and challenges and concerns which focused on barriers experienced by women in their quest for leadership, and suggestions for enhancing participation in leadership.

This kind of analysis strategy assisted in identifying and analyzing the number of women with common and different experiences, in order to make a sound judgment of the women's voices in the information presented.

Kombo and Tromp (2006:119) suggested the use of thematic analysis, whereby major concepts or themes are identified. The researcher adopted the following steps in making use of thematic analysis, namely

- perusing the collected data and identifying information relevant to the research questions and objectives;
- developing a coding system based on samples of the collected data;
- re-reading the texts and highlighting key quotations/insights and interpretations;
- indicating the major themes in the margins;
- placing the coded materials under the major themes or topics identified - all materials related to a certain topic were placed together; and
- developing a summary report identifying major themes and the associations between them. (Kombo & Tromp 2006:119)

#### **4.4.5 Measures to ensure validity and reliability**

Reliability is sought through a highly structured, transparent and detailed approach, using research strategy and data-collection techniques that have validity in the research community (Biggam 2008:238).

This study met the test of reliability by providing details of the appropriateness of the qualitative approach used, the site selected, and the type and number of participants interviewed, the specific issues that were addressed, the actual interview questions and the method of data analysis.

Another method to enhance reliability, suggested by Shenton (2004:65), is that each person who is approached to participate in the study should be given the opportunity to refuse to participate and the right to withdraw from the project, so as to ensure that the data-collection sessions involved only those who were genuinely willing to take part in the project, and who were prepared to offer data freely. This was done by means of the informed-consent procedure to be explained in section 4.5.1.

The researcher employed the following methods to enhance validity, as advised by McMillan & Schumacher (2006:410), namely

- the use of mechanically recorded data - a tape recorder was used to tape the interviews to ensure accurate and relatively complete data;
- member-checking - within the interviews the questions were rephrased, and probing was used to obtain the complete meaning and understanding of the responses. The observations were confirmed with the participants through conversations. The participants were also asked to confirm their responses in the transcripts;
- triangulation - triangulation, involving the use of numerous data sources and data-collection methods, ensured that the consistency was checked.

#### **4.5 ETHICAL MEASURES**

In this section the following ethical measures employed in the study will be discussed, namely informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, deception, privacy, actions and competence of the researcher as well as permission to conduct research at an institution.



#### **4.5.1 Informed consent**

In this study the researcher undertook to obtain informed consent by attempting to bring the participants to "...an understanding of what the research project is about and what participation would involve so that the participant makes his or her own free decision about whether and on what terms to participate" (Guillemin & Gillam 2004:272).

The head teachers were initially contacted by means of a letter of introduction (see appendix 2) where the researcher introduced herself and explained the purpose of the research. The nature of the research—voluntary, face to face interviews which would be tape recorded, as well as the expected duration of the interviews, were explained in the letter. Telephone calls were later made to each of the prospective participants, during which they were expected to decline or confirm their willingness to participate. Before each of the interviews was conducted, the participants signed a consent form (see appendix 5), indicating that they were willing to be interviewed. An information sheet (see appendix 4), containing the interview process and possible concerns was discussed with each of the participants at the start of the interview. The participants were also made aware of their freedom to withdraw from the study at their own will. Being given all the information, the participants were able to make voluntary, informed and carefully considered decisions in respect of their participation.

#### **4.5.2 Deception of the respondents**

The researcher undertook to avoid deception and to ensure privacy by being open and honest in dealing with the participants (Kombo & Tromp 2006:107). This was achieved by ensuring that all the participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the procedures to be followed during the research (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:196). A disclosure or information sheet was discussed with the participants at the beginning of each interview. The disclosure explained to the participants what they were to do if they were uncomfortable with the questioning, and that they could correct the researcher whenever they found it necessary. Each woman head teacher signed an informed-consent statement before the interview started.

#### **4.5.3 Violation of privacy**

The interview schedule used for the research was reviewed by four of the researcher's colleagues—two fellow students and two colleagues at the workplace in order to help indicate and remove any questions that may be sensitive or biased. It was also presented to the

researcher's supervisor for her comments and corrections, to ensure that the questions asked did not possibly violate the participants' privacy, as advised by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003:191). Arrangements were made to ensure that the collection of the data was done at a time and a place that was convenient for the participants.

#### **4.5.4 The actions and competence of the researcher**

In conducting this research, the researcher was the primary research instrument for the collection and analysis of the data. Reflexivity (rigorous self scrutiny by a researcher throughout the entire research process) was paramount in the whole research process (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:411). The researcher had to be conscious of any biases that may creep into the research, as this could have an effect on the research process.

The researcher constantly reflected on and questioned her own assumptions which could likely be influenced by her experiences as a long-serving female teacher, her prior relationships with some of the participants who had been her colleagues in the profession, and whom she had watched ascend to headship, as well as her perception on matters relating to gender.

#### **4.5.5 Confidentiality and anonymity**

Given that qualitative studies often contain rich descriptions of the participants in the study, confidentiality breaches via deductive disclosure, also known as *internal confidentiality* (Tolich, in: Kaiser 2009), are of particular concern to qualitative researchers (Kaiser 2009:1632). As such, qualitative researchers face a conflict between conveying detailed accurate accounts of the social world, and protecting the identities of the individuals who participate in the research. Such was the dilemma faced in this research study. The area of study, Kajiado County, has very few female head teachers whose unique experiences could likely be identified by their colleagues and members of the wider teaching fraternity. The researcher chose to cover a wider area of study to minimize this risk.

As much as the participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, the risk of the likelihood of the participants being identified was discussed with them. The researcher, accordingly, considered a more nuanced view of consent as presented by Kaiser (2009: 1636). He suggested moving away from the assumption that every respondent desires 'complete confidentiality', and instead, recognizing that a participant in the research might want to receive recognition for some of, or all of what he or she contributed. Participants were also

fully informed about who the audience of the research project would possibly be, so that they could make informed choices of what to share. The researcher was, however, careful to ensure that names of the schools and the participants were not identifiable in print. Instead, pseudonyms were used, and the descriptions of the areas were disguised. The participants were also assured that the raw data collected would be kept in a safe place where it would be accessible to the researcher only.

#### **4.5.6 Permission to conduct the research at an institution**

As a 'pre-field logistic' (Mugenda & Mugenda 2003:182) a letter was written to the District Education Officer (see appendix 1) asking permission to conduct the research in the District. Approval was granted. Letters were then written to the individual head teachers selected for the study. Mailing the letters would have meant wasting a lot of time, seeing that some schools are quite far from towns where they have their post office boxes, thus it was found more convenient to distribute the letters at the head teacher's meetings where each district held their beginning of term-meetings.

#### **4.6 SUMMARY**

In this chapter an explanation was given of the research design and methods to be used in this study. The ethical measures, data collection and data analysis strategies were also indicated.

In the next chapter the findings of the study will be presented.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter an analysis will be given of the data collected according to the methods set out in chapter four. The findings will be provided. This study was undertaken to explore the educational leadership experiences of female head teachers in primary schools located in rural areas of Kenya. The data were gathered by means of semi-structured interviews, observations and field-notes. The interview schedule can be found in appendix 5. The experiences shared by the fifteen research participants are meant to contribute to the understanding of the nature of their experiences as primary school heads in rural areas. The data were analyzed through the process of thematic analysis in order to elicit recurring themes that appeared as relating to the lived experiences of the women. The themes that were significant to this study include becoming a head teacher, the head teacher's work experience and personal challenges, as well as strategies for enhancing the participation of women in rural primary school leadership, and the participant's future aspirations.

Before presenting the findings, the women and their career backgrounds will be introduced.

#### **5.2 THE PARTICIPANTS' CAREER BACKGROUNDS**

The data collected on the head teachers' career background included the number of their years of teaching experience, how long they had taught before being promoted to heads, and how many years they had worked in their current positions.

The women were drawn from fifteen primary schools in Kajiado County. As shown in the table, the participants were referred to using pseudonyms, in order to maintain privacy and confidentiality (Mugenda & Mugenda 2003:191).

The findings are presented in the table below.

HEAD TEACHER	NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE	NUMBER OF YEARS TAUGHT BEFORE BEING PROMOTED	NUMBER OF YEARS AS A DEPUTY HEAD TEACHER	NUMBER OF YEARS AS HEAD TEACHER
Cynthia	32	28	4	4
Julie	18	17	5	1
Ruth	18	17	6	1
Damaris	20	11	1	9
June	17	13	8	4
Janet	20	19	6	1
Rosaina	9	7	4	2
Ann	10	6	2	4
Lilian	14	11	3	3
Flora	20	15	8	5
Eunice	21	11	5	10
Eve	25	19	5	6
Maggie	24	18	6	6
Lucy	20	17	3	3
Irene	16	11	5	5

**Table 5.1 The participants' career backgrounds (pseudonyms are used)**

Table 5.1 presents the profile of the participants in terms of their career backgrounds. It focuses on their years teaching experience, the number of years before being promoted to their current positions, and the number of years they have been in their current positions.

Their years of teaching service ranged between nine and thirty-two years, with Cynthia having served the longest time, namely thirty-two years. Most of these head teachers had taught for between six and seventeen years before promotion. Cynthia had worked the longest before being promoted, namely for twenty-eight years.

Regarding their years' experience as head teachers, except for Damaris and Eunice who had been head teachers for nine and ten years respectively, all the others had from one to six years' experience. This is an indication that the inclusion of female head teachers in rural primary schools is something that is just beginning. It is, however, just an assumption, as no data was collected on how many female head teachers had left the position.

All the head teachers had been deputy heads before. Their years' of service as deputy head teachers ranged from one to eight years. Some of them were promoted at the same schools where they had worked as deputy head teachers, others were promoted and transferred to start new schools, while others were promoted and transferred to schools that already existed.

These categories are represented in table 5.2.

**Table 5.2 The participants' promotion routes**

Promoted at the same school	Cynthia, Julie, Damaris, Eve, Eunice and Maggie.
Promoted to a new school	Ruth, June, Janet, Ann, Lilian and Irene.
Promoted/transferred to an existing school	Rosaina, Flora and Lucy

Six of the head teachers were promoted at the same schools where they had worked as deputy heads. It can also be assumed that these teachers had the comfort of a familiar environment. A large number of participants, namely six also, were promoted to new schools. This category of head teachers had to experience a new environment as well as face the challenges of starting a new school from scratch. Only three participants had gone to existing schools.

### **5.3 GENERATING THEMES AND SUB-THEMES**

Raw data from the three data-collection techniques were analyzed and developed into themes and sub-themes, as depicted in table 5.3 below.

**Table 5.3 Themes and sub-themes**

THEME ONE	BECOMING A HEAD TEACHER
Sub-themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation to become a head teacher</li> <li>• Preparation for headship</li> <li>• Society’s perception of female head teachers</li> <li>• Perceived barriers to women’s entry into leadership.</li> <li>• Advantages of being a head teacher</li> </ul>
THEME TWO	WORK EXPERIENCE
Sub-themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reception into headship</li> <li>• Administrative challenges</li> </ul>
THEME THREE	PERSONAL CHALLENGES
Sub-themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-confidence</li> <li>• Balancing work and social life</li> <li>• Home-work conflict</li> </ul>
THEME THREE	FUTURE ASPIRATIONS
SUB-THEMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing participation of women in leadership</li> <li>• Future aspirations of the female head teacher</li> </ul>

In the following section the findings pertaining to the lived experiences of the women will be revealed.

## **5.4 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

As shown in figure 5.3, the raw data generated four main themes which, in turn, generated several sub-themes. The main themes form the main headings, while the sub-themes form the sub-headings. Some sub-headings had other sub-headings as well. Anecdotes from the participants were also used as illustration.

### **5.4.1 Becoming a head teacher**

This first theme focused on the teacher’s motivation for entering headship, the preparation received for headship, society’s perception of female head teachers, the advantages experienced as a head teacher, as well as the perceived barriers to women’s participation in school leadership.

#### **5.4.1.1 Motivation to become a head teacher**

Although none of the women reported facing any obstacles at the point of their entry into headship, a lack of motivation to participate in school leadership was evident, according to

most of their responses. It emerged that none of the women had started their careers dreaming of a future in which they would be school head teachers. This was confirmed by the fact that twelve of the women in the study had not applied for the position of head teacher. They did not follow the procedure set out in the 2007 TSC policy on the Appointment and Deployment of Administrators of Primary Institutions (section 3.5.1), which states that one has to indicate interest by applying for the position. They waited for the positions to be offered to them. It is important, however, to note that some of the head teachers were appointed before the policy was put in place.

Most of the participants were aware of the advertised posts but did not apply. Ironically, several of them had applied for the post of deputy head teacher earlier in their careers, but they found themselves taking up their positions of head teacher for various reasons. *'I found myself in this position after my head teacher had passed away'* (Julie). *'The divisional education officer (who was a woman) encouraged me to take up the position saying women were so few in school leadership and she thought I was capable'* (Rosaina).

For most of these women, the suggestion for their promotion had come from other people, mostly officers in the education leadership hierarchy. This finding corresponds with an observation made in a study by Eddy (2008:52) (section 2.5.7) that some women may not consider upper level positions on their own, and thus there existed the increased importance of well-placed suggestions by mentors. Interestingly, none of the participants in this study resisted taking up the posts when they were offered to them. Eve, Maggie, Julie, Cynthia, Damaris and Eunice attributed their promotion to headship to their presence as deputy head teachers in their respective schools. They would contentedly have remained second in command, if it had not been for their head teachers being transferred to other schools. They had worked in an acting capacity for some time before they were confirmed and given letters of appointment. Cynthia elaborates:

*'I did not apply for this post. My former head teacher went on transfer and I naturally took over the running of the school, having worked as a deputy head teacher in the school for four years. When I was offered his position, my family and close friends encouraged me to take it up. Looking back, I think all I needed was a slight push'.*



Ruth, June, Janet, Ann, Lilian and Irene all got the opportunities for headships at new schools that were being started in the districts, in an attempt to take services closer to the people and to ease the congestion in the existing schools after the introduction of free primary education. For these women it was an opportunity to start their headship in a totally new place.

*'I would never have taken the position in my school. The teachers were too familiar with me to take me seriously'.* (Ruth)

Three of the participants had applied for headship. These women seemed to have gained confidence and started believing in their leadership capabilities during the years they had worked as deputy head teachers. A common motivation among them was their knowledge of administrative duties at a higher level. Two of them said their head teachers were away from school most of the time. They found themselves handling the head teacher's duties, and this motivated them to showcase their capabilities.

The most striking similarity among all the women in their entry into leadership was their perception of themselves as the unofficial leaders, yet most of them did not apply for leadership positions. Several of the women had shown leadership qualities elsewhere, mostly in church. They also believed in their leadership capabilities as deputy head teachers. It is no wonder then that none of them had resisted when someone else pointed them out as being suitable for the position of head teacher. Another similarity is the relative degree of ease with which they had entered school leadership, as none of the women reported having experienced obstacles on their path to leadership.

This data revealed that in most cases the women's path to leadership was, in a way, unplanned. The majority of the participants in this study did not declare any intent to lead in the early years of their career. It can be concluded that the women did not make themselves visible for consideration of promotion by applying for leadership positions. Their visibility was accidental (head teacher being transferred, head teacher passing away, a new school being opened). This indicates how the women perceived themselves as leaders. Personal factors such as beliefs, self-perception and expectations, referred to in the Social Cognitive Theory (Wolfolk 2007:330, and Santrock (2000:8) (Section 1.6) may explain the reason why most of the women in this study took a relatively long time in their careers before entering leadership. They did not

see themselves as leaders; hence they did not strive for leadership positions. The social environment triggered their interest (they waited to be noticed by others). They also accepted the leadership positions where the physical settings were convenient for them.

Various studies, for example by Oplatka (2006:210), Kyrioukous and Saiti 2006:1-2), Adams & Hambright (2004:211), and Eddy (2008:52), referred to in the literature review (section 2.4.2), which attribute the under-representation in leadership positions to women's own decision not to apply for promotion, hold true in this study. Even when presented with an opportunity, most of them did not declare any interest. They waited for someone else to notice them and give them 'a slight push', as Cynthia put it.

The researcher now looks at the kind of preparation the head teachers received to prepare them for leadership.

#### 5.4.1.2 Preparation for headship

Most of the head teachers in this study had no leadership training related directly to the position of head teacher. Although three of the women had attended a primary school management course earlier in their careers, they admitted it was not a conscious effort on their part to prepare them for headship at the time. For them it was just another course that had been introduced by the ministry of education that their head teachers had nominated them to attend. They had all worked as senior teachers in their schools at that stage. Notably, these were the same women who later applied for the post of head teacher. They, however, said that the knowledge from the course helped them a great deal when they became heads.

*'I attended PRISM ten years ago. At that time I did not think I would ever become a head teacher. I was nominated to attend the course because I was a senior teacher. The knowledge from PRISM helped me in the years I was deputy and does so even today'.*

(June)

It would appear that the only preparation for headship most of these head teachers received was working as deputy head teachers. The administrative duties delegated to them acquainted them with headship, so they did not feel like they were 'groping in the dark' when they got into their current positions. Maggie credits her former head teacher with her mentoring and modeling a responsibility in headship. She commented:

*'My former boss was a person who took his work seriously and would sometimes say to me jokingly, 'Maggie, you know you may find yourself heading this school someday'. Then he would guide me through some of the duties required of a head teacher and explain to me how to deal with various official duties. Sometimes he would even call me into his office to listen in and comment when he was handling parents' and teachers' issues. That helped me a lot when I took over the school. I used to consult him a lot in the initial days'.*

Similarly, Rosaina gained experience from having to do administrative duties delegated to her by her former head teacher.

*'My head teacher always depended on me. He gave me a lot of responsibility because I did not mind taking it - sometimes I was literally 'the one in the office'. There is not much I am doing now that I am doing for the first time. The only difference was that then, if I got stuck with something, I would keep it aside for the head teacher to come and handle. Now everything is on my shoulders'.*

All the head teachers had attended various seminars and workshops during the course of their work. These workshops addressed specific aspects of their work, especially if it was something new the Ministry of Education or another stakeholder was introducing in the school system. The examples they gave included seminars on the school feeding programme, gender and inclusive education, and health issues. They acknowledged that this kind of training helped them to integrate new programmes into their school systems.

This finding illustrated that their responsibility for school duties in their work as deputies, and by means of other duties delegated to them by their head teachers, helped them in their work. Though the majority of them had not attended school management courses, they learned on the job. The participants were, however, in agreement that some form of training, specifically directed at the duties they were going to take up as head teachers, would have helped them in performing their duties more efficiently. Janet sums it up as follows,

*'The nature and the scope of the work change as you get into administration, and I feel that some form of training beyond the orientation given by my former head teacher would have been necessary'.*

The findings concurred with studies in the literature review (section 2.4.3) which indicated access to leadership programmes as one of the factors that attracts women to leadership. The studies include the comments by Mitroussi and Mitroussi (2009:517), who noted that women need to feel well-prepared before they applied for a leadership position, and Cowie and Crawford (2008:689) who observed that preparation for leadership can help to develop the professional identity of aspiring head teachers, broaden their outlook and develop confidence and self-belief. Other studies, referred to in section 1.1 Pont, *et al.* 2008:2, Priola & Brannan (2009:386), associate women's hesitance to apply for promotion with insufficient preparation and a lack of training to support the promotion to a leadership position.

It can be assumed that the women in the study would have felt more confident and may have done their work more efficiently if they had been exposed to leadership programmes. The women who had attended a leadership course said that the knowledge helped them in their work.

The researcher next examines the society's perception of female head teachers.

#### 5.4.1.3 Society's perception of female head teachers

Although these female head teachers did not experience obstacles at the time of their appointment, most of them felt that once in their schools, they were received into headship with some skepticism. They, nonetheless, acknowledged that with time the society accepted and respected female head teachers after they had proved themselves. Indeed, some of the schools that the researcher visited were of the best-performing schools in the vicinity. The head teachers attributed the good performance to their working hard to try and prove themselves.

Damaris comments:

*'You set out knowing every step you take is being watched. You cannot afford to prove the skeptics right so you put your all into it. In the end, results begin to show and the people begin looking at you differently.'*

Julie was of the opinion that the way women led also had something to do with the improved performance, and hence improved acceptance. She said,

*'You know women are motherly, and they tend to nurture their subjects. Teachers and learners who are treated well tend to work hard because they would not want to disappoint their 'mother'.*

This data led to the supposition that the society usually started off with a negative perception, *albeit* subtle, of women leaders. This notion finds support in Kiamba's (2008:8) work where he observed that historically, leadership has carried the notion of masculinity, and that public perception tended to favour men as being better able than women to handle discipline, work with predominantly male boards of education, and deal with political influence.

#### 5.4.1.4 Perceived barriers to women's entry into headship

Women's own issues, as opposed to external factors, seem to be hindering women from participating in leadership. The fact that most of the participants reported having been encouraged by their education officers to apply for headship, while others were appointed directly, indicates that the authorities would like to encourage more women to enter school leadership. It would be assumed that it was women themselves who did not apply for the top jobs. Time-commitment, poor remuneration, fear of geographical mobility and fear of responsibilities associated with headship, were the most recurring hindrances noted during the interviews.

Most of the participants admitted having a problem with the time they have to put into their work as it left very little time for their own personal interests. They thought that this was one of the major factors putting other women teachers off headship, especially if they were married and had young children. Cynthia confirmed that the reason why she was able to get to school early in the morning and leave later than everybody else was because her children were grown-up and had already left home. Her husband travelled a lot, so most of the time she was at home all by herself. She said that sometimes she stayed at the school until eight o'clock in the evening, doing paper-work. She did not think that would have been possible when her children were younger.

The remuneration offered to head teachers for their added responsibilities was said to be too little compared to the amount of work to be done. This was another factor keeping women off headship. Most of them said that one had to look at the cumulative benefits of being a head

teacher, as the pay was not enough to attract one to the position. Flora (and others agreed with her sentiments) lamented that some of the teachers under her earned a much higher salary than she did because they were on a higher grade, according to the TSC'S scheme of service. She commented:

*'The responsibility allowance is too little. One needs to see a significant difference on the head teacher's pay slip. Unless you appreciate the cumulative advantages of headship, you can get very discouraged. The pay is not attractive'.*

This view agrees with Bennel's (2011:4) (section 3.5.1) comment that in most countries head teachers receive little or no additional pay for their duties. He suggested that, in addition to having reduced workloads, head teachers should be paid substantially higher salaries than classroom teachers.

Another recurring hindrance, as noted by the participants, was the fear of geographical mobility. They said women feared applying for headship because most of the time the promotion meant movement from one school to another, usually away from home. This could explain the fact that some of these women had worked as deputy head teachers without applying for headship. They had waited to be noticed and perhaps to be assured that they would be promoted at the same schools, or to schools that were nearby. Indeed, almost all the head teachers interviewed worked at schools where they commuted or walked from their homes, while some were housed in the school compounds. Some of them said that they would consider stepping down from their current positions if they were transferred to areas far away from their homes.

There existed a general feeling that some women feared the responsibilities associated with heading a school. They preferred to remain in their safe zones where they were not exposed to too many challenges and too many responsibilities. Some of the women interviewed lived in the rural areas where they had interacted with people in the vicinity for most of their lives. Dealing with the same people in a different capacity (as a leader) posed a challenge. The participants thought the fear of dealing with such people was a factor deterring women from applying for leadership positions. June elaborated,

*'When you work in an area where you grew up, it means that some of the people you serve are your relatives and neighbours. It is not unusual to find some issues of domesticity creeping into the leadership role. Like a relative accusing a head teacher of punishing her child because they do not get along on the home front. I guess some people would like to avoid this'.*

Most of the grievances revealed by this study in regard to women's reluctance to apply for leadership posts correspond with those mentioned by other researchers, such as Kellerman and Rhode (2007:3-6), Kiamba 2008:12-13), Kyriakoussis and Saiti (2006:1-2) Omukaga, *et al.*(2007: abstract), Pont, *et al* (2008:2), Adams and Hambright (2004:209), and Chege and Sifuna 2006:126), as indicated in section 1.1.

#### 5.4.1.5 Advantages of being a head teacher

Most of the head teachers interviewed had not planned their path to leadership. In the words of Janet, it seemed that most of them had *'found themselves in the position'*. They, however, acknowledged that working as leaders had numerous positive effects on their lives.

##### a) Self-development

As they continued their work as leaders, most of the participants reported discovering new capabilities within themselves. Knowing that they were able to deal effectively with the duties of a head teacher confirmed their capability. Maggie reported having a feeling of *'I can do it!'* after a few weeks in office. Eve said that she *'...gained confidence with each passing day'*, while Ann remembers her initial days as *'...each day being better than the previous'*. Woolfolk's (2007:333) sources of self-efficacy which she identified as mastery experience, vicarious experiences and social persuasion, correspond with the experiences of the participants. As they gained mastery of their work, their self-efficacy increased.

Dealing with different kinds of people made some of these head teachers better problem-solvers. Every eventuality in the school either started or finally landed in the office of the head teacher. They were not prepared for some of the issues, but they had to find a way of solving them. Eunice put it metaphorically,

*'It's like being a valley surrounded by hills. When it rains, all the water comes down into the valley carrying all in its path. In this position, the problems of the teachers,*

*learners, parents and other workers all land in your office. You have to be quite sober to deal with all of them. I find myself more tolerant and discerning than I used to be and I think that is a good thing'.*

These problem-solving skills reflected in their other relationships at home and in the community, which made it another component of their self-development.

Being in the highest office in the institution, these women met different kinds of people. Some of them reported being nervous in their first days in office, but their interaction with others improved as they met more and more people. Rosaina reported about her first days as a head teacher as follows, *'My office window overlooks the school gate. Every time I saw a person come in, I got nervous and started wiping surfaces that were not even dusty. With time that has gone. These days I sit calmly and wait to hear what the person has to say'.*

It would seem that exposure to headship made these women discover a side of themselves that had not been explored before, and which may otherwise not have been known if they had not participated in school leadership. The cognitive perspective (Nevid 2003:12), as explained in section 1.6, holds true in this respect. It is associated with the mental processes by which people gain knowledge about themselves, and how this knowledge is internalized and usually determines future actions. As the participants engaged in their work as head teachers they discovered their potential in problem-solving, and also in public relations. Their self-doubt diminished, as is seen in the case of Rosaina, and their self-efficacy was also enhanced.

#### b) Networking with peers and other stakeholders

The women in the study had improved their interaction in the education circle and beyond. This happened when the head teachers were doing consultations and were raising funds for various school projects. The fact that networking had taken place was evident in various schools, as was observed during the visits to the school, and as confirmed by the head teachers. At Cynthia's school there were computers, a borehole, a forest of trees, and food for the school feeding programme - all donations from people and organizations she referred to as 'friends of the school'. On the importance of networking, she explains, *'One has to go out there and talk to people. All these things were donated by people I can call 'friends of the school'. I believe*



*that makes them my friends too because I have been communicating with them on behalf of the school. Some people are eager to help but you have to knock on their door first*'.

In another school, two classrooms were built by two companies who run a horticulture business in the neighbourhood of the school. The head teacher said she had made a request for the classrooms. She said, *'You get to meet many people you have only been seeing and in the process you learn many things and gain several skills*'.

Other people the participating head teachers got to network with were their fellow head teachers and officers in the education sector. They learnt what was happening in other schools, consulted on issues they were not familiar with, and gained information on what was taking place in the education sector. Lucy, Flora and Lilian said that they used to consult, what they termed as *'experienced head teachers*', many times when they started working, and that they still consult one another from time to time.

#### c) Gaining recognition from the community

According to the participants, their status as head teachers had increased their recognition and respect in the community. In this regard, Ann noticed that her name came up every time people needed to hand out responsibilities in activities happening in the village and in her church. She commented, *'I guess they assume that if I can handle a whole school, then I can also lead smaller committees*'. This was also reported by Ruth, Damaris, Eve and Cynthia. Ruth and Cynthia are leaders in their respective churches, while Eve sits in a committee that raises funds for the girl-child education in her division.

For other heads recognition came with the offices they visit and the people they meet. Rosaina said that through her position she had *'...shaken hands with politicians, senior education officers and other high-ranking people*'. This concurred with an experience Damaris had at the District Officer's office where he recognized her from a group of six people who were waiting to see him. *'I am the only one he called by title (head teacher). He requested the others to allow me in first so that I could go back to my duties of attending to the learners, and they did. It is an honour to be recognized by a high-ranking officer*'.

This recognition, on the other hand, meant that the head teachers had to be careful how they handled themselves in public, as they had become, what June termed *'public figures*'. They

reported consciously adjusting their manner of dressing, and also certain personal habits, and they came to choose their words carefully, as what they said was taken seriously.

#### d) Opening for further leadership opportunities

Gaining experience and confidence in leadership was seen as an opening for the participants to venture into other areas of leadership. The responses from the interviewees revealed that most of the participants appreciated the fact that working in the position of head teacher had '*added an item*' on their *curriculum vitae*, which gave them an added advantage if they were to look for a job elsewhere. Two examples are Maggie and Lucy, who felt that with their experience they were in a position to handle bigger challenges. Lucy pointed out many senior leaders who were formerly school leaders, including politicians and even a former president, concluding that, '*School leadership prepares one for any kind of leadership and I believe that I can also be like one of them*'.

### **5.4.2 Work experience**

In this section the women's views on the experiences they had as female head teachers in their schools will be presented. The first part examines the head teachers' perceptions of their reception by various stakeholders once they reported to their workstations. The second part explores the administrative challenges they had to face in the course of their work.

#### 5.4.2.1 Reception into headship

This part of the interview intended to discover the head teachers' first experiences in office in terms of how they interpreted their reception by the learners, the teachers, parents and other stakeholders. The reception they received from the learners and teachers seemed to differ from the reception from the parents.

As noted earlier (table 5.3), the head teachers fell into various categories. There were those who were promoted in the schools where they had worked as deputy heads, others started new schools, and some were transferred to other existing schools. Some of the schools were experiencing their first female head teacher, while others had had previous female head teachers.

The transition seemed to have been smoother for those who were promoted within the same schools where they had worked as deputy head teachers, as they did not have to deal with the

physical movement, as well as the change in official duties. They worked in familiar surroundings where they knew the teachers, the learners, the school management committee and the parents. The major challenge they experienced was resistance to new routines. Their styles of leadership were also compared to those of the previous head teachers. Eve was promoted within her school and she confirmed a fairly smooth transition.

*'We had always worked as a team in our school. I think that was one of the things that encouraged me to accept this position. I was familiar with the environment. I just stepped from one office into another. People took time, though, to take to anything new I tried introducing, but I still think it's easier that way as opposed to moving to a new school'.*

Only one participant among those promoted in their own schools, Damaris, had a totally different experience, and considered herself a very strong lady, having withstood the treatment she received as a new head teacher. She had got the promotion after her head teacher deserted his school. He left during a weekend and never came back to the school, which was situated in a remote area. The local education officer asked her to take over as acting head teacher, as the office debated the fate of the school. The environment in the school she had taught for four years, once as a deputy, suddenly became hostile. The learners were rude, and once they even attacked her physically. A scar is still visible on her forehead. She narrated her story as follows,

*'I came to school early one morning to find only the girls in the upper classes(standard four to eight).When I asked them where the boys were, I was told that they were having a meeting behind the classes. I decided to leave my handbag in the office before I went to check what they were doing. As I was closing the door to leave, they approached me with sticks and started shouting at me in the local language (I come from a different community). I believe God loves me - just then an elder, who was respected in the village, entered the school compound, and dared them to touch me again. In this community the young ones respect their elders, so they stopped. By then one boy had already hit me twice on the head and blood was oozing out. I don't know what I would have done if the old man had not passed by'.*

After the unfortunate incident, she was transferred to her current school, where she says she has been working very happily. She did not attribute the animosity against her in the last days of her stay in her former school to her being a woman. She strongly believed that it was the makings of a male teacher who had eyed the head teacher's seat and wanted her out of the way.

The experiences of the head teachers who started new schools were slightly different. Everything was new for them – a new environment, new teachers, new parents, and a new school culture to be set. Janet considered this a challenge on the one hand, but an advantage on the other hand, because there was nothing and no one to be compared to. All the stakeholders were eager to develop the new school, so they worked closely together. Janet appreciated the wealth of knowledge the teachers brought from their former schools. Together they started to shape a school culture. *'I told the teachers that the new school was for each of us to build from the experiences we had gathered from elsewhere. They were eager to cooperate'*.

The participants reported a cooler reception from the parents, especially in their first days. Most of them felt that the parents, although they did not reject them outright, seemed skeptical at first, but accepted them with time. The skeptics were more pronounced in schools which had never had a female head teacher before, and where a former female head teacher was thought to have failed in the job. Lilian said that initially she continuously received parents in her office who came to *'greet the new head'*, and who had all kinds of advice on how they thought the school should be run.

*'One of them actually told me to my face that although he did not doubt my leadership, he thought that what the school needed was a strong male teacher to control the many lady teachers (the school had only two male teachers) in the school'*.

In another instance, the patriarchal factor was evident in a parent's reference to a female head teacher, as reported to the head teacher by another parent. On his way to school, when asked by another parent where he was going, he replied that he was going to the school to see those 'women'. He used a derogatory term used for women in the local language to refer to the head teacher and her deputy, who is also a woman. This may imply that the parent perceived them as women first, before seeing them as school leaders.

Another head teacher reported that the area chief kept approaching the local education officer demanding a male head teacher, but the officer was adamant that he knew what he was doing when he sent the female head teacher to the school.

Although this initial seemingly negative response by parents was subtle, it negatively influenced the start of these head teachers' work. Several of them admitted to having had the feeling that they needed to prove themselves in their work in order for them to be fully accepted. Most of them reported slowly feeling accepted as they continued interacting with the parents, and mastered their administrative duties. Kiamba's (2008:8) assertion that traditionally public perception tended to favour men as better able than women to handle school leadership holds true where the experiences of the participants in this study are concerned (section 1.1). This notion also reflects the Social Role Theory (Gage, *et al.* 2004:36) (section 1.6) which explains how each gender becomes focused on whatever roles are available to them, based on the expectation of the society, thus influencing the society's attitude and reception of women into leadership roles.

#### 5.4.2.2 Administrative challenges

The challenging nature of the female head teachers' jobs was compounded by some particular factors that emerged from the data, which include accountability issues, parents' grievances and expectations, time away from school, limited resources, dealing with school management committees, and dealing with difficult teachers.

##### a) Accountability issues

Primary school head teachers are the managers of the curriculum, of the people and of the resources in their respective schools. Issues of being accountable for these responsibilities kept recurring in the interviews. Most of these head teachers, as noted earlier, had not attended school management courses to prepare them for headship, and thus for their leadership roles, as a result, they found themselves feeling overwhelmed by the responsibilities. Eunice indicated,

*'Whatever happens in this school, all the questions land in my office first. If exams results are bad, they will wave placards and chant 'Eunice must go!' If money is misappropriated, they will come for me first. If a child gets hurt, I will be the one to answer. Don't you think this is too much for one person?'*

Cynthia concurred. She said that sometimes people even referred to the school as the *head teacher's* (e.g. *Cynthia's*) school, instead of calling it by its name. She experienced cases where she got calls asking her to explain things that happened at school during her absence, even before she had a briefing with the teachers concerned. *'One is expected to have answers all the time. I only feel comfortable when I leave the school after all the teachers and pupils have left. These people rarely see my back'*. What Cynthia meant by this was that she always got to school before everyone else and left after everybody else has left. That, she said, reduced the chances of her being taken by surprise by things that happen in the school.

Although these head teachers made use of delegation and consultation to ease their workload, they still felt overwhelmed by the fact that they were held accountable for everything that happened in the school. This research study confirms the findings in Kocabas and Karakose's (2009:129) study where they noted that school heads have a key role to play in managing their schools because they are the main decision-makers. The success of the school and the degree to which they reach their educational aims depend on the school head and his or her governance. On the same point, Aketch and Simatwa (2010:486) noted that in Kenya the government and all the other stakeholders look upon the head teacher for the effective implementation of any programme introduced at primary level (section 3.5.2).

#### b) The parents' grievances and expectations

Another common theme among the participants was the dilemma they sometimes faced when handling the grievances of parents, and the high expectations these parents had from the school. All the head teachers interviewed had, at one time or another, to handle parent's grievances, some of which created a great deal of stress. It is simply not possible for the head teachers to keep all the stakeholders happy all of the time, and there were times when the parents left the school dissatisfied because the head teacher did not respond as they had expected.

In some cases the grievances were directed against the teachers. The teachers are guided by a code of regulations, and the head teacher first has to ascertain if an offense was committed. Some parents could not understand that the head teacher needed to listen to both sides before she could take any action, and that she was limited in her reactions by protocol. *'Some of them expect me to call in the teacher and give her or him a tongue lashing before them. Sometimes it is the parent who is in the wrong, usually because of not knowing the school rules'*.

In other cases the grievances were against other parents. Certain disagreements that happen in the village end up in school. Sometimes the parents involved their children too much in their personal affairs. Children from such homes sometimes got involved in a fight at school, and after investigation it was found that the fight had actually started at home, necessitating the head teacher to summon the parents. This is what happened at Maggie's school. The parents traded insults in her office before she even had time to talk to them.

And yet, at times the grievances were against the parents' own children. The participants felt that sometimes the parents expected too much from them, bringing to school issues that they actually had to resolve at home. Eve said that it was not unusual for a parent to come to her office with the child, expecting the head teacher to punish the child for things that the child did at home. On one occasion a parent brought her teenage daughter to school to report to the head teacher that the child had not slept at home. Although she later took time to counsel the girl, Eve was of the opinion that some parents needed to exercise their authority where their children were concerned. She said, *'I find some of these parents ridiculous. Some of them do not want to take responsibility. They think all the discipline lies with the teacher'*.

Flora, whose school served mostly children whose parents worked on a nearby flower farm or in the quarries, said she sometimes had to listen to what she called *'way too much information'*. Especially when a parent wanted to enroll her child for the first time, she found herself listening to stories of broken homes, estranged spouses, poverty, child abuse, and so on. She said that some of these experiences really weighed her down.

*'I have to listen to all their stories. I am human. These stories affect me. Sometimes I spend quite some time trying to calm down a parent who finally seems to have found a person with whom to share her grief. I am not trained in counseling but I do the best I can.'*

Children who come from such dysfunctional homes often demonstrate emotional problems that interfered with their performance at school. Each of the head teachers had these kinds of children in their schools. As one of the head teachers commented, *'The first gauge for the success of a school is performance, yet the social and emotional status of a child is also a great*

*determinant of performance. Some people do not understand this. They expect us to perform miracles’.*

The grievances of parents are common in schools, contributing to the stress of the head teacher who has to work through the grievance process to reach a solution. When an offended parent comes to school, the first person who has to respond to her or his grievance is the head teacher. This takes the head teacher away from her other duties and responsibilities, and which may sometimes even have an effect on her emotions. The experiences of these head teachers concur with Slater, *et al.*'s (2008:704) observation that school heads act as 'buffers', absorbing the pressure and responsibilities stemming from problems among teachers, students, parents, supervisors and the community (section 1.1).

c) Time away from school

Primary school head teachers are also classroom teachers, and the number of lessons they take depends on the status of staffing at their schools. Several of the participants had quite a number of classes to teach, as their schools were under-staffed. Some heads, like June, Ann, Irene, Damaris and Cynthia had almost the same teaching load as the other teachers. Ann and Irene were also class teachers, in charge of classes four and six respectively. Their absence from school to attend meetings at the education office, or networking with other stakeholders to solicit funds for their schools, meant that quite an amount of their teaching time was being used. This forced them to take extra time to cover their lessons which, at times, interfered with the children's and their own schedules. Yet, the classes had to be taught because the syllabus had to be covered, and the head teachers also knew that the other teachers were looking up to them to produce excellent results.

Irene said she missed the days when she could attend to all her classes as scheduled. It gave her confidence for the exams because she knew she had done her work well. If her pupils did not perform well (which, ironically, rarely happened, even with her frequent absence) it always left her feeling that she had failed the learners. She wished all rural school were equipped with computers so that some of the information they received at meetings could be shared through mails, so that she did not have to do all the travelling. Although this was not a common challenge among participants in other studies reviewed, it was found to occur quite frequently among the participants in this study.



#### d) Limited resources

Six of the participants had started new schools, and they were the ones who complained most about limited resources. The phrase ‘lack of money’ was repeated several times during their conversations with the researcher. Indeed, the lack of resources was also confirmed during the researcher’s observations when she visited the schools for the interviews. In Irene’s, Janet’s, June’s and Ruth’s school, there were no offices for the head teachers. In Irene’s and Janet’s case, the interviews were conducted in a classroom during the lunch break, while in June’s school the interview was conducted after the children had left the school, while in Ruth’s case, the interview was conducted under a tree in the compound. These head teachers did their work making use of cabinets placed in other teachers’ classes, limiting the head teacher’s interaction with parents and others who visited the school. In one school there were not enough classrooms. The pupils came to the classrooms in shifts - half of the pupils occupied the classrooms in the morning, and the other half during the afternoon.

Some of the participants who did not have a problem with buildings, complained about the money they were expected to produce to finance various activities. Lillian commented,

*‘Sometimes you are asked to send several teachers to a seminar and provide for their transport and lunch. The money is not always available’.*

The head teachers in this study identified with those in Cheruto and Kyalo’s (2010:73) and Aketch and Simatwa’s (2010:487) studies (section 3.5.2). The head teachers in their studies cited accountability issues of free primary education funds, the shortage of funds, and the general financial management of their schools as some of their greatest challenges.

#### e) Dealing with the school management committees

Each public primary school has a school management committee which runs the development issues of the school in liaison with the head teacher, who is the committee secretary. The committee members, who work on a voluntary basis, are elected by the parents. Although the participants appreciated the contribution of the members of the committee, they commented that sometimes there was a drag in the way things were carried out, because the committee takes time before it meets. For example, when there is a drought, a meeting can be postponed several times because of the lack of a quorum, because the members are attending to their

animals. Such a case was witnessed by the researcher in one of the schools. A meeting with the head teacher was scheduled for two o'clock because she had indicated that she had a meeting with the school management committee members at ten o'clock in the morning. By the time the researcher reached the school at half past one, the meeting had not taken place, so the head teacher decided to finish her meeting with the researcher first. At the end of the day the meeting with the committee members was called off as only four members had turned up.

#### f) Dealing with difficult teachers

Whether the head teacher was promoted in the school she had taught, or was transferred to another school, each of the participants experienced difficult teachers on the staff, and this posed a great challenge. The head teachers made mention of teachers who always came to school late, who were absent without permission, and who '*were not a good example to the pupils*', according to Lucy. Probed further, she said she was referring to teachers who sometimes come to school intoxicated, or who smoked in the school compound, knowing too well that it was against the rules. The dilemma of dealing with some of these teachers presented itself especially if the pupils performed well in that particular teacher's subject, which was sometimes the case. The dilemma arose on whether to report the teacher to the authorities and risk having him transferred which might result in lowering the school's mean score in the subject he teaches, or simply to let him be. Maggie explained her dilemma as follows,

*'In administration I believe there is a code of regulations, and then there is the human face. When one is faced with a difficult teacher, you want to hope that he will change with time after being talked to. If he is a good performer, you really do not want to lose him. It is a tricky situation because, on the other hand, you also fear that he may be a bad influence on others.'*

A specific category of teachers who were thought to be difficult by the participants were those who had stepped down from headship as they kept undermining the school leadership, and who were reminiscing about their days as heads. Those who went back to teaching after going through interdiction were also considered to be problematic.

All the above challenges were indicated in studies discussed in sections 1.1 and 3.5.2. Adams and Hambright (2004:209) identified the challenge of dealing with difficult parents, students

and staff members, while Cheruto and Kyalo (2010:75) also confirmed that conflicts with parents were a challenge.

Having examined the administrative challenges of the women head teachers, the researcher now examines their personal challenges.

### **5.4.3 Personal challenges**

#### 5.4.3.1 Self-confidence

From the accounts of these head teachers it was apparent that from time to time they experienced a lack of confidence in their work. For most of them this was their first time to head a school. Only three of the women worked in schools which had been headed by a female head teacher before. These three reported feeling uncomfortable during the first days, and even thereafter, when they had to deal with issues that posed a dilemma. Rosaina put it this way,

*'The first time I addressed the school assembly as head of a new school I felt uneasy. I had prepared a very short speech because I felt my confidence failing. I asked for feedback from one of the teachers whom I had worked with in another school and she said that I need not have worried'.*

Their responsibilities were sometimes overwhelming, and they did not always feel sure that what they were doing was the right thing. Ann commented,

*'I find myself scrutinizing my reaction to situations all the time and wondering whether I handled them in the right way. I usually take time before making a decision as I pondered the best route to take. The moments just before a major decision has to be made are the most trying for me. It is as if I am carrying my work with me in my mind and heart all the time'.*

The women in the study, however, acknowledged gaining confidence and adopting coping mechanisms as time went by. They did not, though, elaborate on the coping mechanisms. Each of them said they had a higher level of confidence than when they had started working in their positions.

#### 5.4.3.2 Balancing work and social life

The female head teachers spoke of how their social lives had been affected by their entry into leadership. Spending many hours at school meant that part of their private lives needed adjustment. Cynthia, who worked in the same neighbourhood where she lived, explained how her religious activities have been affected,

*'I used to attend lunch time prayers in my local church but I rarely do so these days. Time does not allow for it. Being a leader of the women's group at church, most of the people I lead are parents of my school. The leadership face I put on in school is different from the one I put on in church. Sometimes they do not understand me. I am considering relinquishing my post as the leader of the church's women's group'.*

The way the society perceived them also had an effect on their lives, and they had to be extra careful of how they behaved themselves socially. June shares the following,

*'Being a head teacher has put me in the limelight and now more people recognize me wherever I go. I have to be mindful of the way I dress, whom I associate with and even the places I visit'.*

The time-commitment of these female head teachers was incredible. They spent so much time juggling school-work and responsibilities at home that they had no time left they could call their own. Some of them said they had sacrificed of their friends as they did not have time to interact with them. Flora reported on her relationship with an elderly friend as follows,

*'The other day an old lady I used to visit complained that she sees very little of me these days. Her children have left home and my visits really cheer her up. She tries to, but I wonder if she understands that it is the added responsibility that keeps me away'.*

Janet added,

*'I don't have enough time left to groom myself. Sometimes I wear the same hairstyle for days. I look at the other lady teachers with their smart hairstyles and I envy them. These days you mostly find me in the salon at night'.*

The added responsibilities kept the women so busy that it affected their relationships with their friends, their religious obligations, and even the time meant for themselves.

#### 5.4.3.3 Home-work conflict

Perhaps the one area that all the participants felt that suffered the most was their family life. The ascribed roles of women on the domestic front created a challenge where they had to balance work and home. Each of them had something to share on how their administrative duties affected their time and their relationships with their families. Although most of them reported receiving support from their family members, they felt guilty, as they felt they did not fulfill their duties as mothers and wives (for those who were married) the way they wished to. They had to make sacrifices, especially in respect of their families. This was confirmed by Ruth and Julie, who said they had to send their youngest children to boarding school, as they felt they were not giving them enough quality time. Ruth indicated,

*‘My son would get home before me, and since I am tired most of the time when I get home, I was not able to share his enthusiasm. I decided to send him to boarding school with the hope that I would be in a position to give him better quality time when we are both at home during the school holiday’.*

Damaris mentioned how her daughter was once sent home from school because her mother had failed to attend a parents’ meeting. A head teachers’ meeting coincided with the parents’ meeting. She had chosen to attend the head teachers’ meeting and visit the school the following day. *‘I was left feeling like an ‘anti-mum’.*

Janet did not have the time to attend to her cows and goats as she would have liked to.

*‘In my community it is considered important for a woman to check her animals as they leave in the morning and come back from grazing in the evening. Although I want this leadership, I don’t want to lose my status in the family. I rarely see my animals these days. It takes me one and a half hours to get here from home, so I have to leave early. My husband understands, but it leaves me feeling inadequate’.*

It seemed that even as these women attended to their leadership roles, they still valued the roles they played at home. They felt as if they were not adequately performing their duties as

mothers, wives and home-makers. This left them with a sense of guilt. These findings concur with the information in studies by Kiamba (2008:12-13), Chege and Sifuna (2006:126), and Archer (2003:1), as discussed in section 1.1, who all recognized child-care and family responsibilities as challenges unique to women. Other studies, (discussed in section 2.4.3) by Seelinger (2000:77), Eagly, *et al.* (2009:12), Derrington and Sharratt (2009:21), and Cornwall and Legerski (2010:462), indicate the suffering women leaders go through as they try to integrate work and home duties. Knowles, *et al.* (2009:333) particularly noted that many mothers felt exhausted and overwhelmed, trying to balance paid work commitments with parenting commitments. Thus they were psychologically, intellectually and emotionally drained.

The findings in this study are contradicted by the conceptions of some of the participants in Derrington and Sharratt's (2009:21-22) and Seelinger's (2000:78) studies (section 2.4.3), who maintain that educational leadership is manageable with support and timing.

Having examined the challenges faced by the participants, the researcher will now report on what the participants thought would enhance the participation of women in educational leadership.

#### **5.4.4 Future aspirations**

##### **5.4.4.1 Enhancing the participation of women in leadership**

The participants made several suggestions on what they thought would attract women to school leadership. The lack of mentoring was a concern raised by the majority of them, in terms of grooming and preparing them for school leadership. Several of them felt that the presence of very few women in school leadership at the time they had started their careers made it a very foreign idea to them then. Ruth, who works in the same area where she grew up and started her career, says she always imagined that primary school leadership was a man's job. She elaborated,

*'During the time I went to school as well as the time I started my career, I had only known of one woman primary school head teacher. She headed a town school and she came from another district. Even most of the lady teachers in my primary school taught the lower classes. There was no role-model for us girls. When I went to secondary*

*school, I found a woman principal but then I thought that, because it was a girl's school, it had to have a woman as principal'.*

The existence of role-models and mentors were specifically mentioned as a factor that would help other women to have interest in school leadership. June and Rosaina felt that if the women who were already heading schools, and those found at all levels of the education leadership ladder, mentored aspiring women leaders well, the increase in women in school leadership would be realized. This notion finds support in the work by Lockwood (2006:39) (section 2.3.3), who asserted that the visibility of female role-models is particularly effective for those who are attempting to determine their potential for future achievement, and also because females are more inspired by female role-models. Studies by Lange (2006:17), Sherman (2005:711), Kellerman and Rhode (2007:xiv), and Sherman (2005:712) also support the importance of role-models and mentors for women aspiring for leadership positions (section 2.3.3).

Ann noted that most of the times when women school heads talked about their work, they tended to concentrate on the negative aspects, thus discouraging those who would have liked to join. This was also noted by Sperandio and Kagonda 2010:24) (section 2.5.7), who said that some women heads may be so beset with problems created by resentful teachers who are unwilling to accept a woman 'boss', that the example they provide is unable to mentor and encourage other women. Ann implored the women school heads to talk about both the positive and negative aspects of the job, so that aspirants may make an informed choice. She insisted that there were positive things about being a head that aspirants should know of. Ann indicated,

*'It's not all doom in this job. Yes, the pay is not good but money is not all. There are good and bad days. Let us talk about them all. As we talk about the difficulties we are facing, let us also mention the satisfaction one gets when your school performs well or when an otherwise naughty child has reformed. Negative talk can be discouraging'.*

The importance of management courses in relation to beginning head teachers, was also mentioned, and to on-going professional development. The participants felt that there should be specific courses for women who aspire for school leadership, as well as further courses where women receive training and get to share school leadership experiences that are unique to

women. This notion is in line with Sherman's (2005:712) (section 2.3.3) observation that women who participate in aspiring leadership programmes advance to administrative positions more readily than women who do not.

The participants felt that their participation in school leadership would also be enhanced if women were promoted while taking into account limited geographical movement, in order to ensure that their promotion did not affect their family set-up. A woman's culture demands from her that she should stay at home and mind her husband, her children and her home. A husband who allows his wife to leave home, even on promotion, would be frowned upon by the community. The majority of the women head teachers thought moving away from home was likely to cause conflict at home, and this makes many women shy away from applying for school leadership. The observation that geographical mobility mattered when women considered entering leadership positions, tallied with the studies discussed in section 2.4.5, by Wickham (2007:29), Eddy (2008:56), Mitroussi and Mitroussi (2009:511), and Wanyama (2002:49).

#### 5.4.4.2 The future aspirations of the female head teacher

Their future aspirations differed greatly among the participants, but it was apparent that none of them wanted to head their current schools up to their retirement age. Seven of them indicated that they would look for further promotion in education, hoping to retire at the highest level possible. It also emerged that a number of them were hoping to use their positions to build their *curriculum vitae*, in order to secure 'better' jobs outside of teaching. Two of the head teachers actually said that the job was not worth the stress, and that they would consider stepping down and going back to classroom teaching, as that was their passion. One of the participants expressed the hope to go back to teaching. She said that if that was not possible and she continued being a head teacher, she would opt for early retirement. Another one was hoping to save money to enable her to start up a business, so that she could leave the teaching profession. Four of the participants had enrolled for degree courses, in the hope of securing themselves teaching positions in secondary schools. The participants who wanted to opt out of headship cited the lack of an attractive pay package as a reason.

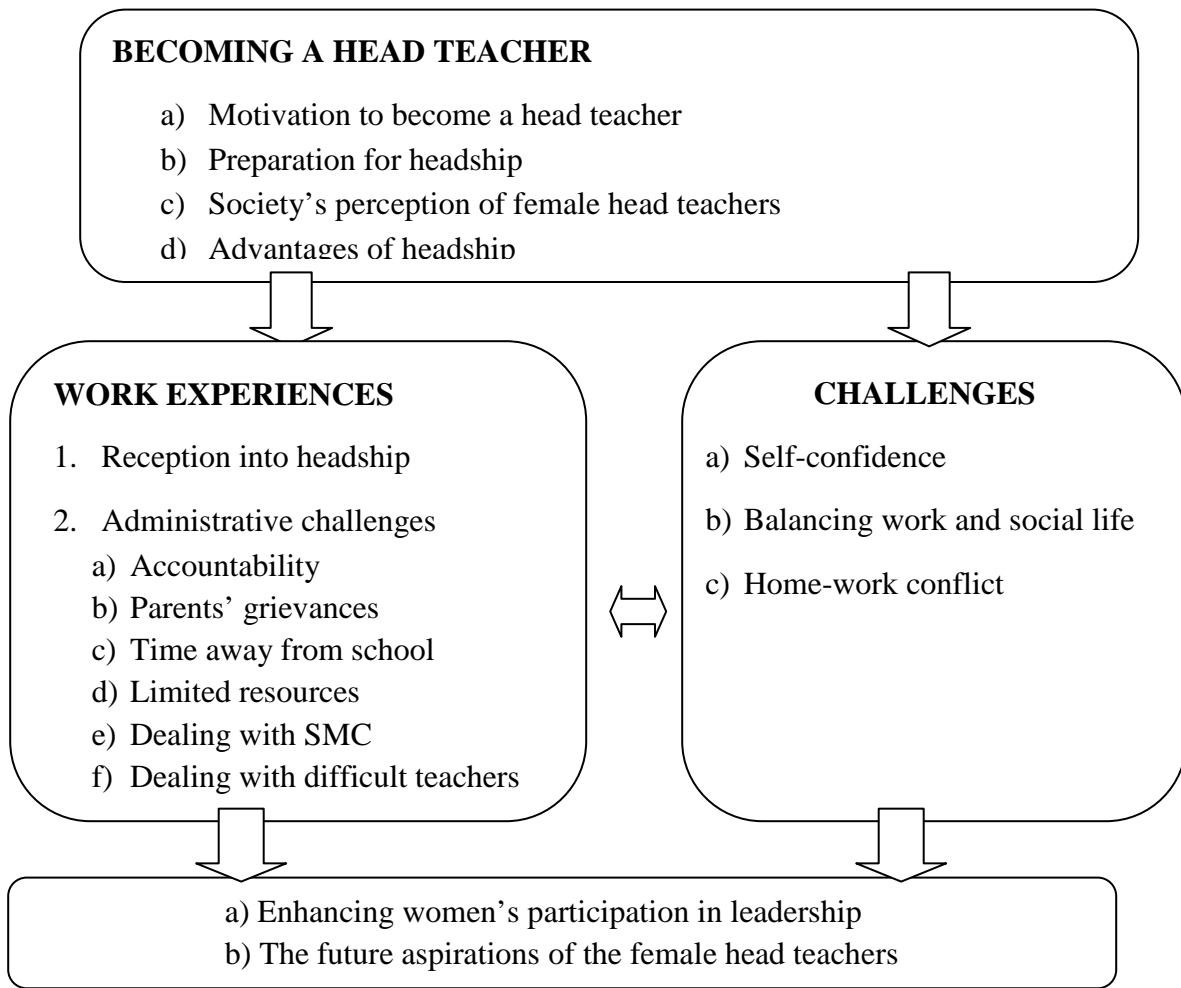


## **5.5 DIAGRAMMATICAL REPRESENTATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE HEAD TEACHERS**

As revealed from the data collected by means of the interviews, the field-notes and observation, the women head teachers had a variety of different experiences in their work.

These experiences are represented in a diagram below. The first heading, which forms the first theme, represents their motivation to become head teachers, and their preparation for headship. It also represents their thoughts on society's perception of female head teachers, and the advantages they had experienced since taking up their headship positions. Their various experiences are joined by double-edged arrows because they affect one another. The experiences at the work-place, for example the time spent at work, affect their personal duties and responsibilities. Both administrative and personal challenges determine the head teachers' future aspirations, and hence the participation of women in educational leadership.

**Figure 5.1 Diagrammatical representation of the women’s lived experiences**



**5.6 SUMMARY**

This section provided the findings of the leadership experiences of female head teachers in rural primary schools in Kenya. These experiences were revealed by means of the emphasis on recurring issues that arose from in-depth interviews, in particular their motivation for leadership, their experiences as head teachers, which included personal and administrative challenges, and their future aspirations. The head teachers also gave their opinions on what they thought would enhance the participation of women in primary school leadership. Adequate training, the presence of role-models, and limited movement on being promoted, were some of the factors mentioned.

In the next chapter the findings in relation to the existing literature in this area of study will be discussed.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In chapter six a summary of the study, as well as the conclusions from the literature review and from the findings of the study will be presented. The chapter will also include recommendations, suggestions for further research, and the limitations of the study.

The aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of female teachers heading primary schools in the rural areas of Kenya. By means of individual interviews and field-notes the experiences of fifteen participants were recorded.

In chapter one, a brief introduction and an account of education in Kenya were given. Chapter two provided an overview of women and leadership, gathered from international and local literature. In chapter three, an overview of women and leadership in Kenya was provided. In chapter four the qualitative design and the methodology used were described. The findings of the research, which were presented in relation to the research question, were presented in chapter five.

#### **6.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY**

This study set out to explore the lived experiences of female head teachers in rural schools in Kenya (section 1.4). A brief introduction was given concerning the under-representation of women in educational management and its possible reasons (section 1.1). This was followed by an overview of education in Kenya in section 1.2. The statement of the problem, expounding on the motivation for the study, was provided in section 1.3. The aim of the study, namely to explore the lived experiences of female head teachers in Kenyan rural primary schools, and the two main objectives which set out to explore the lived experiences of female head teachers and also to suggest strategies for enhancing women's participation in education leadership, were recorded in section 1.4. Justification for using a qualitative research design in this study, including sampling, data-collection, piloting, the analysis of the data, and its presentation, was done in section 1.5. A theoretical framework, the social cognitive theory, on which the study was based, was expounded on in section 1.6. The ethical issues which were observed in the

research were introduced in section 1.7. The concepts were defined in section 1.8, and the organization of the study was presented in section 1.9. Chapter one ended with a brief summary (section 1.10).

A review of the literature available on women and educational leadership was given in chapter two, which focused on international and local literature on women and educational leadership. The presence of women in leadership positions was considered important (section 2.2), as it was seen to promote gender equity (section 2.2.1), to provide a distinctive way of leadership (section 2.2.2) and to provide role-models for aspiring women (section 2.2.3). The common factors that drive women into leadership were identified (section 2.3), as well as the barriers to women's entry into educational leadership (section 2.4). A discussion of the challenges faced in school leadership was provided in section 2.5, and a brief summary in section 2.6.

Chapter three was an extension of the literature review which placed the study within the perspective of women and leadership in Kenya. The chapter started off with a brief introduction (section 3.1), followed by an overview of the status of women and leadership in Kenya (section 3.2). Section 3.3 gave specific attention to the Kenyan context of the status of women in the wider education sector, finally narrowing it down to school leadership. Measures taken to address gender disparities in educational leadership were discussed in section 3.5. A brief discussion was given of primary school leadership in Kenya (section 3.5).

The findings from the literature review provided a framework for the research design and methodology of this study (chapter four). This chapter detailed how the study was undertaken, including the selection of the participants for the interviews, the instruments used the data-collection procedures, and the method of data analysis. After a brief introduction (section 4.1) attention was given to the research problem (section 4.2). A qualitative design was considered appropriate as it enabled the investigation of the research objectives (section 4.3). In section 4.4 the research methods used in the study were explained. Qualitative research instruments (semi-structured interviews (section 4.4.1.1; appendix 5), observation (section 4.4.1.2) and field-notes (section 4.4.1.4) were used for the collection of the data. The ethical measures discussed earlier in chapter one were revisited in greater detail in section 4.5, with the inclusion of a discussion of informed consent (section 4.5.1), the deception of the respondents (section 4.5.2), the violation of privacy (section 4.5.3), the actions and competence of the researcher (section

4.5.4), confidentiality and anonymity (4.5.5), and permission to conduct the research (section 4.5.6). A brief summary of the chapter was provided in section 4.6.

In the sections that follow, the conclusions drawn from the literature study (section 1.1; chapter two; chapter three) will first be discussed. Thereafter, a summary of the findings obtained from the lived experiences of the female head teachers (chapter five) will be provided.

### **6.3 SUMMARY OF THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

The transcribed individual interviews and field-notes were analyzed and emerging themes were indicated. Each theme generated several sub-themes. The following were the main themes and their emerging sub-themes:

- **Becoming a head teacher**

The female head teachers shared the experiences they had prior to taking up their positions as head teachers. Five sub-themes emerged from this theme, and they enabled the exploration of the following areas (section 5.4.1), namely

- the factors which motivated the female head teachers to enter into leadership positions (section 5.4.1.1);
- the kind of preparation the female head teachers had received to prepare them for headship (section 5.4.1.2);
- what they thought the society's perception was of female head teachers (section 5.4.1.3);
- what the female head teachers felt were the perceived barriers to women's entry into headship such as time commitment; poor remuneration; fear of geographical mobility and fear of the responsibilities associated with leadership (section 5.4.3.4); and
- the advantages they experienced from working in positions of headship which included: self-development; networking with peers and other stakeholders; gaining recognition from the community; opening for further leadership opportunities (section 5.4.1.5).

- **Work experience**

This theme generated two sub-themes. The head teachers shared their initial experiences when they started their work, and then the challenges they faced. From the sub-themes it was possible to determine

- the nature of the reception the head teachers received from different members of the school community (section 5.4.2.1); and
- the administrative challenges the female head teachers had to face during the course of their work. Six administrative challenges were identified namely: accountability issues; the parents' grievances and expectations; time away from school; limited resources; dealing with school management committees and dealing with difficult teachers (section 5.4.2.2).

- **Personal challenges**

Being in positions of leadership posed challenges that had an effect on the female head teachers' personal lives (section 5.4.3). The sub-themes explored here revealed challenges in

- their self-confidence (section 5.4.3.1);
- balancing work and social life (section 5.4.3.2); and
- juggling home responsibilities and administrative duties (section 5.4.3.3).

- **Future aspirations**

The experiences the female head teachers determined their future aspirations in leadership, hence the two sub-themes, namely

- the participants' views on factors that would enhance the participation of women in school leadership (section 5.4.4.1); and
- the participants' future aspirations on the leadership path (section 5.4.4.2).

## **6.4 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY**

Based on the findings from a review of the literature on women and leadership and the findings of the empirical research, the study presented certain conclusions.

### **6.4.1 Conclusions from the literature study**

The literature review generated the following conclusions:

- Women are under-represented in positions of leadership in all sectors (section 1.1; 2.2). In Kenya the under-representation of women is evident in government positions, and the presence of women thins as one goes up the employment ladder where the salaries are higher, with more opportunities to get involved in decision-making (section 3.2).
- The representation of women in educational leadership is important, as it is seen to promote gender equity, to provide a manner of leadership that is distinctive to women, as well as role-models for women who aspire for leadership positions (section 2.2).
- Policies on equal opportunities, the possession of academic credentials, access to leadership and preparation programmes, and the women's own motivators are some of the factors that encourage women to take up leadership positions (section 2.3). Some of the motivators include an inherent passion for leadership, resulting from the self-knowledge of the possession of leadership skills, an intrinsic need and a moral responsibility to create a difference in other people's lives, and the desire to improve academic performance and student outcomes (section 2.3.4).
- The lack of female leaders in top positions is the result of both internal and external barriers women encounter (section 2.4). Some of these hindrances are:
  - male-oriented work structures, especially the culture of long hours (section 2.4.1; section 1.1);
  - the women's own decisions not to apply for promotion for fear of excessive levels of work, work-pressure and stress associated with leadership (section 2.4.2);
  - the challenge of integrating their responsibilities as leaders, and of running their homes (section 2.4.3; section 1.1);
  - female socialization practices, and stereotypes associated with gender (section 2.4.4; section 1.6);
  - the fear of geographical mobility that would interfere with the family set-up (section 2.4.5; section 1.1);
  - a lack of self-efficacy (section 2.4.6; section 1.6);
  - the shortage of role-models and mentors (section 2.4.7).
- School leaders face the challenges of overburdened roles, insufficient preparation and training, limited career prospects, and inadequate support and rewards, including poor remuneration (section 2.5; section 1.1; section 3.5).

- Some of the personal challenges faced by school leaders include feelings of professional isolation and loneliness, having to deal with the legacy of previous head teachers, dealing with multiple tasks, managing time and priorities, managing the school budget, dealing with ineffective staff, and implementing new government policies (section 2.5).

#### **6.4.2 Conclusions from the findings of the study**

From the findings of the study the following emerged as the main experiences the female head teachers had:

- The presence of female head teachers in rural primary schools is a fairly new phenomenon, considering the fact that the longest any of the participants had served as a head teacher was ten years (figure 5.1; section 5.2).
- Most women lack self-motivation to join school leadership. However, suggestions from role-models, mentors and senior education officers play a major role in triggering the women's interest and decision to participate in leadership (section 5.4.1.1).
- The transition to leadership is faced by the challenge of a lack of or inadequate preparation for leadership (section 5.4.1.2).
- Prior knowledge of administrative duties play a role in preparing head teachers for their administrative work (section 5.4.1.2).
- Skepticism from the society was observed at the start of a female head teacher's work. The performance of the female head teacher determines how she is received by the society (section 5.4.1.3).
- There is no evidence of administrative obstacles to women's rise into leadership. On the contrary, in Kajiado County, evidence existed that the educational hierarchy encourages women to participate in school leadership (section 5.4.1.4).
- Time-commitment, poor remuneration, a fear of geographical mobility, and the fear of the responsibilities associated with headship, are some of the aspects that discourage women from applying for positions of leadership (section 5.4.1.4). In contrast, improved remuneration, promotion with limited geographical movement, the presence of role-models and mentors, and access to leadership programmes would encourage women to enter into educational leadership (section 5.4.4).



- Working as a head teacher has advantages, which include self-development, networking with peers and other stakeholders, enjoying the recognition of the community, and the creation of openings for further leadership opportunities (sections 5.4.1.5a; 5.4.1.5b; 5.4.1.4c; 5.4.1.5d).
- Female head teachers face administrative challenges associated with accountability, parents' grievances and expectations, time spent away from school, limited resources, dealing with school management committees, and dealing with difficult teachers (section 5.4.2.2).
- Understaffing is a major challenge in schools, and it has a negative effect on the head teachers' work, as it means an increased teaching workload, leaving little time to manage other administrative duties (section 5.4.22c).
- Female head teachers experience wavering self-confidence, which improves as they gain confidence in their work (section 5.4.3.1). Other challenges are the balancing act of work and social life, as well as the conflict arising from juggling home responsibilities with work duties (section 5.4.3.1).

## **6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study revealed specific recommendations and recommendations for further study are also made.

### **6.5.1 Recommendations emerging from the study**

From the research study and the experiences shared by the female head teachers several recommendations became apparent that could be beneficial to educational administration and female leadership in primary schools in rural areas. They include an awareness of and the implementation of the gender policy set up by the ministry of education, the inclusion of preparation programmes for educational administrators, and also developing a mentoring network for female school leaders.

#### **6.5.1.1 Preparation programmes**

It was apparent from this study that one of the reasons for the under-representation of women in education administration is the fact that women avoid applying for leadership positions. It also emerged that those women aspiring for leadership feel unprepared for headship, as they had no

prior training directly related to their work (sections 1.1; 2.4.3; 5.4.1.2). This aspect could be addressed by ensuring that all aspiring head teachers attend a management course at KESI, in accordance with the recommendation of the policy on the identification and deployment of primary school head teachers (section 3.5.1). These courses could be made more attainable, and could include a larger number of participants by being advertised long beforehand, and offered at the county level at specific times of the year.

In addition, women could also be exposed to programmes tailored for women and aimed at empowering them, namely by developing their self-awareness and self-belief, as well as their leadership skills.

#### 6.5.1.2 Gender policy in education

All stakeholders in education should be made aware of and participate in implementing the strategies laid out in the Ministry of Education's gender policy on education, aimed at addressing issues on gender in governance and management in the education sector (Republic of Kenya 2007:28-29) (section 3.3). The progress of this implementation should be monitored at all levels to ensure proper gender representation in education management.

#### 6.5.1.3 Mentoring network

As noted previously in the study, the presence of mentors and role-models is essential in improving the participation of women in educational leadership (sections 1.6; 2.3.3; 2.5.7; 5.4.4.1). An effective mentoring network could provide guidance and support to females who are reluctant to enter leadership, and encourage those who are already in leadership to do their work better. This mentoring could have a positive impact on the number of women in school leadership.

The network of mentoring can be achieved by having experienced women educational leaders reaching out to their novice colleagues, and by modeling leadership styles. Successful female head teachers and educational officers could also be assigned to beginners, to aspiring female teachers and to already active head teachers who may have problems with self-confidence, to assist and guide them along the leadership path. Another avenue of providing mentorship would be the forming of networking groups in districts where women could meet to empower one another, and to gain the strength and courage to continue. In these networking forums,

female teachers to be mentored could be identified according to the potential the leaders will have identified in them in their respective schools.

#### 6.5.1.4 Reflection on leadership

Female head teachers in the field are encouraged to reflect on their perceptions of leadership, and how they communicate it to would-be aspirants (section 5.4.4.1). The female head teachers are called to recognize the immense effect that their mentorship may have on the next crop of educational leaders.

#### 6.5.1.5 Adequate staffing

The Teachers' Service Commission needs to ensure adequate staffing in all schools in order to reduce the head teachers' teaching workload (section 5.4.2.2c). In this way the head teachers would have the time to deal with their administrative duties.

#### 6.5.1.6 Remuneration

The government should consider reviewing the remuneration offered to head teachers in order that more women are attracted to school leadership (sections 3.5.1; 5.4.4.1).

### **6.5.2 Recommendations for further study**

The limited literature on the topic of female primary school head teachers calls for more research on the topic. Some of the areas that were left uncovered by this study which would benefit from further research are:

- a study of deputy head teachers and senior teachers would be appropriate in order to collect data on gender in those positions, as well as on the aspirations of those who are already holding those positions;
- an investigation into the number of female teachers who academically and professionally qualify for positions of headship in accordance with the laid down policy, and an exploration of the reasons why they have not sought administrative positions, or if they have, what the hindrances were in their achieving the positions;
- a study on the female teachers' perceptions of school leadership;
- a replication of the study of the female head teachers' lived experiences in other counties in the country;

- a replication of the study of the lived experiences of male head teachers in rural primary schools would help the authorities to understand whether men experienced it differently;
- an investigation into the teachers' training programmes to assess how women are assisted to develop a strong self-concept in their preparation for leadership;
- a comparison between aspiring and non-aspiring female teachers to ascertain the differences in their perception of leadership;
- research on female head teachers can also be done by controlling the variables, such as age, parenthood, marital status and years of service in headship; and
- an exploration of the female head teachers' lived experiences with data obtained by means of observation. This would likely add greater context, and triangulate the findings by expanding upon self-report.

## **6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The current study was limited in respect of the following:

- The study included the experiences of female head teachers in the rural primary schools of Kajiado County. Female head teachers of primary schools in other counties or in urban primary schools may not have similar experiences, so the generalization of the findings should be done with caution.
- This study included only the positions of headship. Deputy head teachers and senior teachers who also hold leadership positions in their schools could reveal other experiences unique to their levels of leadership.
- For the first time the participants were engaged in a study seeking their lived experiences. It is possible that their views may not have been well-defined and concrete, as reflecting on their experiences was new to them.
- This study only considered female head teachers. Male head teachers from rural schools could possibly have different experiences.
- The study was only concerned with educational leadership in primary schools. A different perspective of leadership could emerge from educational leadership at other levels of education.

## **6.7 SUMMARY**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of women heading primary schools in rural areas. The experiences of the fifteen women in this research revealed what educational leadership was like for them. It was indicated that they encounter challenges in the course of their work. Certain barriers prevent women from entering educational leadership. It is only when the interrelation of the challenges, the hindrances and the under-representation of women in educational management is recognized that a clear picture emerges of how women can be empowered and supported to increase their representation in educational administration.

The researcher hopes that this study brings about an additional understanding of female head teachers in rural primary schools, especially towards facilitating future research on women and leadership.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

### LETTER SEEKING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE DISTRICTS IN KAJIADO COUNTY

P.O. Box 71-00242,  
Kitengela.  
17 January, 2011.

The District Education Officer

.....District

Dear Sir,

#### **RE: PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH IN THE DISTRICT**

I am directing this letter to you to request your permission to carry out a research project on ‘The lived experiences of Kenyan female head teachers in rural primary schools’ in the.....district. The research is part of my Master of Education-degree in Education Management at the University of South Africa (UNISA), under the supervision of Professor GM Steyn.

The research aims to explore the female teachers’ views and perceptions about their experiences in their current leadership positions in primary schools. It will involve interviews with fifteen female primary school head teachers working in public schools. The research will strictly adhere to the UNISA Human Research Ethics regulations.

It is hoped that the findings of this research will shed light on the representation of women in primary school leadership in the district, on women’s perceptions of leadership and also on suggestions of strategies that can be employed to improve women’s participation in leadership.

Yours faithfully

Mary Parsaloi

**APPENDIX 2**

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**

Email :isinyaedu@yahoo.com

Telephone 0572523442  
When replying please quote  
Ref: ISN/DIST/RSC/01



DISTRICT EDUCATION  
OFFICE  
ISINYA DISTRICT  
P.O. BOX 847-00242,  
**KITENGELA**  
18<sup>th</sup> March, 2011

**RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION: MARY PARSALOI**

The above mentioned person has been authorized to carry out academic research on 'lived experience of the Kenyan female headteachers in rural primary schools in Isinya District.'

Kindly accord her the necessary support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip K. Wambua'.

**P.K. WAMBUA**  
**DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICER**  
**ISINYA DISTRICT**

**PHILIP. K. WAMBUA**  
**DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICER**  
**ISINYA**

### **APPENDIX 3**

#### **LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO THE PARTICIPANTS**

P. O. Box 71-00242,  
Kitengela.  
17<sup>th</sup> April 2011

Dear Madam,

#### **Re: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Even with the government's efforts to attain gender parity in our country, there are still relatively few female administrators in the nation's public primary schools. As head teacher of..... School, you have achieved something rare and important.

I am a master's student working on a dissertation with the title, 'The lived experiences of Kenyan female head teachers in rural primary schools', in Education Management at the University of South Africa, and I would like to hear about your experiences.

It is critical for researchers to understand your work from your perspective. To achieve this goal, I will be interviewing women who are heading rural primary schools, and I invite you to be part of the research study.

The interview will be scheduled in advance, and all the resulting information will be held in the strictest confidence. The interviews will last approximately 45 to 90 minutes, and will be audio taped for verification of the findings. I will be calling you within the next two weeks in order to answer any questions you may have, and to confirm your willingness to participate.

Thank you for your time. I truly look forward to talking with you.

Yours sincerely

Mary Parsaloi

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **PARTICIPANTS' INFORMATION SHEET**

The following script will be used in the information phase for each interview.

1. Thank you so much for agreeing to talk with me today.
2. As I told you in the letter and on the phone, this research for a Masters-degree, is on women public school head teachers. There are not many of you and I would really like to hear your story.
3. My goal is to ascertain your experiences as a female primary school head teacher. This means that there are no wrong answers, since I want listen to your view.
4. Should we veer off into any area that makes you uncomfortable, please let me know. If you prefer, you can merely indicate that you would rather not answer the question, and we will proceed to the next question.
5. Be sure to correct me if you think I have missed a point or misread your answer - it will not offend me at all. It is important that I really understand what you are saying.
6. Please understand that your participation is strictly voluntary, and you do not have to respond to every question.
7. I want to assure you that complete confidentiality will be maintained.
8. This interview will last approximately 45 to 90 minutes, and will be audiotaped for the verification of the findings.
9. Please feel free to ask me any questions that you may have at any time.



**APPENDIX 5**

**CONSENT FORM**

I..... (Please print your name) have read and understood the nature of the research project and agree to participate as requested. I understand the regulations governing this research and give my consent for my interview to be tape-recorded.

I understand that my identity and that of my school will be kept anonymous, and that all the information provided by me will be treated as confidential.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am not obliged to share information that I do not feel comfortable in revealing.

Signed.....

Date.....

## APPENDIX 6

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FEMALE HEAD TEACHERS

#### Preparation for leadership

- 1) How long had you taught, since leaving college, before you became a head teacher?
- 2) For how long have you been a head teacher in your current school?
- 3) What factors motivated you to become a school head teacher?
- 4) What reaction did you get from other people (*e.g.*, family, colleagues), when you showed interest in leadership.
- 5) What was the selection process like?
- 6) What preparation (in terms of training, mentoring) did you receive to prepare you for leadership?

#### Work experience

- 7) Please share briefly your experiences as a female leader in your work:
  - a) with the learners
  - b) with the teachers
  - c) with parents, and other stake-holders.
- 8) Please share some of the major challenges in the course of your work:
  - a) personal challenges
  - b) administrative challenges
- 9) What are your future aspirations in leadership?

## Concerns

- 10) What, in your opinion, is the perception of the society towards female head teachers?
- 11) What would you say are the stumbling blocks that hinder women from participating in primary school leadership in rural schools?
- 12) What would improve women's participation in primary school leadership?
- 13) Is there anything else you would like to add?

## APPENDIX 7

### INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH DAMARIS

Researcher: How long had you served in teaching before being appointed to head teacher?

Damaris: I had worked for eleven years, one as a deputy.

Researcher: For how long have you been a head teacher?

Damaris: I have headed this school for nine years, but I had short stays at two other schools, so in total I have been a head teacher for eleven years.

Researcher: What motivated you to become a head teacher?

Damaris: Waoh! Motivated, I was not. I found myself heading my first school after the head teacher absconded from work. He went away for the weekend and never came back, so I took over the running of the school. I had worked there as a deputy for one year. Later the 'education office' confirmed me as the head teacher. I was the only female teacher at the school then.

Researcher: Did you receive any kind of training or mentoring to prepare you for leadership?

Damaris: No, I did not attend any course. I was, however, mentored by the zonal education officer in the area, who was also a woman. She gave me a lot of encouragement.

Researcher: Please share some of your experiences as a female head teacher.

Damaris: I have headed three schools, with different experiences. Which of these would you like to hear?

Researcher: Please share with me the different experiences.

Damaris: My first experience as a head teacher was horrible and very frustrating. Looking back, I am surprised that I am still a head teacher. Like I told you earlier, I was

promoted at the school where I was the only female teacher, and I think some people did not take to this kindly. I was frustrated in many ways. Some teachers would collect school funds from learners and refuse to hand it over to me, and once I was even attacked physically by the pupils.

Researcher: That must have been a scary experience. How did it happen?

Damaris: I went to school one morning and found only girls in the upper classrooms. When I asked where the boys were, I was told they were having a meeting under a tree behind the classrooms. Before I could get out of the office to go and find out what they were doing, they met me at the door and started shouting at me in the local language. One of them even hit me twice on the forehead. You can see the scar (touches a scar on her forehead). An elder from the village who heard the commotion as he was passing, came and talked to them, daring them to lay a hand on me again. It was a very humiliating experience. The education officers decided to transfer me immediately. After investigations, it was discovered that the male teacher who was working as a deputy at the school played a role in inciting teachers, pupils and parents against me because he had hoped to get the promotion after the head teacher deserted the school.

Researcher: That was quite an experience. Please share some of your personal challenges since you became a head teacher with me.

Damaris: Since I became a head teacher, I have found that I have very little time for my personal affairs. My family has suffered the most. I feel that my children are not getting enough motherly love because of the time I put in at school. Sometimes I get home feeling very tired and cannot help with the home-work effectively. The most painful experience I have had was once when my daughter was sent home from school because I had failed to attend a parents' meeting (I had a head teachers' meeting with the DEO, and he refused to grant me permission to attend the parents' meeting, saying that the head teachers' meeting was very important). My social life has been affected as well. I have no time for friends, and rarely attend social functions. I really have no time I can call my own. Even

today I have not had lunch yet, because I had things to attend to. My other challenge has to do with making decisions about things. I have worked for many years, but sometimes my confidence still fails me, especially when I am handling new issues or dealing with unfamiliar people. It is, however, better now than when I started.

Researcher: Please share with me some of your administrative challenges.

Damaris: My greatest challenge is understaffing. As a result of this, I have a workload of forty lessons per week. That means I am supposed to be teaching every lesson of the day. That is not practical, taking into account that I have to attend meetings in and out of the school, handle grievances, receive visitors, and supervise other teachers. I have to create extra time to supervise my lessons, and that is not easy. Another challenge is a lack of sufficient funds to cater for the school's needs. There are things free primary education does not pay for, and sometimes parents are not ready to oblige. There is also the challenge of handling teachers' problems. Because of the location of the school (the school is in a rural area, but the teachers are not housed, so they have to commute from the nearest town about thirty kilometers away, with transport problems) some teachers are discontented, and are often absent. Pupils also walk long distances to get to the school, and they do not always get to school on time.

Researcher: What are your future aspirations in leadership?

Damaris: I hope to study for a master's degree, and seek promotion higher up in the education system. I would like to see myself sitting in the office of the director of education before I retire.

Researcher: What would you say are some of the advantages of being a head teacher?

Damaris: Being a head teacher has made me a hard worker. I have to be a good example to those I am working with. The title also gives one power and opens doors to many places. One gets to meet many people, for example, I now have access to many local leaders, just by virtue of being a head teacher. The networking with

my fellow colleagues and other stakeholders also has enlightened me in many ways. In the process of managing my school, I have also become a better manager in my own home, especially in financial matters.

Researcher: What would you say is the perception of the society towards female head teachers?

Damaris: The female head teacher has to prove herself in her work in order to be accepted by the society. Times have changed, though, and the society is accepting the female head teacher as a motivation for the girl child.

Researcher: In your opinion, what hinders women from attaining school leadership?

Damaris: They themselves. Most female teachers have a negative attitude towards headship, so they do not apply for the position. I had an acting deputy whom I tried to encourage to apply, but she ended up stepping down. She said she could not handle the time involved in leadership. This notion is shared by many female teachers. There is also the fear of being transferred to far-away places that would inconvenience their families. Female teachers who work near their homes would not like to move.

Researcher: What do you think would motivate female teachers to participate in leadership?

Damaris: I think female teachers would accept headship if there was no threat of them being transferred far away from their homes. Special courses for female aspirants should be offered to help them appreciate headship. The society should also change its attitude towards the female leaders, and try to see them as head teachers before seeing them as women.

Researcher: We have come to the end of the interview. Thank you for talking to me.

Damaris: Thank you. I wish you well with your studies.