Leader identity development of African school leaders: is there a gender difference?

Pontso Moorosi

Women Leading Education Conference, Nottingham 2019

EUROPE

Black Sea

Caspian Sea

Mediterranean Sea

The Gulf

Red Sea

ASIA

ATLANTIC OCEAN

INDIAN OCEAN

www.mapsofworld.com

NAMIBIA

BOTSWANA

SOUTH AFRICA

SWAZILAND

LESOTHO

0	1000	2000 Km
0	500	1000 Miles

Introduction

▶ In line with the conference theme, the paper looks at ways in which women develop a leader identity over time.

▶ Values are instilled at home from childhood (punctuality, equal treatment, respect, spirituality, etc.) shape their approach to leadership.

▶ Self-development (e.g leadership development programs) sought through self-awareness.

▶ Strong social justice agenda (alert to issues of oppression & exclusion)

Interview participants

Country	MP	Female Principals	MDP	Female DP/HoD	Total
Botswana	5	5	2	6	18
Lesotho	5	11	5	8	29*
Namibia	6	4	2	1	13
S Africa	9	4	6	10	29
Total	**25**	**24**	**15**	**25**	**89**

Research Questions

▶ When/how do school leaders identify as leaders?

▶ How does leader identity change overtime? What critical incidents or trigger points affect this change?

▶ What are the implications for leadership development programmes?

Leader identity development theory

- Leaders cannot really understand who they are until they see what they do
- Leader identity is the extent to what one thinks of oneself as a leader;

- Early recognition/self-definition motivates individuals to seek out developmental experiences and opportunities to practice relevant leadership behaviors;

- Leader identity is subject to change in a dynamic manner because of different experiences and nature of interventions / development programmes
- Leader identity development is necessarily longitudinal

Three "extraordinary" women leaders

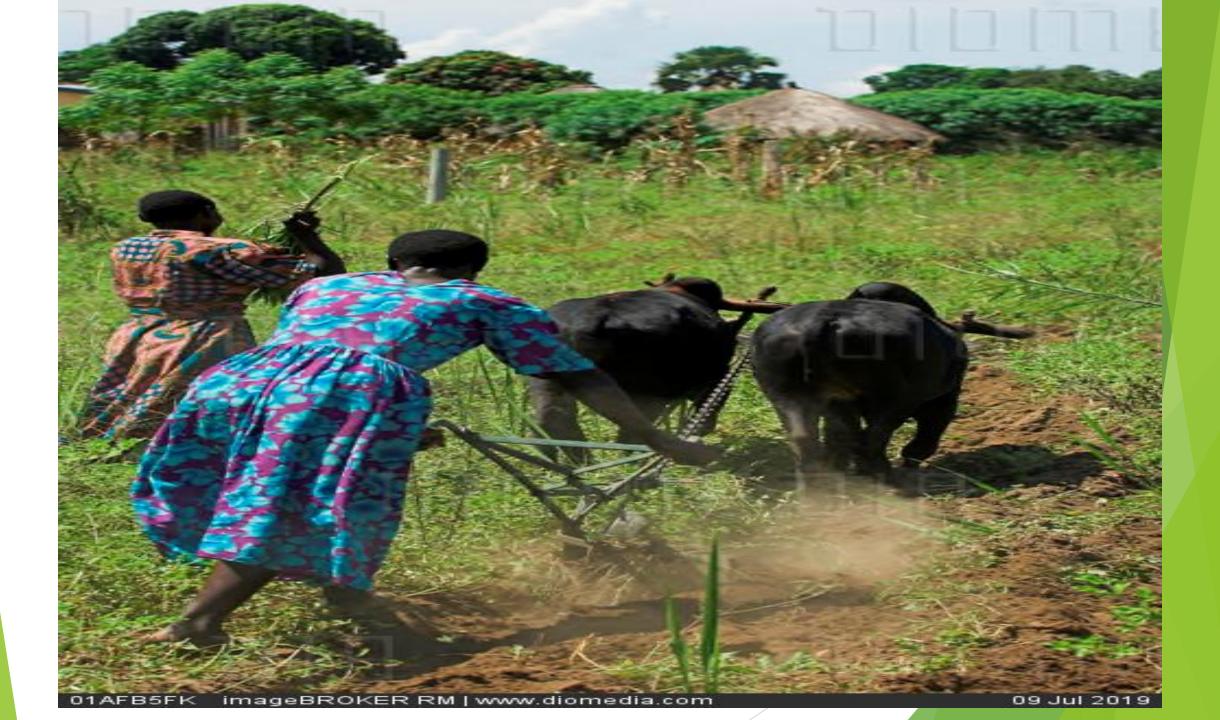| Mmara (Botswana)	Thami (Lesotho)	Thobeka (South Africa)
started school at 10, "my leadership started right there … "	Reserved but "… wherever I am people always say I am going to take the lead".	"Coming from rural areas, I was nothing, but I had ideas"
pregnant at 19, dropped out of school, ostracised by family; endured hardship, ploughed fields	Hated school, wanted to get married after Std 7; animal herder skipping school days, strict discipline	Grew up in extreme poverty and knew education was the only way out; Herded cattle, went animal dipping & missed school days 2/3 times a week
through community service decided to be a teacher, parent to learners & teachers; persuaded Chief Ed Officer to organise training as DH;	expected community presence that; networking in clusters, empowering coordinating roles	Community leadership; working HIV/AIDS orgs, orphanages, etc.
Aware of big voice, "don't want young teachers to fear me"; aware of	Aware that leadership needs to be spread - HT not enough;	" … you need to always think of other people … But not too flexible

Thami, Lesotho

"...remember I grew up as a shepherd along the boys and fighting goes with the territory and that is still there".

"I was exposed to working with males very early, so that developed my confidence"

Thobeka, South Africa

- "Then we were five in the family and most of the time we used to go and look after cattle before we go to school. I used to go to a dipping tank before I go to school, ... maybe twice or thrice in a week, I would miss school because why? I have to go to herd cattle and sheep". Thobeka, SA

Concluding remarks

- Strong self-definition leads to stronger leader identity which in turn leads to higher leader effectiveness.

- Higher leader effectiveness leads to leader identity change (re-invention) – on-going process

- More leader activity more awareness of needs for development, strengthens leader identity

- Leadership preparation programs should be linked to practice.