Women in Learning Leadership (WiLL)

What does women's school leadership look like in Chad?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PRIORITÉ À L'ÉGALITÉ
GENDER AT THE
CENTRE

Executive summary

This is a translated executive summary of the first report on Women in Learning Leadership in Chad, originally produced in French. The full report is available on UNICEF Innocenti's website here. Authorship and acknowledgements remain the same as in the full report.

The global education landscape faces a crisis characterized by low learning outcomes for children despite progress towards greater access to education (World Bank et al., 2022). Within this challenging context, governments, international organizations and other education stakeholders need effective strategies to sustainably improve the performance of education systems and enhance learning for all students.

Global literature consistently demonstrates the pivotal role of school leaders as catalysts for transformation. Schools led by effective leaders are more likely to obtain better learning outcomes (Adelman and Lemos, 2020; UNESCO, 2018). Some studies also indicate that effective leadership is particularly important for schools in disadvantaged contexts, where there is significant scope for improvement (Grissom et al., 2021). School leadership, often regarded as second only to classroom instruction in shaping learning, is widely recognized as an indispensable prerequisite for driving school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2020; Pont 2020).

The Women in Learning Leadership (WiLL) research initiative aims to generate evidence to strengthen school leadership. Inspired by emerging literature highlighting a positive correlation between female school leaders and learning outcomes (Bergmann et al., 2022; PASEC, 2020), WiLL adopts a gender lens to examine school leadership. The project aims to document the state of female representation in school leadership, identify the barriers they encounter, and explore the leadership and management practices they adopt to run their schools effectively. WiLL, thus, pursues a dual objective: promoting equity by informing increased women's representation in leadership, and fostering excellence by identifying leadership and management practices that improve education quality and transform social norms to enhance the status of girls and women.
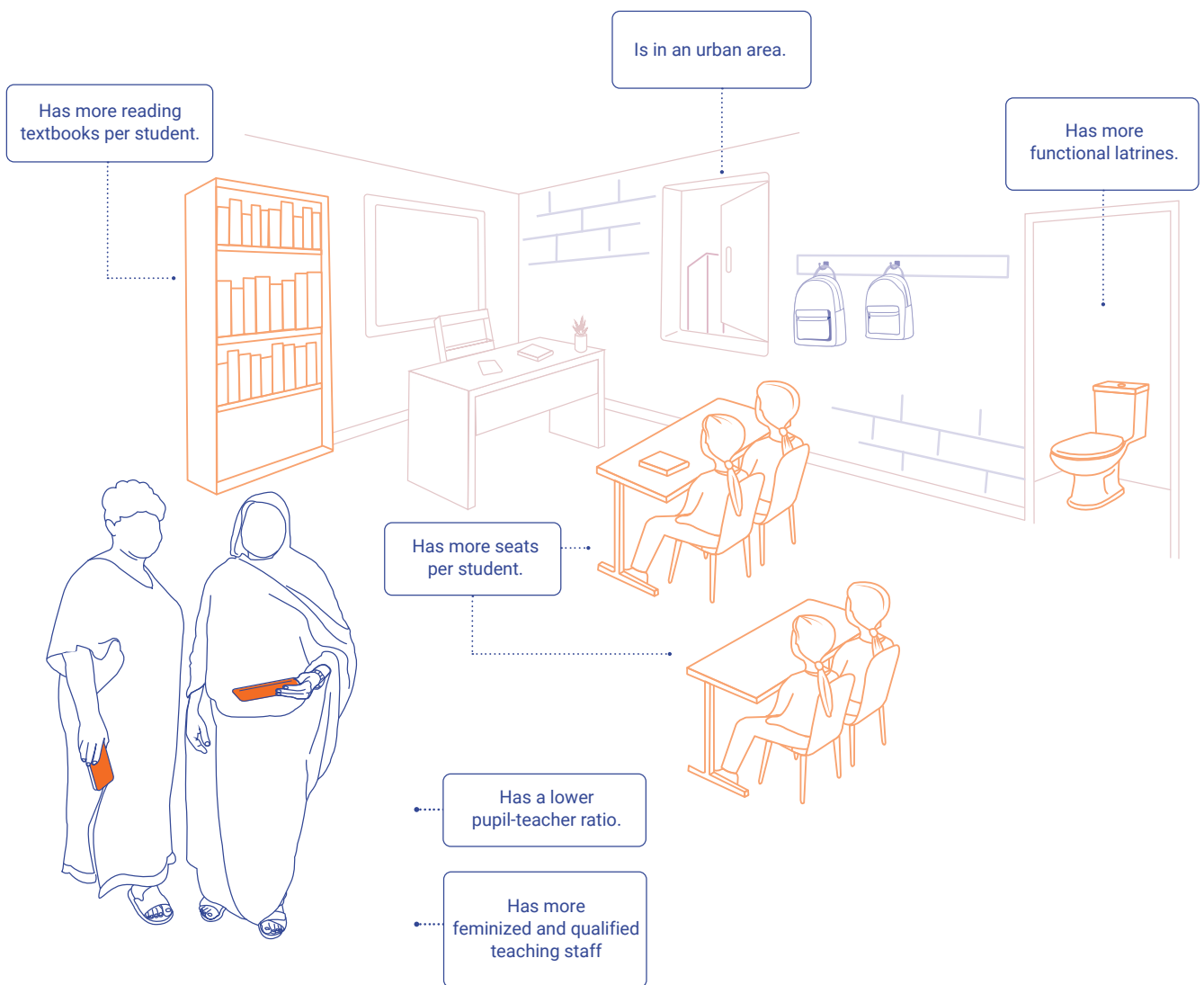
In line with international literature, WiLL's findings confirm the significant underrepresentation of women in the education sector in Chad. Indeed, only one out of five teachers (20 per cent) and 1 out of 20 school leaders – a mere 5 per cent – are women. Women are more likely to be based in urban areas, where one in nine school leaders are women, compared with rural areas where only 1 in 33 school leaders is a woman. Female representation is notably scarce in public and community schools, which comprise 90 per cent of all schools, in contrast to secular and denominational private schools.

Only one
out of five teachers and

1 out of 20 school leaders are women

Figure 1: A typical female-led school in Chad

Is in an urban area.

Has more reading textbooks per student.

Has more functional latrines.

Has more seats per student.

Has a lower pupil-teacher ratio.

Has more feminized and qualified teaching staff

In Chad, women leaders are present in different types of schools compared with their male counterparts. An average female-led school is in an urban area and accommodates 139 more students than a male-led school. Despite larger enrolments, female-led schools have seven fewer students per teacher (i.e., a lower pupil-teacher ratio), a higher proportion of female teachers and more highly qualified teachers overall. Additionally, women leaders are found in schools with better infrastructure and resources on average. For instance, over half of schools led by women possess functioning latrines compared with just over a quarter of schools led by men. Moreover, female-led schools have one additional reading textbook for every 32 students and an extra seat for every 20 students. Various intersecting reasons may drive these differences between female- and male-led schools, including geographical location, types of schools where women are concentrated (e.g., private) or other unobservable factors.

Despite Government efforts, Chad remains a profoundly unequal society, and the causes of gender inequality in the education sector are multifaceted and complex. Through interviews with key informants within the education system, the WiLL team has identified several barriers to achieving equitable representation of women in education. These are categorized according to a three-tier analytical framework – composed of micro, meso and macro levels – as depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Obstacles to gender equality in school leadership in Chad
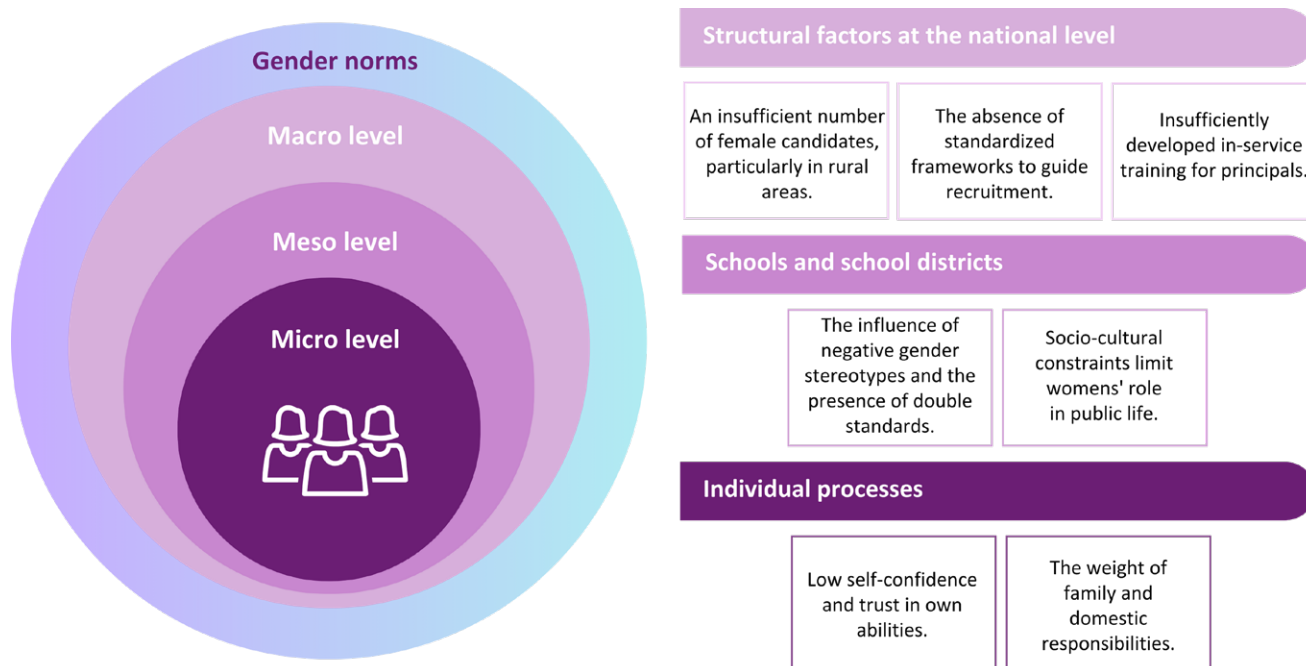
At the micro level, women's aspirations are constrained by factors such as low self-esteem or confidence in their own abilities. Internalizing widespread gendered expectations about women's role in society, they may feel unable to take up professional challenges traditionally associated with men, thus further reinforcing these stereotypes. This phenomenon – the Pygmalion effect – explains how external expectations influence individual behaviour and performance and is common among women educators in Africa (Bush et al., 2022; Ndebele, 2018). Additionally, women often face time and energy constraints linked to the burden of domestic responsibilities and motherhood, especially given the extremely high birth rate in Chad. Traditional gender roles assign women the responsibility of household management and childcare, which may push them to opt for part-time positions or withdraw from the labour market.

At the meso level, deep-rooted harmful gender stereotypes and traditional norms in Chadian society continue limiting women's opportunities (GCI, 2021). The prevailing belief is that men should occupy managerial positions, and women often face double standards and gender biases, which may result in harsher work assessments compared with men despite comparable work quality. Girls and boys are socialized into distinct roles from an

early age, significantly hampering women's chances of success, even if they possess excellent abilities. Without adequate community and family support, particularly from male family and community members, Chadian women often find it challenging to break free from the traditional roles of motherhood and homemaking.

At the macro level, several structural factors contribute to the low numbers of women in leadership positions. Like in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, women are underrepresented as teachers in rural areas (see work by UNICEF Innocenti's Teachers for All Initiative). In Chad, there are six provinces where the number of female teachers is lower than 12 per cent, translating into a very small pool of potential candidates for school leadership roles. The causes for low numbers of women are diverse and range from the lack of adequate infrastructure to security risks, and the fact that once they are married, female teachers are encouraged to reside with their husbands, likely in urban locations.

Further, the absence of a standardized framework with a clear set of well-defined criteria for selecting and evaluating school leaders may affect women disproportionately. The selection relies on the discretion of a primarily male pedagogical inspectorate who bases decisions on seniority and a subjective assessment of "competencies" that are not clearly defined. Influenced by the deep-rooted Chadian gender norms where women are not seen as leaders, male inspectors might favour nominating men as school leaders. In this context, specific training for the school leader role could serve as a levelling force to ensure men and women objectively have the same formal qualifications. The absence of such training is disproportionately detrimental to women, and reduces opportunities for them to find mentors and networks of female professionals.

When women overcome these obstacles and access school leadership positions, statistical analysis of administrative data reveal that they obtain better results than their male counterparts in community and private schools. In community schools, female-led schools have a 5.3 percentage points lower student dropout rate than male-led schools. On average, private schools led by women achieve a promotion rate of 3.3 percentage points higher. Additionally, in these community and private schools, the dropout rate for girls decreases as the proportion of female teachers increases. This finding is particularly significant as, in Chad, the average girl is worse off than the average boy when it comes to schooling access. For instance, girls' promotion rate is 4.1 percentage points lower and their dropout rate is 3.6 percentage points higher than boys.

Differences in student performance based on the school leader and teacher gender are more nuanced in public schools. Male-led public schools have a 2.9 percentage points lower dropout rate in urban areas and 4.2 percentage points lower dropout rate in rural areas. However, girls demonstrate improved academic achievement in urban schools with a higher proportion of female teachers, irrespective of the school leader gender. In rural areas, more male teachers are associated with higher school performance, but the effect on girls' performance is less pronounced.

The differences in school performance based on the school leader's gender may be influenced by the selection process for leaders and teachers as well as the social

status attributed to specific school types. In public schools, where inspectors and their teams are responsible for appointing school leaders, the selection process includes a limited number of female stakeholders. In such a setting, it might be challenging for female school leaders to carry out their duties effectively. Conversely, in community and private schools, school leaders are chosen by the community or the school owner. Selected female leaders in this environment may experience higher levels of trust and respect, possibly influencing their effectiveness. Private schools may also offer better-maintained facilities and a higher percentage of female teaching staff compared to public schools.

Different leadership practices may also contribute to differences in student performance. According to key informant interviews, female school leaders display a stronger commitment to improving student learning and well-being, as demonstrated by their active engagement with students and prioritization of addressing girls' dropouts. Having a female school leader may also raise the aspirations of girls and their families. Female school leaders serve as rare role models for girls, encouraging them to pursue their education (Sperling et al., 2015). At the same time, parents may feel reassured about their daughters' safety in a female-led school, as they perceive women to be more attentive to the unique challenges faced by girls. This may make parents more supportive of their daughters' education.

This report presents results from the first two phases of the WiLL research initiative in Chad. The first phase involved a comprehensive policy and institutional framework analysis of school leader recruitment in Chad, including key informant interviews that shed light on the challenges women encounter in accessing school leadership positions. The second phase analysed existing school administrative data to quantify the underrepresentation of women (school leaders and teachers) in the Chadian education system. To address these challenges and enhance women's representation in school leadership positions in Chad, the report offers several recommendations for consideration by the Ministry of National Education and Civic Promotion:

◎ **Establish a standardized recruitment framework for school leaders**
Develop a framework that clearly outlines the eligibility and selection criteria aligned with desired competencies for school leaders, such as technical leadership, pedagogical expertise, socio-emotional intelligence and soft skills. In Niger, for example, Article 7 of Order No. 0283 (Játiva, forthcoming) on primary school leader appointments enumerates the eligibility criteria for the school leader position and preserves it within the country's regulatory framework. Such a framework can enhance transparency in recruitment, clarify the expectations of the role and encourage potential candidates to pursue leadership positions.

◎ **Professionalize the school leadership workforce**
Countries that have invested in creating the right institutional frameworks, defining the school leaders' roles and responsibilities and ensuring the necessary training have benefited from strengthened school leadership (UNESCO, 2018). Drafting a clear set of guidelines for the school leader role, including a competency framework to underpin the recruitment process and define key expectations from school leaders (e.g., human resources management, school self-evaluation and development plans, etc.) can enable similar benefits in Chad.

◎ **Structure teachers' career paths towards school management roles**
Such structuring of career paths could take many forms, including requiring teachers to work in remote areas at the start of their careers in exchange for easier future mobility, accelerated salary progression or encouraging teachers to take on school management tasks to build their capacity and improve school operations. Setting up clear career progression pathways can help motivate teachers and improve their effectiveness. It may also simultaneously support the retention of teachers in remote areas and encourage them towards leadership positions.

◎ **Develop in-service training programmes for school leaders**
Well-designed in-service programmes can refresh and reinforce the management skills of school leaders. Such training credentials are particularly beneficial for female school leaders, who are more isolated than their male colleagues and face greater challenges due to gender stereotypes and perceptions about their professionalism undermining their authority.

◎ **Implement mentoring programmes for female teachers**
Organize workshops or meetings facilitated by women mentors to reinforce teachers' leadership skills and career aspirations. A mentoring network may foster mutual support among female teachers in a predominantly male environment and contribute to their well-being.

◎ **Consider quotas for women's representation in school management roles**
Gender quotas have been used as a policy tool to address gender inequality across sectors, particularly in politics and the corporate sector (Revillard and Tuffy, 2022). Evidence shows that quotas not only improve representation but also increase the visibility of women's priorities and issues (Pande and Ford, 2012). Chad already has legislation establishing a 30 per cent quota for women's representation in decision-making bodies. In line with this existing legislation, setting quotas for women in inspection and school leadership positions (while considering regional variations) can help stem the current cycle of inequitable selection.

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◎ **Organize gender bias awareness campaigns targeted at inspectors**
The inspection body responsible for appointing school leaders is predominantly male and influenced by prevailing gender biases in Chadian society. Awareness campaigns can help offset the weight of these widespread and harmful gender norms. For instance, through its social and behaviour change unit, UNICEF Chad regularly organizes campaigns to empower individuals and communities, and encourage adopting practices that foster a more equitable society. Similar campaigns, designed and contextualized for school inspectors, could support desirable behaviour change and outlook towards women and girls.

◎ **Continue prioritizing academic success for girls to set in motion long-term progress**
Mitigating the factors contributing to girls' school dropout (such as early marriages, school-related gender-based violence, inadequate sanitary infrastructure, etc.) and investing in mechanisms that promote girls' educational success (free education for girls, school programmes that target reproductive health, improvement of water and sanitation facilities, etc.) can positively influence the future participation of women in the labour market, and by extension, the proportion of female teachers in the education system. Increasing the presence of female role models and expanding the pool of female candidates for school leadership positions can furthermore initiate a positive cycle towards greater gender equality in education.

The WiLL research continues in Chad, with the next phase focusing on collecting primary data to further understand the school environment in Chad. Exploring different leadership styles in schools through a gender lens will help identify good management practices and propose concrete measures to strengthen women's representation in education further and improve student learning outcomes.
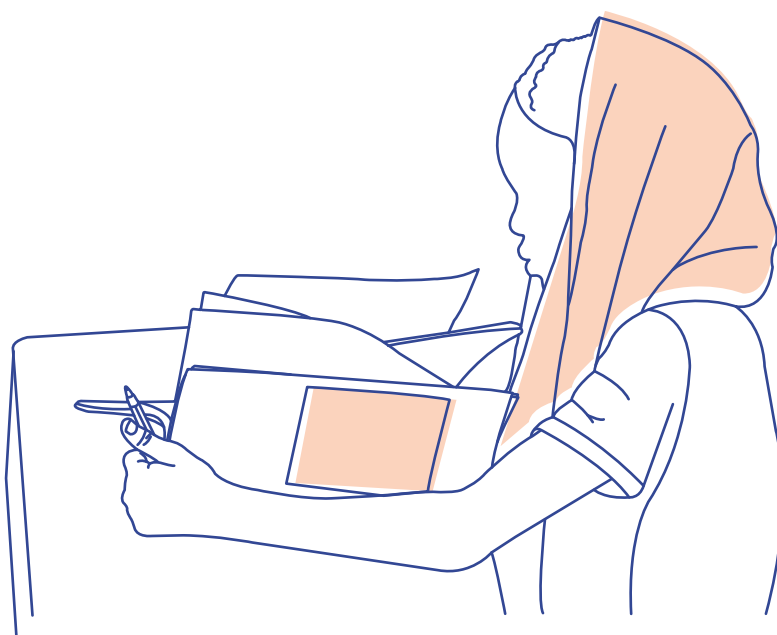
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