
[Generating new knowledge on women's leadership in education](#)

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Gender

School management

Recent studies have shown that school leaders' management practices play an important role in learning. Evidence suggests that, in some contexts, student outcomes benefit more when schools are female-led. These findings are highlighted in a recent work published jointly by IIEP Dakar and the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, which aims to bring together existing evidence on the positive impacts of female school leadership.

Recent data from six sub-Saharan African countries show that the proportion of women among primary school leaders is very low, despite the fact that in most countries there is a positive evolution of female participation in the teaching force. In Niger, where female teachers represent over half of the primary education teaching workforce, women account for only 17 per cent of primary school leaders. In Togo, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso, only around one in 10 primary school leaders are women. On a global scale, the gap between women's participation in school leadership positions and in the labor force remains around 20 percentage points even in OECD and upper-middle-income countries.

Recent research findings reviewed

The under-representation of women in leadership roles in education and other fields has been highlighted in several studies on the African continent - and beyond. Digging up the figures and findings of international research on the challenges and opportunities of female school leadership is the purpose of this piece and a whole workstream developed by IIEP Dakar in the context of the [Gender at the Center Initiative](#).

In several French-speaking African countries that participated in the PASEC assessment in 2019, boys' and girls' performance in reading and numeracy was better in schools headed by women. In that year, only 22% of students had a female headteacher, on average.

The evidence brief highlights effective management practices of women school leaders such as the promotion of more participatory teaching and learning environments, their encouragement of teacher

attendance and parental involvement, and their increased pedagogical leadership aimed at supporting teacher collaboration, encouraging skills improvement, and promoting accountability for learning.

The more women are appointed as school principals in rural areas, the more we have the opportunity to accelerate the reduction of gender gaps in education.

Ms Mariama Chipkaou Director of the Promotion of Girls' Schooling at the Ministry of National Education of Niger

Steppingstone to a research-based workstream, supported by the Gender at the Centre Initiative

The benefits of effective school leadership practices have been well documented over the years.

However, more in-depth applied research is needed to impact decision and policy making and achieve large-scale positive education outcomes. Working for women's school leadership serves a dual purpose: on the one hand, it promotes equity, but it also represents an opportunity, little explored so far, for the improvement of education outcomes.

We need to better understand where the differences between women's and men's leadership in the education sector come from, especially in low- and middle-income countries, and support countries in the development of strategies to scale up good practices.

Ms. Carolina Alban Conto Head of the research and development programme at IIEP Dakar

IIEP and GCI's **Workstream on Female School Leadership** is a knowledge-based program that seeks to inform the development of policies and programs to improve women's representation in school leadership positions, address the barriers to women's access and successful performance in these roles, and scale high-quality school management practices.

The program is being developed in several phases covering:

- Desk research, comprising the “Increasing Women's Representation in School Leadership: A Promising Path to Improving Learning” Evidence Brief, and a forthcoming publication on female school leadership practices and learning in 14 francophone African countries.
- Country-level analysis and exploratory school-level fieldwork.
- Co-design and impact assessment of possible interventions with the governments of the GCI alliance.
- Full implementation and operationalization strategy.

Our program builds on existing knowledge to explore new avenues to accompany governments and partners in designing and implementing effective policies and programs for

the promotion of equity in education leadership and learning, she continued.

[Access the IIEP Dakar and UNICEF Innocenti Evidence Brief](#)

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