A Comparative Study of Leadership Opportunities for Women in Faith-Based Institutions of Higher Learning in Kenya

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7.1 Introduction

Gender imbalance at the top leadership and managerial levels is a common phenomenon in the world. In contemporary society, women continue to aspire for top leadership positions not only in the business and political arena but also in academia. Onsongo (2011) observed that many women seek administrative positions in colleges and universities nationwide. Even though most women have become highly qualified and gotten adequate training to compete for coveted leadership positions, the ground seems not level yet since patriarchal attitudes and toxic masculinity in leadership, especially in Africa, are still a big hurdle. The scenario is largely replicated in institutions of higher learning, where women are largely underrepresented in influential decision-making and leadership roles. Consequently, the availability of adequate literature on the status of representation of women in senior capacity leadership, especially in faith-based higher education institutions, is a bit patchy. That scenario raises questions as to why so few women hold senior-level leadership and management roles. This study was motivated by the need to establish the cause for the dismal representation of women in senior-role positions in faith-based higher learning institutions and determine what could be done to remedy the situation. Thus, the following questions guided the research:

1. What are the leadership and management opportunities available to women in faith-based higher learning institutions in Kenya?

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2. What are the causes for the underrepresentation of women in either senior leadership or management ranks in faith-based higher learning institutions in Kenya?
3. What are the challenges that bar women from taking up or aspiring for senior leadership ranks in faith-based higher learning institutions in Kenya?
4. What coping mechanisms and remedies enable women to maintain their leadership status in faith-based higher learning institutions in Kenya?

7.2 Literature Review

This section has singled out available literature on the issues that have a direct or indirect bearing on the objectives and questions of this study.

7.2.1 An Overview of the Involvement of Women in Leadership

Leadership from a historical point of view is a role that is perceived to be a preserve for males, especially in many patriarchal societies. This is because it has a masculinity connotation and ideas such as men being the most suited for leadership are still prevalent in most societies (Kiamba, 2008). As evidenced in the political arena, although many countries have embraced democratic ideals of equity and equality, there still remains a huge disparity in women representation in top leadership positions, especially in elective representation, where men dominate the arena since women rarely run for the positions. In acknowledging the scenario, the IPU's (2020) report indicated that in both the United States of America and the United Kingdom there is a great difference in women's and men's political engagement. Further, even though these two countries have long democratic histories and greater score indicators on women status, their representation is relatively low. The Inter-parliamentary Union Report (2020) gave a preview on the status of women's representation with only 25.5% of the world MPs to be women; America was ranked 78th in the world in the representation of women in the parliament with 16.8% of women in the lower house while 17% were in the upper house. Similarly, the United Kingdom was ranked 55th with 22% women representation in both the lower and upper houses (IPU, 2020). The situation is similar in other parts of the world but in Nordic countries, the report pointed out that the gender gap was slowly closing since the women parliamentarians were close to half at 42%. There are only a few countries that had achieved gender balance in parliament. For example, Andorra in Europe at 50% and Rwanda in Africa at 56.3% (IPU, 2020). Even though there is further progress in the representation of women, minimal representation in the leadership roles that they take in the parliament is observed. For instance, few women are serving as parliamentary speakers. In Kenya, the place of women in major organs of decision-making is still very low. Onsongo's (2005) study observed that women were indeed underrepresented in management positions in Kenyan universities and executive positions in the public service. Her study also revealed a dismal representation of women in the executive position in the public service. For example, she noted that in the public

service, there were only 4.9% of women in job groups P and above in contrast to 95.1% of men.

In academic fields, underrepresentation of women in educational leadership has been discussed widely. From a global perspective, there is great evidence that is documented. For example, Eagly and Carli (2007) have described the situation of entry into an administrative position in tertiary education as an "impenetrable concrete wall." Shepherd points out "a serious gender imbalance" (2017, p.82) in executive management of business and leadership roles in the university education sector in the UK in disregard of attempted efforts to remedy the situation. These are other solid examples of how difficult it is for women to sail through leadership ranks in the world (Mclendon, 2018). In most cultures, the reality of women being promoted to upper ranks of leadership is difficult regardless of their adequate education levels and requisite leadership skills. Further analysis by Lund (1998) on commonwealth universities indicates underrepresentation of women amongst full-time staff in both administrative and academic hierarchies.

Table 7.1 from Lund's study in Onsongo (2005) gives a summary of the status of women ranks in higher education institutions. This is a confirmation that senior leadership positions in those institutions are predominantly occupied by men. It also highlights the progress made by women in leadership.

In Africa, the top universities leadership representation is even worse because women only constitute 29% in comparison with 41% globally of academic staff. This gender equity gap can be attributed to the fact that academia and its professional work have for a long time been influenced by patriarchal tendencies and therefore a preserve for men. Kanake (1997) observed that in the past, top leadership and management positions in African countries have always been anchored on masculinity and on overall traditional societal conventions that men in those positions outshine women in performance. Consequently, exclusion of women from occupying institutional leadership and managerial positions is still persistent (Avegeri 2015, Blackmore, 2014). There are glaring figures of underrepresentation in the university leadership where out of the 1500 universities in the continent only 40 are headed by female vice chancellors. This situation is replicated in other cadres of leadership in higher learning institutions, confirming that disparities still exist in contemporary society.

Table 7.1. Women and higher education management in the commonwealth: an overview

Status	1997			2000		
	Women	%	Total	Women	%	Total
VCs	50	8.3	600	54	9.0	602
DVCs	N/A	N/A	N/A	329	19.8	1664
Head of admin	96	18.8	511	79	14.9	531
Finance officers	34	10.1	337	45	12.0	374
Deans	238	13.0	1827	308	14.3	2160
Head/directors	1234	15.2	1823	2686	17.9	15,017
Librarian	108	36.5	296	126	37.2	339

Source: Singh (2002)

In Kenya, women have rarely been found in senior leadership positions. For example, it was not until March 2006 when Kenyatta University appointed the first female vice chancellor in a public university. In 2008, the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology followed suit. Top leadership in private universities has also been male-dominated with Prof. Leah Marangu being the first female leader of the African Nazarene University in Kenya in 1996. She beat the record not only in Kenya but in East Africa as well (Mukusya, 2011). Whereas the numbers of women in top leadership and management positions have increasingly been witnessed in other universities in Kenya such as Maasai Mara, Machakos, Meru, and Eldoret, the situation in faith-based higher learning institutions in Kenya (which are largely private) has not seen much progress in the relegation of top leadership to women.

7.2.2 Barriers to Women Leadership

As earlier pointed out, there are notable factors leading to the dismal representation of women in top leadership as well as in major decision-making organs in higher education worldwide. Sandberg (2013) likens the barriers to some maze which require women to persistently negotiate their path to the higher ranks of leadership no matter how difficult they find that path to be. Barriers to hinder women from accelerating the leadership ladder in both academic and administrative roles in higher learning institutions in Kenya have been categorized and discussed under personal, structural, and organizational contexts.

7.2.2.1 Personal Barriers

Concerning personal barriers, available literature supports the reality that one's internal factors such as personal motivation, belief in oneself, and capabilities or self-efficacy contribute to choices one makes either to take leadership roles or not. Similarly, other internal factors like family roles contribute greatly to women's involvement in leadership. Bandura identifies self-efficacy as core to one's agency and vital in leadership development (Bandura, Locke, 2003). Leadership self-efficacy is defined as the ability of one's success in their leadership capacity based on their self-belief (McCormick et al., 2002). Self-efficacy greatly affects how an individual thinks either in ways that are either self-enhancing or debilitating. It also contributes greatly to one's motivation and resilience in times of difficulty. Similarly, self-efficacy can contribute to the choices and decisions that an individual makes during crucial moments of his/her life (Bandura, Locke, 2003).

Historically, as earlier observed, leadership has been associated with masculinity which is in turn linked to power, authority, and hierarchy. Such are the expectations of leadership that still exist within society to date as confirmed by Eagly and Carli (2007). The traditional, masculine, privileged assumptions, and messages about what leaders should look like and how they should behave have particularly worked against women (Morley, 2013). That has in turn influenced their leadership

self-efficacy especially where there are prescribed societal standards that the women seem not to portray (Dugan et al., 2013, Morley, 2010).

Studies by Cheung and Halpern (2010) and Sandberg (2013) established that women in early academic stages hold low self-efficacy beliefs for leadership than their male counterparts. This was further confirmed by Onsongo's (2011) study on "promoting gender equity in selected universities in Kenya" from which she found out that societal obstacles affect women's characteristics making them to keep off from either aspiring or willing to hold any public leadership office.

7.2.2.2 Family and Cultural Barriers

In cultures that continue to insist that women are the ones to undertake the very involving caring responsibilities, they often become subjects of condemnation when they delegate such roles to caregivers to pursue top leadership in different areas. That reality is captured in Onsongos's assertion that

> Women pay too heavy a price for success in career, a pitch for African feminism, a journey that may never end but is worth taking nonetheless...what has happened to us?...the girl as a species in serious crisis...In the quest for education and career progress, the female graduates who seemed to have postponed important things like marriage and childbearing...today I listen to the women of my generation mourning omissions for motherhood, the biological clock is ticking. Between education, career, and motherhood, which is superior? Which of these can be sacrificed or postponed over the other? Which of these is of uttermost importance in life? This is the question that every woman should ask herself. (Onsongo, 2004, 1).

Family obligations play a key role in an individual's choice of life aspiration for many career women especially in the African context where socialization has family and care at its core. Thus, the label of a good woman is mirrored from the priority she gives to her family (Onsongo, 2011, Ridgeway, 2011, Maathai 2006).

Kamau (2004) also confirmed the above reality in his study by observing that many career women would rather put on hold their career progression and aspiration until their children are of age while some find it difficult to ever go back and others struggle through the process because they have to juggle between career and family care. Thus, women's upward mobility is challenged by inability to balance between work and family. The idea of balancing work and family has dominated studies since early 1960s and the focus has primarily been on work and family conflict for women (Blackmore, 2014). That has made it difficult for most of them to take up top leadership roles which are generally perceived as demanding (Ward, Eddy, 2013, White, 2017).

Balancing career and family has been cited by many women as a challenge in their progress up the career ladder (ASHEWA, 2010). Most working mothers, for instance, struggle to navigate between their dual roles of nurturing family alongside their challenging careers (Correl & Paik, 2007). As such, the demanding childcare responsibilities that tame the mobility of mothers, and the fast-moving biological clock are some of the challenges that hinder and slow down women's career progression including taking up leadership roles. Indeed, cross-cultural research indicates that the burden of domestic responsibilities lies on women and they are more

often than men faced with the greatest dilemmas in balancing the demands of family and work (Acker, 2014; Blackmore, 2014; Luke, 2000). An economic study that was done in Ghana and Liberia revealed that family responsibilities were the sole greatest barrier for the professional development of women (Oduro et al., 2011). The study further illustrated that female economists working outside academia were sidelined and denied opportunities based on the assumption held by their male colleagues that they would not have time for newer professional roles and challenges. Another study by Adusah-Karikari (2008) on female university faculty and administrators in Ghana indicated that many women turned down fellowship and opportunities to study abroad citing difficulty in juggling career and family. Sadie (2005) found that female academics in Mauritius often admitted the feeling of guilt whenever they could not successfully undertake family and child-rearing roles as required of them by other people, particularly their parents.

The preceding situation is similar to the Kenyan context. Research by Kanake (1997), Kamau (2004) and Onsongo (2011) indicated that conflicts arose between family and career and had adverse effects on the career development of women in academics yet senior leadership positions are anchored on such. Onsongo summarized the above concerns as follows:

> Women face contradictions of mother, wife, and career which are exacerbated by the sociocultural expectations of women in Kenya… if they spent time in the office doing research, the husbands at home and the family felt neglected… the cultural construction of motherhood and the gendered domestics roles- multiple roles as academics, mother, daughter in law, wife makes it difficult to balance. This constraint has a huge impact since most of the leadership positions are pegged on research publication and even attainment of a certain level of education. (Onsongo, 2005, 183).

The primary role of women as home builders and "caretakers" where they have greater roles in the care for the home and children more than their spouses had made it difficult for them to dedicate longer periods required for furthering their education and training. Supporting this argument, Prozesky (2018), who examined the situations of dual couples in Nigeria, inferred that most women inevitably subsumed their careers in favor of their spouses'. The study also determined that successful female academics in South Africa either delayed or changed focus in their early research careers in order to give way for the advancement of their husbands' careers. In some cases, women lacked support from their spouses making it difficult for them to pursue their career to the highest level.

7.2.2.3 Structural and Organization Barrier

Many structural and organizational barriers dissuade women in their career progression. Some of these are congruent with personal and internal factors. Hence while the barriers may be addressed as structural they are intertwined with some attitudes and personal beliefs. Several studies have cited the glass ceilings as a major structural barrier for women's leadership and general career progression (Bello, 1991; Kamau, 2004; Onsongo, 2005). According to Berheide (1992), the glass ceiling is an unexplainable and artificial impediment that halt the progression of women in

senior leadership ranks even though they qualify. Glass ceilings seem to be embedded in the social-culture realm, it is a gender-based barrier inhibiting women in their career progression. Bello (1991) regards social-cultural beliefs as a major barrier since they emphasized the superiority of men and inferiority of women and depicted the role of women as mothers and wives, which challenges them in balancing the dual role of family care and their careers that may be too demanding.

Women representation in key decision-making positions in higher learning institutions is still minimal and has many barriers (Longman & Anderson, 2011). A recent version of glass ceilings is "sticky floor" which implies the aspect of being stuck in one place unnecessarily due to barriers around and within an organization such as low pay and promotion that is based on appointments leaving women systematically disadvantaged. Women do not share the same mobility like men are as noted by Dahlvig and Longman (2010). Even if women advanced to positions that opened up pathways for administrative roles, many of them would not manage to pursue them due to the tricky balance of work and demands family demands aforementioned. Similarly, pursuing senior leadership ranks may require movement to a different institution, a reality that most women are unable to embrace due to their partner's employment location.

The glass ceiling phenomenon is common challenge for women progression into top leadership ranks in various sectors of society (Mudis & Yambo, 2015). For example, in higher learning institutions there are instances where women have advanced to middle-level administrative ranks like associate deans or associate deans, but the scenario diminishes toward the very top. Structural and socio-cultural barriers are partly to blame for the situation (Onsongo, 2005). A contrary position is that "it's not the glass ceiling that's holding women back; it's the whole structure of the organizations in which we work." (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2003 136). Thus, in addressing this challenge there is need not only to evaluate piecemeal factors but to do an overhaul on the organization structure with a more gender-sensitive eye that sees all aspects that dissuade women's progression in their leadership. In order for higher learning institutions to become more robust and influential organizations, there is need for women to advance into crucial leadership roles (de Wet, 2010). Further, the factors that hinder women from either aspiring for or advancing leadership ambition or should be a priority in higher leaning institutions since such institutions are considered an important portal for enhancing the status of women in other sectors of the society (Adusah-Karikari, 2008).

Policies determining academic career growth are important because many of the managerial and leadership positions are vetted against the degree, productivity, duration of employment, type of institution, and amount of time spent in administrative activities. Other criteria are membership of a professional organization and regular subscription to a journal (Kamau, 2004). As noted earlier such requirements may disadvantage many women whose profile may turn out to be rated low.

Organizational culture has also been cited as a great deterrent for women in ascending to leadership. The culture in some institutions reflects a patriarchal attitude that is embedded in the beliefs, norms rules and regulations, language, and communication. As Kamau (2004) pointed out sometimes there is a chilly and

hostile climate at the university that only accommodates a few "old boys' networks." That is further supported by White's (2001) and Avegeri (2015) studies which affirmed that women who got to senior positions have encountered the challenge of male hegemony which only accommodates some few women but does not challenge male dominance. Gachukia (2002) also noted that lack of women leadership-friendly institutions, interviewing panels that are largely male-dominated, job selection criteria that are non-transparent, and lack of clear gender balance policies at the university are the drawbacks to women's aspiration journey of top leadership in those institutions.

7.2.3   Bridging the Leadership Gap

In an attempt to curb the minimal representation of women in the top leadership of higher learning institutions, support systems play an important role. This consists of both personal, intrapersonal, and institutional support systems. Literature indicates that the availability of support networks, both in the family and in work domain, can easily influence upward mobility (Prozesky & Beaudry, 2019). Professional support can be derived from sharing information, advice, and career strategies with colleagues and members of one's network.

Personal support can come from family, friends, and spouses which may include emotional support, childcare assistance, or assistance with household responsibilities. That is supported by literature on strategies employed by female academics in administrative leadership in their work-family balance. A study by Hewlett and Luce (2006) showed that the women leaders that attempted to balance between their family lives and their careers advancements employed various means to create more time, and multitask in order to integrate work and family without compromising their two distinct responsibilities. Similarly, Prozesky (2018) indicated that finding support from the family and work domain had a positive effect on individuals and brought satisfaction. The study also revealed that women in top leadership positions had clear goals and priorities and would also seek help in the household through outsourcing whenever it was necessary.

Other strategies employed have been mentorship by other women who have overcome obstacles to ascend to leadership and performed exceptionally well in those roles. Through mentorship women who may feel stuck in their position can be helped to move on by recognizing their contributions and also through feedback as noted by Silver (2003) who found mentoring to be useful for both junior and senior faculty in learning, understanding, and navigating general institutional culture. Mentorship also provided a safe space where women could openly share, discuss and encourage each other in their ambitions. A mentor is viewed as a bridge that links one to other professional networks. The mentors act as connectors to promotions and new opportunities. In spite of the foregoing, women in academic careers continue to face barriers in benefitting from mentorship because of the disproportionality of potential mentors who have higher ranks of leadership to the majority of mentees in lower ranks. In the Kenyan context, the slow production rate in women

academics is linked to the lack of career mentorship as observed by Kamau (2004) who found out a great correlation between academic success and mentorship. He argued that "a good relationship between a junior academic and a senior" is a "catalyst" or "passport" to "success in academia" (Kamau, 2004 17).

Besides mentorship, other strategies that can enhance women participation are improving career mobility options for them by providing a friendly and collaborative work environment (Kezar, 2014) that enable the cultivation of lasting relationships and democratic decision-making processes that accommodate both men and women on equal footing.

Formal and informal career networks have also been cited as a way that can assist women leaders to enhance their leadership skills and professional development. The career network presents an avenue where colleagues can meet one another for mutual career benefit (Mulyampiti, et al., 2018). They present an avenue for exchanging information, collaborative career planning, support and professional encouragement, attainment of visibility, and progression to upward ranks of leadership. Mavin and Bryans (2002) noted that it is through the informal networks that academic profession recruitment and promotion happens and even sustained. Additionally, having a mentor can also enhance the building of network and exposure to opportunities. However, research shows that women tend to have few connections at work hence miss out on many opportunities (Prozesky & Beaudry, 2019).

7.3   Methodology

The study applied a qualitative research design to find out the leadership opportunities available for women in faith-based institutions of higher learning in Kenya as well as the challenges they encountered in their quest for senior-level positions. In-depth interviews were used to collect the primary data from 15 participants who were purposefully sampled from three Christian faith-based universities in Karen, Nairobi-Kenya. The institutions were selected due to their proximity to the researcher's work station and the lean number of participants in the study was necessitated by the COVID-19 restrictions that could not allow us to get in touch with a much larger sample. The target population constituted women who were either faculty or holding positions of leadership in the selected institutions. Given the qualitative nature of this study, a comparative analysis of the data from the interviews has been done in the context themes that emerged.

7.4   Results

The analysis of data from interviews data generated five themes which are discussed in this section. These themes are opportunities available for women leadership, professional/career advancement, dismal representation of women in leadership, women experiences as leaders, encountered challenges by women leaders, and coping strategies. Pseudonyms have been used to refer to the informants of the study in

order to eliminate any possibility of identification, and their details are anonymously kept to be accessed by the researcher only.

7.4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The ages of the participants interviewed from the three institutions ranged from 38-50 years, 5 married, 7 in religious life, and 3 single. The current academic degree reported by 4 participants is a doctorate, while 7 were holders of a master's degree with an ongoing Ph.D., and 4 of them had a master's degree. The 5 married participants reported having children ranging from 2 to 4 in number.

7.4.2 Available Opportunities for Women in Top Leadership

The study found that across all the three higher learning institutions appointment and promotion opportunities have standard procedures for all. Sixty-six percent of the participants observed that equal opportunity is generally available for women to take up leadership roles in higher learning institutions. The examples they cited were mainly drawn from the internal advertisement for positions such as of deans of schools and institute directors that are always open to both female and male applicants. However, they were quick to point out that the actual picture in the institutions did not reflect a balance, especially in major decision-making organs. Thirty-four percent of the participants held that the opportunities such as of vice chancellor and chancellor seemed to be a reserve for their male counterparts. Wendy, for example, noted that "*I do not foresee a woman becoming a vice-chancellor in this university ever because it would involve a lot of review of appointment policies and criteria. There are deep-rooted religious dynamics whose break may take very many years.*" Enid on the other hand said that "*the challenge women have in accessing top leadership opportunities is that patriarchal culture is still rooted in faith-based institutions and even when the ground appears level, it is not in reality. So some women may simply shy away from applying on that ground.*"

7.4.3 Professional/Career Advancement

The interviewees were asked to describe the motivation behind the advancement of their careers. Ninety percent of women leaders interviewed indicated that after many years of teaching experience the forces behind their aspirations were personal satisfaction and the possibility of climbing up the career ladder. For example, Nelly and Phoebe noted that this was their main goal when they ventured into leadership and if they failed in achieving it, they would feel professionally dissatisfied. Milka, on her part, regarded managerial prestige and the high social status that goes with the position as fulfilling and worth attaining. Betty and Ruth described it as a long progression of taking part in more and more demanding jobs. They identified

appropriate timing, availability, good reputation, hard work, and good networking as major contributors to their career advancements. Lastly, Cate revealed her unwillingness and reluctance to become a coordinator of her department since it was not part of her plans but she was eventually appointed to the leadership position:

> I have never had as a goal to become a leader. I started my career at the college as a part-time job when I was unemployed, then my department started assigning me duties, and with time I got employed as a full-time faculty. Then, as time moved on, I realized the need for development and quickly became one of the leaders in the department. When my predecessor finally left for greener pastures, I naturally took over the position.

7.4.4   Dismal Representation of Women in Leadership

Despite the realization of higher education access, degree completion, and staff positions, women are still minimally represented in positions of leadership in academic institutions (Stromquist, 2015). 90% of participants across the three institutions acknowledged that fact, pointed to have experienced it and attributed the situation to several factors. For instance, Nelly and Enid expressed that women's underrepresentation in leadership is partly due to the family obligations and the high demands for professional development; while according to Milka, underrepresentation of women in leadership was as a result of the normative views held by society: *"The society itself produces the stereotypical norm that women are inferior to men and consequently not acceptable to hold senior positions as leaders."*

In addition, Betty pointed to the psychological reasons as being behind the dismal representation of women in leadership: *"I feel that a lot of women do not feel secure to undertake a decision-making role and therefore fear the challenge to become leaders. This is because of family roles since they feel more confident in their sphere and safer to only undertake their house chore."*

Ten percent of the participants held a contrary position. For example, Cate observed that women were not underrepresented in leadership and management ranks in her institution as such. She stated: *"I don't think women are underrepresented. Today, I believe, that women leaders constitute the majority, or at least this is the case in my department. Underrepresentation of women leaders could be the case some years ago, but now I think the trend has changed; it's moving towards the right direction of distributing equivalent opportunities to both genders."*

7.4.5   Experiences of Women in Leadership

One hundred percent of participants shared the position that their educational background was the main contributing factor in their career progression, leading to their leadership aspirations. They also shared that postgraduate education had opened doors for them in leadership ranks. The participants shared that their lives and ambition to later progress later for educational degrees and vie for leadership positions were significantly affected by their early school years. Sixty percent of them stated

that their postgraduate education enhanced their knowledge and experiences, and it was only upon earning their doctorate degrees that they qualified to serve in active leadership roles. For example, in highlighting the impact of one's academic background and its impact on his/her professional progression, Cate asserted that *"Having the right educational background qualified me to get a leadership position as compared to my colleagues."* Nancy made similar comments regarding the benefits of having the right academic qualifications: She stated that "*I got a leadership position one year after earning my MA. I, therefore, believe that the right educational qualifications open doors and opportunities for those striving to achieve the positions.*" All the respondents shared that it was during their study time that they experienced significant personal growth in form of interests and knowledge that was critical in their academic career development.

The other experience highlighted by the participants was the issue of job transition. Ninety percent believed that their promotion to administrative positions was due to specific skills and abilities that were noticed by the management in their respective institutes or departments. For example, Nelly stated that she was appointed to an administrative post based on her skills and abilities: *"This wasn't something I sought out for; I was offered the leadership post by the previous officer because we had a good working relationship and he knew I was capable, reliable, and had the required knowledge and skills. He, therefore, recommended me for the post and I accepted it because I was confident of my ability."* 90% of respondents further observed that majority of women leaders got direct promotion from faculty to key leadership roles upon completion of their Ph.D. degrees although the number of their male counterparts was still higher.

As was reported by 10% of participants, any time a position became vacant, they went through formal interviews and ended up getting the job since they had the qualifications and skills that were required. In this regard, Cate noted*: "I did not need to fight to get the post I am holding at the moment. I was offered the post since I had what it takes, and I accepted it*." On a similar experience on how she reached the current leadership position in her institution, Betty stated that *"There is no much competition here for posts. This helped me gain my current position in my school/ department. Our male colleagues here don't fight or go after posts. Whenever there is a vacant position it is advertised, and people are selected according to the need, required skills, and qualification. We were six of us selected for an interview- 3 men and 3 women. I got the job because I had what it takes."*

Further discussion on the point about having the right skills revealed that good communication skills were paramount for effective leadership. On this note, Milka pointed out that *"For the time I have been a leader, I have learned the need for effective communication at the management level. My strength has always been having good communication skills when interacting with the people around me. I always get this comment from my colleagues, that is, I am usually the problem solver when it comes to dealing with people while organizing my department's events and official gatherings."*

7.4.6   Challenges Encountered in the Quest for Leadership

One hundred percent of participants underlined *lack of mentorship* as a challenge at the beginning of their leadership career. More concisely, Nelly remarked that *"When I started working as a course coordinator in my department, I didn't receive any guidance from the previous coordinator. Even the administration of my department was not helpful and supportive to me. I had to learn the hard way and cope with my situation."*

Seventy percent of participants in religious life and serving in positions of leadership in one of the higher learning institutions pointed out that women religious find challenges in vying for a top leadership position because of the roles and structure of their religious organizations. For instance, Milka shared that "*women in religious life are mainly reserved in vying or taking up certain roles in the public domain because they come from a set up in which male dominance in top leadership is a historical issue. Additionally, due to the unique nature of their formation ambition for top leadership is a little reserved because one's service term may end up being cut short when other responsibilities tied to their charism arise.*" Wendy observed that women in religious life have in recent times taken up leadership roles in higher learning institutions. She, however, noted that there are "*congregational dynamics like strict schedules and up-bottom directives that must be obeyed hence may hinder many faculty in religious life from taking up or aspiring for non-congregational leadership.*"

The other challenge that 90% of the married participants highlighted was their *tough schedules and the limited time they had for their families*. For example, Nelly explained that her working hours were not well regulated and that she ended up working on average 50–60 hours per week, a fact that affected her family and health. Enid stressed that the work demands were intense yet she could not do away with while at home in the evening. This compromised her family's social life. Betty also experienced difficulty in managing multiple responsibilities she had and that affected her family and social life suffered the most.

Cate stated with a lot of concern that *"I have not been able to adapt my working hours with the demands of my two children. Apart from the normal working hours, I also work at night when it's quiet and calm. As for the household duties, I organize with the house help to whom I have to part with some coins."*

Another major challenge that women experienced in either their advancement to top ranks in leadership or retaining them was pressing demands of their families. On the one hand, the family's support for women pursuing higher education shaped the participants' abilities to become effective leaders; while on the other hand, it became a challenge to their professional and career development. Nevertheless, 90% of participants stated that they developed coping mechanisms such as adjusting their personal routines which seemed to conflict with their leadership and family roles. The participants identified some difficulties that they often faced in an attempt to manage their personal schedules, family lives, and demands of their leadership positions. For example, Nelly narrated that *"In my situation, family responsibility was one of the main challenges that I had to deal with. Both my family and my marriage*

played an important role in my decisions regarding my career progression and the position that I was serving."

While none of the participants regarded their family as an obstacle per se, there was a general feeling that taking care of family and children affected their professional lives, adding pressure and difficulties to the pursuit of their professional goals. Specifically, Betty explained how complicated her life became when she was appointed the program coordinator in her department after earning her Ph.D.: *"it is not just being a working woman and a leader; it is also fulfilling your wifely duties, being a mother and then the entire family's caretaker."* Similarly, Enid described how she had to find a way to juggle the multiple roles of being a wife, a mother, and a leader in her department: *"My family is not an obstacle to my leadership career, but it is a situation that I have to deal with as I go through the process and the demanding hours of my leadership role, as well as being a wife and a mother. I am working continuously, but I feel that I am not doing either of them very well."*

7.4.7   Coping Strategies

In reflecting on their leadership journey and professional development, 100% participants admitted that *personal sacrifices* were necessary for the process of balancing work and family. They were at 100% in agreement that women holding leadership positions are forced into continuously working their way around societal standards and expectations of leadership because of enshrined patriarchal attitudes that always expects them to adjust their lives in order to cope with their family responsibilities.

Mentoring and Networking. One hundred percent participants agreed that networking within one's professional associations that is related to higher education and one's discipline of expertise were as important as having a mentor. They stressed the importance of having professional connections both internally and externally of one's employment station.

In regard to strategies for overcoming the barriers in their leadership journey, 80% of participants pointed out the importance of seeking advice from others. For instance, Nelly stated *"It is important to seek counsel from other professional leaders, both male, and females inside and outside your University or college."* Additionally, Betty recalled: *"There were many mentors, role models, and friends who believed in me and often encouraged me to take the next step at different stages of my leadership career."*

Hard work and good communication skills. In discussing leadership traits, 40% of participants indicated that hard work and good communication skills were important to those in top leadership positions since they need to constantly relay key work-related information to those under them. Milka noted *"You have to understand and know when to use your effective communication skills, especially when you are faced with difficult situations at work."* 50% of participants also expressed the view that knowing how to negotiate and communicate effectively were crucial skills for overcoming the negative issues hindering one's worth as a leader. Also, knowing

how to listen effectively was described as being of importance in cultivating relationships with other faculty and non-faculty members in the institutions.

Cultivating Healthy Relationships   Thirty percent of participants strongly believed they had maintained their leadership positions through the ability to cultivate healthy relationships with other people in the workplace. Cate, for example, asserted that *"Even though a person may not like you, you have to understand that they have skills, and you have to look beyond your personal feelings to work towards achieving your goals when it comes to leadership. You may need their counsel"*.

7.5   Discussion

This study sought to compare and contrast leadership opportunities for women in three faith-based institutions of higher learning in the Kenyan context. The comparison was decided on because of the unique nature of the selected universities; that is, they are largely influenced by the Christian tradition in their operations even though some of their faculty are not necessarily of the Christian faith. At the onset of the research, it was assumed that there would be a bid variation of the informant's experiences regarding opportunities and challenges for top leadership positions. However, the findings of the study have not revealed any notable variants from the responses except for the correlation, given by 40% of participants, between Christian tradition and patriarchal tendencies in the appointment of vice chancellor in two of the sampled universities.

7.5.1   Leadership and Management Opportunities Available to Women

It is important to mention at this point that due to proactive initiatives of various women's movements, affirmative action policy, and women's strong work ethics and abilities, most women have made great strides to become more visible within the workforce, increased their numbers in universities, and have made steps toward higher education enrolment and leadership (Stromquist, 2015). But this is not without persistent challenges in the course of women striving for top leadership and management positions especially in some faith-based institutions where standards for recruitment into certain positions have unique historical criteria that implicitly exclude female aspirants as was pointed out above by 30% of participants. This varied between the evangelical and catholic institutions with participants in the former having a positive outlook toward change of the current picture in the near future while those in the later foreseeing an almost impossible scenario of change in the top leadership occupancy.

On the question of the leadership and management opportunities available to women in faith-based higher learning institutions in Kenya, there were very few variations in the criteria for the appointment of individuals in leadership positions in

the sampled institutions. However, one of the defining marks for most academic positions was the postgraduate study with teaching and/or administrative experience. Fifty percent of participants in this study, however, shied away from applying for the positions because either they lagged in the requisite requirements or opted to take a low profile due to fear of demands of the office and family responsibilities. This included those in religious life and those in marriages with children. These findings agree with researches done worldwide especially in cultures that are predominantly conservative about the role of women in society (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kiamba, 2008).

7.5.2   Reasons for Underrepresentation of Women in Top Leadership and Management Positions

The situation of underrepresentation of women in top leadership and management positions was observed by 90% of the participants. That agreed with the findings of most research that have considered gendered leadership disparities in higher learning institutions as well as other sectors (Davidoff, 2013; Gumbi, 2006). Regarding causes for the dismal representation, and the challenges that barred women from aspiring for top leadership and management ranks in faith-based higher learning institutions, the results of the study varied on the basis of individual participant's experiences, backgrounds, and institutional structures regarding appointments. The majority of the respondents pointed out the level of career advancement, personal drive, family obligations, and institutional dynamics as determining factors for women who aspire for leadership positions. The foregoing revealed that women continue to face barriers and have to work within generally male-dominated leadership structures as they pursue top leadership ranks in faith-based higher learning institutions (Longman & Anderson, 2011).

7.5.3   Coping Mechanisms and Retention of Women in Top Leadership Positions

Women leaders in faith-based institutions of higher learning in Kenya encountered most of the barriers highlighted in the literature above. On the coping mechanisms and remedies to enable women maintain their leadership positions in those institutions, the research established that across all the three sampled institutions longer experience in leadership and focus on the goal of the office one held helped build resilience in 80% of the women leaders we interviewed. Whereas only 40% of participants in this study had an experience of having ranks of the dean of a school and directorship of institutes, their responses indicated that the two factors could cut across all ranks. 50 % of the participants held influential but a little bit lower ranks of leadership and management positions and expressed a desire for top ranks in the future when they attained the requisite qualifications while 10% had no ambition for top leadership ranks. The coping strategies they shared include the ability to make

sacrifices, tenacity, family support, and network with other people, building good relationships and communicating effectively. Across the three higher learning institutions, the participants recognized that having experienced women leaders to consult with and look up to was necessary for the upcoming leaders. That view agrees with the general findings of other research across the world regarding the importance of mentorship and networking for success in one's leadership roles (Peters, 2011). One hundred percent participants in our study shared the importance of networking and mentorship not only in their career progression but for all other women in different sectors of society.

7.6   Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study show that most women in faith-based institutions of higher learning aspire to progress to top leadership positions. There was a little consensus on the availability of opportunities because the job adverts for vacant positions to be filled are usually in the public domain. However, concern for transparency on criteria used to pick candidates was put into question since the under-representation of women in top ranks of leadership was still persistent. Given the unique composition of the institutions of the women under study, cultural and Christian-patriarchal attitudes were perceived to influence who takes which leadership position. Thus, initiating liberal institutional reforms, revising recruitment criteria and appointment policies, and building strong support systems for women leaders were deemed necessary in the quest to bridge the leadership gap in faith-based higher learning institutions.

Based on the findings and limitations experienced in the study, a larger comparative sample drawn from both faith-based and public higher learning institutions is recommended.

7.7   Implications

On the basis of this study, literature analysis, findings, and conclusions, we offer the following implications for practice.

(a) Faith-based institutions of higher learning in Kenya could allocate more time and resources to develop programs for leadership mentorship that provide platforms for consistent exchange of insights and best practices as well as roadmaps for younger career women who qualify and have ambition for top leadership ranks.

(b) Faith-based higher learning institutions in Kenya could strengthen deliberate inclusivity drives which provide a platform for awareness creating on the need to model a balanced leadership pattern as a means for preparing learners to serve the larger society with the same attitude and mindset.

(c) Faith-based higher learning institutions in Kenya could entrench the affirmative action policy into appointment and promotion criteria and procedures in order to deliberately give room for qualified women to also take up top leadership roles that have traditionally been a preserve for their male counterparts.

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