



## **WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE.**

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## **Abstract**

*Following the promulgation of international, regional, and national legislations on closing the gender disparities in all sectors, the role of women in top leadership ought to significantly change. Universities have played a role in changing the nature and status of society by training women and young girls to avail equal opportunities with men. Yet the participation of women in leadership positions in higher and tertiary institutions of learning has been poorly documented. As such the objectives of this study are to: to assess the levels of women's participation in leadership at the University of Zimbabwe, to assess the legislative and institutional mechanisms for the participation of women in top leadership at the University of Zimbabwe, and to assess the pitfalls that are stalling the effective participation of women in leadership at the University of Zimbabwe. The study made a revelation that the current proportion of women in university leadership at the University of Zimbabwe is quite commendable. Currently, 38% of the general staff are women, with out of eleven deanship positions (45%) being occupied by women. In 2022, 32.7% of the promotions were of women. The current legislative framework provides spaces for equal participation in leadership between men and women. These include the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment 20 Act 2013, the National Gender Policy of 2013, the University of Zimbabwe Act (25:16), and Ordinance 58. The University has various structures like the university executive, the university council, the senate, and other talent development programs where women are given a chance to participate in positions of power. Affirmative action policy in student enrolment has enabled more female students to enrol in various degrees placing them at par with male students. During the period 2020-2022, the enrolment of both postgraduate and undergraduate students was skewed towards women averaging 52%. Challenges that continuously stall the effective participation of women in top university leadership include inter alia: the traditional cultural and gender roles, the persistence of the patriarchal culture in Zimbabwe, gender discrimination, and parenthood responsibilities. The paper recommends the need for strengthening existing frameworks and efforts to empower women to attain top leadership positions in various areas. Education and training programs for young girls and women should be in place to support women occupying top university leadership positions.*

**Keywords: Gender, Women, Leadership, Participation, Culture, University**

## Introduction

Mainstreaming gender in social systems has gained renewed attention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has been viewed as a building block for sustainable social change and a pillar for economic development (Chandah 2013; Zvobgo 2014; Mendum 2018). The transition from the 2002 Millennium Development Goals to the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals has set a new tone for the recognition of women in the development of communities and the nations at large. From time immemorial, relentless efforts have been made to develop mainstream interventions in achieving gender parity in all sectors. The introduction of the legislative quotas has been a landmark development towards the improvement of women in political participation, power structures, political representation, and decision-making across the globe. Nevertheless, gender disparities continued to manifest across all sectors. In developing countries, the gap has largely remained wide, given the adverse effects of economic and socio-cultural factors. Institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe have not been spared either, and the sprouting of several universities, both state and private, at the turn of the twenty-first century, has met the same disparities in terms of gender. There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the role of women in leadership systems. Zimbabwe has made significant strides through the introduction of legislative quotas, among other various frameworks and systems to promote gender parity in political participation. To date, an interrogation of the participation of women in top university leadership has received scant attention in the available literature. Consistently, there is little published research on the levels of women's participation in leadership positions at the University of Zimbabwe. Shava and Chasokela (2020), observed that though women have made substantial gains in higher education learning institutions, they have not achieved parity with men. There is still uncertainty, however, whether the University of Zimbabwe is reflective of such observations. Thus, this paper gives an account of the current levels of women's participation in leadership at the University of Zimbabwe, the legislative and institutional mechanisms for the participation of women in top leadership at the University of Zimbabwe, and the pitfalls that are stalling the effective participation of women in leadership at the University of Zimbabwe.

## History of the Zimbabwean Context on Women's Leadership

Women's leadership roles have passed through different phases: the pre-colonial Zimbabwe era, the colonial era, and the post-colonial Zimbabwe. These phases have significantly shaped the levels of women's participation in various positions of power. Firstly, the pre-colonial era was predominantly associated with the patriarchal state. In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, gender roles were primarily distinguished through the socio-economic responsibilities that men were naturally born as '*masters of the clan*,' and women were relegated to domestic and childbearing duties (Bhatasara and Chiweshe, 2021). The traditional Zimbabwean culture ought to have primarily shaped the dominance of the patriarchal system where men were seen as the head of the family and women as followers (Dodo 2013; Tshuma 2020).

Men were primarily expected to take more responsibility for roles regarded as risky and labor-intensive, like hunting, going to war, and looking after the family, while women had to focus on gathering fruits and other domestic duties (Tshuma 2020; Zililo, 2023). Culturally, men were only qualified to assume a social status to lead a community, especially in traditional leadership of someone becoming a King or a traditional leader. Women, therefore, were given secondary duties or responsibilities as men were perceived to be culturally superior to women regarding positions of power.

Women's roles in pre-colonial Zimbabwe also included those of religious and political authority; however, they were generally excluded from secular decision-making spaces (Angela, 1986; Hallinger & Bryant, 2013; Hallinger, 2016). Women usually gained authority after reaching the menopausal age nonetheless, their influence remained curtailed, and they were more of private players. This is primarily because they could not frequent the decision-making spaces like the '*dare*.' This implies that cultural and gender roles dictated the role and position of women in leadership and decision-making processes.

It should be noted that the colonial period significantly started to promote a radical shift against female acquisition of skills and rights as adults. For instance, the hut tax of 1894 forced men to get into urban areas for work in the modern labour market (Api.parliament.uk.1909). As such, men had to get educated in order to be marketable in the modern labor market, while women remained in rural homes—that was the birth of the expanded educational gap between men and women (Mhloyi, 1995). During the colonial rule, unlike their male counterparts, women were not accorded the right to vote or equal access to employment opportunities and equal pay (Mudege and Kwangwari, 2013; Gudhlanga, 2013). During the colonial era, women were further suppressed as they were still considered inferior. Under the colonial rule, only men were given the passes to freely walk in towns and get employed while women always stayed at the reserves where the blacks were allocated (Mapuranga 2013; Muzenda 2019).

Despite a radical approach suppressing the rights and freedoms of women towards accessing leadership opportunities, some women were actively seen participating in the liberation struggle to the same level as men, a situation which counterbalanced the colonial oppression of women. One infamous woman, '*Nehanda Nyakasikana*,' customarily called Mbuya Nehanda, was one of the spirit mediums well-known for her active involvement in the liberation struggle and is celebrated today for her contribution to the battle. *Nehanda Nyakasikana* served as the spirit of Nehanda's medium, making prophecies and engaging in rituals to bring rain and abundant harvests. Mbuya Nehanda had a crucial role in setting up the First Chimurenga in 1896-7, which attracted participants from all over the country (Mapuranga 2013; Tshuma 2020; Zililo 2023).

Three significant roles were pronounced of women during the second liberation war from 1900-1980. Some women joined the freedom fighters at the battlefield. Notable examples are Joice Mujuru, Oppah Muchinguri, Margret Dongo, and Monica Mutsvangwa just to mention but a few women. More so, some were war collaborators (Chimbwidios), and some cooked for the liberation war fighters (Muchemwa 2020; Bataumocho, 2022). A considerable number

of women took part during the 1960s and the 1970s as liberation war fighters and some as wives of the nationalist leaders who actively participated in arranging meetings, supporting and organizing the war (Tarinda, 2019). Young girls were recruited to act as messengers of war strategies and information from the liberation fighters to other community members. This was a pivotal role played by Zimbabwean women during the pre-independence era. Today, women have also been actively involved in religious, political, and academic leadership systems, which envisages the increasing relevancy of women in top leadership systems.

### **Building on the post-independence era,**

The post-independence era saw a seismic shift in the position of women through a raft of measures adopted to address the colonial imperfections. The government of Zimbabwe has legislated numerous provisions and ratified international conventions to position and preserve women's role in leadership systems. The country became a signatory to various international conventions on protecting and eliminating discrimination against women. These include the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the 1995 Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, and the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa. Further, the 1984 Prime minister's directive gave women the right to vote and participate in political processes for the first time.

At a national level, the 2013 Zimbabwe Constitution, among other legal provisions, saw the establishment of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission and other rights of women codified in the constitution (Mutangirwa, 2016). The Constitution has provided several economic, political, cultural, and social changes, including women's rights, empowerment in economic activities, and the inclusion of women in decision-making processes. Chapter 4 Section (80) of the Constitution states that women have equal opportunities just like men and are free to participate in political, social, and economic activities. This is also supported by Section (67) (7), which guarantees that female workers have the right to maternity leave and full payment of at least 90 days. The following clauses in the Constitution demonstrate the values and guiding principles that guarantee women the same rights and opportunities as men: "*The State must promote full gender balance in Zimbabwean society and in particular, the State must promote the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society based on equality with men.*" Section 17: 19 "*Every woman has full and equal dignity of the person with men, including equal opportunities.*" "Section 80:30 states that "... *an additional sixty women shall be elected under a party-list system of proportional representation based on votes cast for political party candidates for the next two terms of the National Assembly*" This is supported by Section (17) (b), which states that women are to be represented in all government institutions equally, just like men at every level. Section (104) (4) requires that the President follows the stipulations in the Constitution and ensure gender balance in selecting Ministers and Deputy Ministers. Taken together, it can be noted that the Zimbabwean government adopted a Constitution that advocates for gender balance and emphasizes the need by the state to ensure equality between men and women in all positions

in government. This implies that University leadership is not exempt from the Constitution's requirements for promoting gender equality in all areas of governance.

Zimbabwe also introduced a National Gender Policy launched in 2004 (Shava and Ndebele 2014) to help increase the number of women in leadership. It provides guidelines and parameters for gender equity in all sectors of the economy. Since its launch, the Gender Policy has had a profound and positive economic, political, and social impact. These include the creation of the Ministry of Women Affairs Gender and Community Development in 2005, which championed gender equity in development. The Policy also saw the creation of a Women's Parliamentary Caucus, Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Gender, Inter-ministerial Committee on Gender, and Financial Institutions to support women. This policy also increased women's representation in decision-making in most sectors substantiated by statistics. It was also amended in 2013-2017 for thematic areas, namely women in politics and decision-making, women and the economy, education and training of women, and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women (National Gender Policy 2013). More so, the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, established in 2005, was also put forward to support equality in Zimbabwe and primarily to elevate the status of women in society. Its mandate was to ensure gender mainstreaming in all sector ministries (UNFPA 2011). It supported the creation of Gender Focal persons in all line ministries, departments, and agencies, which were implemented to foresee and mainstream gender in all government policies through capacity-building programs (Tarinda 2019; Vinga 2023; Mutingwende 2023). The aforementioned evidence shows that the government has made tremendous efforts to support women's participation in leadership positions.

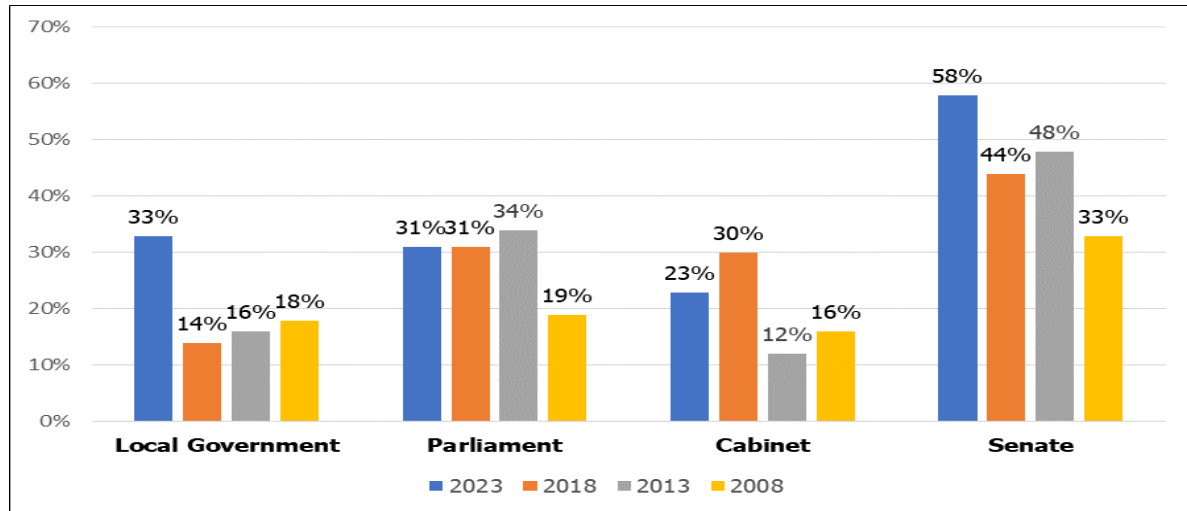
## **Participation of Women in Leadership**

### ***i. The participation of women in various higher positions of leadership***

The participation of women in various higher positions of leadership has significantly changed over the years. The status of women in Zimbabwe shows a great improvement owing to several legislative and institutional mechanisms that have been implemented at national and sub-national levels. Figure 1.1 presents statistics on the improvement of women in political participation since 2008. In 2005, there were only 24 (16%) women out of 150 members of Parliament, and the number marginally increased to 32 (21.3%) out of 150 seats in 2012 (Parliamentary Debates, House of Assembly report, 2012). In 2013, women made up more than one-third of Zimbabwe's Parliament. Women's representation in Parliament increased from 19% following the 2008 general elections to 34% in 2013. As a result, there were 124 out of 350 members of parliament, which was a significant achievement for the amended National Gender Policy 2013-2017 (UN Women 2013; All Africa 2017). In 2018, the number of females dropped to 31% in the national assembly (UN Women 2018). Women comprised 31% of the Parliament and 44% of the Senate (Gender Links, 2018). In 2023, 31% of the parliamentarians are women, 58% of the senators are women, 23% of cabinet members are women, and 33% of local government elected councilors are women as shown in Figure 1.1. It can be gleaned that in local government, women participation in leadership positions increased from 14% in 2018 to 33% in 2023. In the Senate, women increased their

representation from 44% in 2018 to 58% in 2023. This data suggests that the proportion of women occupying positions of power in Zimbabwe’s political space is significantly increasing.

**Figure 1.1 Women’s Political Representation in Zimbabwe since 2008**



*Source: Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and Local Authority Election Data (2023)*

**Women participation in Higher Education Leadership**

The leadership status of women in the higher education and science systems of Zimbabwe still presents a wider gap since there is still male dominance in leadership positions in many institutions (Shava and Chasokela, 2021; Zvobgo 2014; Shava and Ndebele 2014; Hlatywayo, Hlatywayo, and Muranda 2014; Zvobgo 2015). A study by Zvobgo (2014) reveals an increase in women's representation in the university senate, councils, and various committees in Zimbabwe from 16.7% in 2000 to 25.3% in 2014 in senate positions and 15.6% in 2000 to 21.9% in 2014 in university councils. This agrees with Hlatywayo et al. (2014), who allude that after the Gender Policy in 2004, there was a slight increase in the percentage of women participating in crucial leadership positions in higher institutions. In 2023, there are no female Vice-Chancellors in all 11 state Universities in Zimbabwe, 8 out of 14 (57%) Principals of State-owned Teachers Colleges, 2 out of 8 (25%) Principals of State Owned Agricultural colleges, 2 out of 8 (25%) Principals of State Owned Poly-Technical colleges, 776 out of 2168 (26.4%) Heads of Government Primary Schools, and 416 (17.6%) out of 1940 Heads of Government Secondary Schools (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2023). Data presented shows that women are still underrepresented in leadership structures, and higher and tertiary education leadership still suffers a wide gap as there is unequal representation in leadership positions between men and women (Shava and Chasokela 2021, Chigudu 2021, Hlatshwayo, Hlatshwayo and Muranda 2014).

According to Chauraya (2023), at Great Zimbabwe University, the number of Ph.D. holders among women has increased from zero in 2000 to eight (8) women in 2010, 33 women in 2015, and 61 women in 2021. At the National University of Science and Technology

(NUST), the number of women with Ph.D. qualifications rose from three (3) in 2010 to 12 in 2015 and 22 in 2021. Bindura University's number rose from one in 2010 to 16 in 2021 (Chauraya 2023). While there is an increase of women attaining PhD qualifications, it can be noted that the leadership status of women in higher and tertiary institutions still needs to be improved, as there is unequal representation in leadership positions between males and females. It is also important to note that the number of female leaders in Zimbabwe's institutions of higher learning does not tally with the proportion of females that enrol in these institutions of higher learning. A general assumption is that when more women enrol in higher and tertiary institutions, chances are increased that they can occupy top-level positions in various sectors.

### *ii. Legal and institutional Systems supporting the participation of women*

Following the promulgation of the National Gender Policy in 2004, Zimbabwean Universities implemented various affirmative action policies that primarily aimed at improving the access to education by female students by lowering the University entry points in favour of women. This was directed towards enhancing the enrolment of females in various University programmes. Student enrolment enhances the education, knowledge, and skills of women for effective participation in top University leadership.

Statistics at national level reveal that the share of student enrolment in higher and tertiary institutions is skewed towards female students. King (2022) notes that from 2018-2020, Zimbabwe had an enrolment of 50 699 (54%) female students against 43432 (46%) male students. Mashininga (2021) also note that female students constitute 54% of the total number of students at Universities, and 74% of Teacher's colleges in Zimbabwe. These statistics suggest that there is a significant increase in the enrolment of female students in institutions of higher learning which serves as a foundation for the participation of females in higher education leadership. Comparatively, in 1996, Universities enrolled 8223 (71.3%) males against 3302 (28.7%) females and 10875 (71.4%) males against 4394 (28.6%) females in Vocational and Technical colleges (Mareva, 2014). This shows that student enrolment in Zimbabwean Universities has significantly increased over time in favour of women. It can be noted that, the ability of women to access education is a prerequisite for occupying various positions of power due to the acquisition of the necessary skills and knowledge to lead Universities.

Nevertheless, the enrolment of female students in science subjects or programs seems to be less compared to men. Women seem to be enrolling more in arts and humanities than other science and technical fields. For instance, in 2020, females constituted 35% of the enrolment at the Manicaland State University of Applied Sciences; 39% at the Harare Institute of Technology; 44% at the Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology and 44% at the National University of Science and Technology (Mukeredzi 2022). It should also be noted that male students dominated the enrolment in technical and vocational colleges from 2019-2020. Consistently, more males (15,026) enrolled in 2018 when compared to females (9,337). In 2019, 19,499 males were recruited compared to 15,437 women. The same trend persisted in 2020 (18,647 men and 14,062 women) (Mukeredzi. 2022). However,



despite women having a 55% enrolment rate in Zimbabwean Universities, they have played a lesser role in policy and decision-making than men (Mashininga, 2023). For instance, the Women's University in Africa (WUA) enrolls 85% female students and 15% male students, yet the participation of women in leadership systems remains significantly low (Mashininga, 2023). A research gap exists in explaining the mismatch between women's education levels and their share in academic leadership in universities. Literature therefore suggests that women are dominating the current student enrolment in Zimbabwean higher institutions of learning in most non-science and technical fields. Be that as it may, it can be gleaned that the enrolment of more female students in higher institutions of learning is a positive development in nurturing necessary conditions for the full participation of women in positions of power.

### *i. Challenges Faced by Zimbabwean Women in Accessing leadership positions*

Women's participation in university leadership positions in Zimbabwe still needs to be improved due to parenthood responsibilities (Shava and Chasokela 2020). In Zimbabwe, the traditional cultural values and childbearing roles seem to remain one of the major forces dragging back women to participate in leadership (Chirara, 2023). They are supposed to look after the children and their husbands. This has affected women in leadership positions and aspiring to be in leadership positions because once a woman is married, she must perform her wifely duties. To this end, the levels of participation by women in leadership systems in Zimbabwe might be influenced by the traditional parenthood responsibilities that women had as a pre-conceived motherly figure, which seems equally burdening to pursue academic leadership. For example, she will have to bear children and nurture them and, at the same time, report to duty. Chabaya, Rembe, and Wadesango 2009; Morley 2010, Newman 1995 purport that women in management positions have problems dealing with home and work lives and matching them with their time demands. Because of failure to deal with the time demands, some women chose not to marry to avoid the difficulties of combining a demanding career and a family. Thus, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions; even though today, women earn the majority of college and university degrees, their chances of experiencing or enjoying benefits and promotions associated with leadership are slim (Shava and Chasokela, 2020).

The participation of women in leadership positions has also been mainly affected by the patriarchal culture in Zimbabwe. This is still common today, as evidenced in many churches with particular reference to African Independent Churches (AICs), which comprises a wide range of churches indigenous to the country commonly referred to as Masowe or Mapostori, where the article by Mapuranga referred to them as a gendered space' because they noticed that women in these churches have limited roles (Mapuranga, 2013). It can be noted that it is rare to find top leaders to be women in these churches, meaning the patriarchal state of the tradition also affects females in leadership, and it's one of the challenges women face in leadership. Moila (2002) argues that women are frail, delicate, and dependent on their men, and this view explains how women are supposed to be and act according to the Zimbabwean culture; as such, they must not try to lead men in any way rather man was meant to lead. Therefore, in this church (Johane Marange), women are not even allowed to preach, and they

are forbidden to come near the church after giving birth (Oduyoye 1995; Mapuranga, 2013). In the Zimbabwean context, patriarchal tendencies in the church tend to favour men, giving them more chances to access leadership (Oluwaniyi 2012). Patriarchy has shaped how leaders are seen and identified in the Zimbabwean community, which could have affected the participation of women in higher leadership at the University of Zimbabwe.

Gender stereotyping and discrimination are another challenge undermining the participation of women in top leadership. Mashininga (2021) and Mashininga (2023) posit that Zimbabwean Universities have recorded two cases where aspiring female leaders have been victims of gender stereotyping, affecting their ability to participate in leadership systems effectively. Abiona Mataranyika and Njenge, who was the first-ever female president and the first secretary general in the student representative council at the University of Zimbabwe and the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), respectively, have been called names and faced various character assassinations by just participating in student leadership system (Mashininga 2021; Mashininga 2023). This indicates that the nature of society in Zimbabwe is shaped to the extent that negatively affects the participation of Zimbabwe women in higher education leadership.

### **History of the University of Zimbabwe**

The University of Zimbabwe opened in 1952 as the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and was initially affiliated with the University of London. It was later renamed the University of Rhodesia and adopted its present name upon Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. By then it had ten (10) Faculties. In the 2019 programming, the faculties increased to eleven (11). These faculties are Agriculture Environment and Food Systems; Arts & Humanities; Business Management Sciences and Economics; Computer Engineering Informatics Communication; Medicine & Health Sciences; Education; Engineering and Built Environment; Law; Science, Social and Behavioural Sciences, And Veterinary Science. The university is accredited through the Zimbabwe National Council for Higher Education under the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development.

Given the promulgation of gender-inclusive national legislation, the university has developed systems and frameworks to enhance women's participation in university leadership. The university is governed by the University of Zimbabwe Act Chapter (25: 16), among other national legislations concerning leadership, promotion systems, decision systems, and other governance systems. The University of Zimbabwe Act Chapter (25: 16) provides the power to the Senate and the University Council to establish University Ordinances that are also used in the university's governance.

## Findings on the University of Zimbabwe

### *i. Participation of Women in University Leadership*

#### UZ General Staff Establishment

The study established that the University of Zimbabwe, by 31 December 2022, had a total staff establishment of 2 948 (Table 1.1). On this figure, the majority of the staff members (62% [1820]) are males, while females constitute 38% (1128).

**Table 1.1 UZ Staff Establishment in 2022**

Male	Male (%)	Female	Female (%)	Total
1820	62%	1128	38%	2948

*University of Zimbabwe Annual Report: (2022)*

While there are numerous explanations for the gender disparity between men and women at the University, the gender distribution between men and women is commendable despite not reaching the 50:50 mark as desired. More specifically, the distribution shows significant efforts to enhance gender parity in the staff composition and eliminate the gaps between men and women.

#### Gender Distribution on Academic Staff

Evidence from the study shows that the place and position of women in university leadership systems across various levels have significantly changed over the years. Available data suggests that there is an upward trend in the levels of participation of women in university academic leadership. Note that the statistics on my Table and interpret.

**Table 1.2: Summary of Women in Academic Leadership from 1995-2023**

	1995				1998				2020				2023				% Change of females (1995-2023)
	Males	Females	Total	Proportion Female (%)	Males	Females	Total	Proportion Female %	Males	Females	Total	Proportion Female	Males	Females	Total	Proportion Female	
Full Professor	18	0	18	0.0	24	0	24	0.0	43	3	46	6.5	30	9	39	23.1	900
Associate Professor	35	3	38	7.9	43	7	50	14.0	43	12	55	21.8	42	17	59	28.8	466.7
Senior Lecturer	90	32	122	26.2	78	22	100	22.0	179	88	267	33.0	121	51	172	29.7	59.4
Lecturer	338	129	467	28.2	361	129	490	26.5	381	194	575	33.7	430	214	644	32.2	65.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>645</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>664</b>	<b>23.9</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>943</b>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>914</b>	<b>31.2</b>	<b>77.4</b>

*Source: University of Zimbabwe Human Resources Records; University of Zimbabwe 2022 Annual Report*

Table 1.2 above shows the comparison of women in academic leadership between 1995 and 2023. It can be noted that there has been a 77% positive change in the proportion of women in academic positions from 1995 to 2023. For instance, 900% and 468% of the women are now Full and Associate Professors, respectively. Consistently, the percentage change of the proportion of females in the lectureship and senior lectureship positions have also increased to 66% and 99%, respectively, between 1995 and 2023. Remarkably, the ability of women to occupy academic positions of professorship is a positive win toward ensuring gender parity in all levels of academic leadership. It can be noted that the participation of women in academic positions has improved significantly to date.

### **Gender Distribution by Administrative Positions**

While the study has analysed the participation of women in academic positions, it is also prudent to consider the gender distribution in administrative or non-academic leadership positions. Available evidence shows that the university has successfully managed to have gender equality in the Executive posts from time of the new programming, 2020 to date. Evidence gathered for 2023 and 2020 shows that women are also occupying top administrative positions, which previously could have been occupied by men due to the entrenched patriarchal system in African society. In addition, there has been consistently an equal gender representation in the Executive posts from 2020 to 2023. In 202, three (3) females were appointed to the Executive posts, while in 2023, four (4) are in the Executive, Table 1.3 below presents the gender distribution by administrative positions at the University of Zimbabwe.

**Table 1.3: Gender Distribution by Administrative Positions**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Administrative Position</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
2023	Vice Chancellor	1	0	1
	Pro Vice-Chancellor	0	0	0
	Executive Directors	1	1	2
	Registrar	1	0	1
	Librarian	0	1	1
	Bursar	1	0	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>
2020	Vice Chancellor	1	0	1
	Pro Vice-Chancellor	1	1	2
	Executive Directors	0	2	2
	Registrar	1	0	1
	Librarian	0	1	1
	Bursar	1	0	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>

*Source: University of Zimbabwe Department of Human Resources (2023)*

Deputy Registrar of Human Resources, Deputy Registrar Academic, and Librarian,

## **Other Administrative Positions Occupied by Women at the University of Zimbabwe**

Women occupy numerous administrative positions at the University of Zimbabwe which reflects efforts by the University in mainstreaming gender across various leadership systems. Out of the eleven (11) Faculties at the University, women occupy five (5) deanship posts in five faculties. According to the University of Zimbabwe Act Chapter (25:16) section 15 (1) (a) indicates that deans are part of the Senate which is critical in making vital university decisions. To this end, having five (5) female deans out of eleven (11) implies that women are occupying key strategic positions in leading the university, which is significant in enhancing gender parity in university leadership. It should also be noted that posts such as Director Marketing and Communications, Legal Office, Deputy Registrar of Human Resources, Deputy Registrar Academic are also some of the posts being headed by females. In fact, according to the University of Zimbabwe (2022), women occupy 17 administrative positions within the University. It should be noted that these administrative positions are vital for the effective running or function of the University. The appointment of women in leadership positions at the University not only reflects the competence of women in taking up leadership positions previously dominated by males, but also the commitment of the Executive to appoint women based on qualifications, competence and positive attitude. This reflects that the University has made strides to ensure that gender has been mainstreamed in leadership systems.

### ***ii. Legislative and Institutional Systems Supporting Women in Leadership*** **The University of Zimbabwe Governance Structure**

In terms of the University of Zimbabwe Act Chapter (25: 16), the University of Zimbabwe is led by the Chancellor of all state universities in Zimbabwe, who is the President of the country. The Chief Executive is the Vice Chancellor appointed by the President in consultation with the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development. The Vice-Chancellor is assisted by one or more Pro-Vice-Chancellors, appointed by the University Council with the approval of the Minister of Higher Education Innovation Science and Technology Development (the University of Zimbabwe Act Chapter (25:16). These are the decision-makers at the university with the help of the University Council and the Senate. In terms of section 11 of the University of Zimbabwe Act Chapter (25: 16), the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, and Pro-voice chancellors are ex-officio members of the council. It should be noted that section 11 (1) (f) of the University of Zimbabwe Act sets aside the position of one woman to be appointed by the minister to represent women's interests in the university council. This is a demonstration of the commitment of the government to mainstream gender in the university leadership at the University of Zimbabwe. The council has powers to appoint and remove both administrative and academic staff at the university, among other critical decisions. In addition, the Senate is also comprised of the Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellors, all Deans, Chairpersons of departments, and student representatives.

The governance system at the University of Zimbabwe is also gender-sensitive, given the composition of the University's Executive members. According to the University of Zimbabwe Annual Report (2022), the University of Zimbabwe executive includes women. Currently, Three (3) out of six (6) executive positions in the University of Zimbabwe executive are occupied by women. Women in the University of Zimbabwe Executive Council occupy the following positions: Acting Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Executive Director for Research Innovation and Industrialisation, and Librarian (University of Zimbabwe Annual Report, 2022). Evidence provided shows that women are at the top of the decision-making systems in the governance matrix at the University of Zimbabwe.

### **Staff Career Progression and Promotion Systems**

Data available at the University of Zimbabwe shows significant dynamics and transitions that have taken place in women's participation in leadership positions. The study sought to understand the university policies and structures that facilitate the participation of women in university leadership. The University of Zimbabwe is a public university that is regulated by national legislation that governs public institutions in Zimbabwe. To this end, the university policy on academic staff grading, tenure, and promotion aligns well with national legislation on enhancing gender parity in leadership systems. In terms of section 27 (1)(f) of the University of Zimbabwe Act Chapter (25: 16), the University of Zimbabwe has Ordinance 58 of 2020 as a policy that guides academic staff grading, tenure, and promotion. Section 5.1 of the Ordinance provides that the initial appointment of any academic staff is based on qualifications, experience, research, and registered intellectual property. Section 5.2 of the same Ordinance provides that the basic qualification for academic staff appointment is a Master's or MPhil or an approved equivalent for appointment to a junior position. Section 6.8.1 of the Ordinance further provides guidelines on the promotion procedures where one has to apply for promotion among other issues. From a gender perspective, it is worth noting that, Ordinance 58 of the University of Zimbabwe is an inclusive and gender-sensitive policy that aims to provide both female and male academic staff opportunities for growth into various leadership positions. Central to the Ordinance is holding relevant qualifications, experience, research, and intellectual property as the prerequisite for promotion.

### **UZ Academic Staff Promotion in 2022**

Table 1.4 below shows data on the promotions that were done on academic staff in the year 2022. These promotions varied from junior lecturers to full professors, which happens to be the highest academic leadership level at the university.

**Table 1.4: UZ Academic Staff Promotion in 2022**

Category	Male	Female	Total
Full professors	22 (71%)	9 (29%)	31
Associate professors	32 (76%)	10 (24%)	42
Senior Lecturers	127 (67%)	62 (33%)	189
Lecturers	163 (68%)	75 (32%)	238
Junior Lecturers	59 (60%)	40 (40%)	99
<b>Total</b>	<b>403 (67.3%)</b>	<b>196 (32.7%)</b>	<b>599</b>

***University of Zimbabwe Annual Report: (2022)***

Table 1.3 above shows that in 2022, a total of 31 academic staff were promoted to the full professorship position. From the figures, 29% were female and 71% male. A total of 42 academic staff were promoted to associate professors, where 24% were female and 76 % male. A total of 189, 238, and 99 academic staff were promoted to the senior lecturer's position, lecturer's position, and junior lecturer's position respectively. Overall, 67.3% of the academic staff that was promoted in 2022 were male and 32.7 were female. Despite that women were not promoted equally to men, the systems and promotion processes appear to be gender-sensitive allowing the participation of both men and women in the university promotion processes.

**University of Zimbabwe Affirmative Action Initiatives**

The University of Zimbabwe has ensured the implementation of an affirmative action policy on student enrolment that lowers the entry points for female students. For instance, the minimum entry point for a male student who wishes to enrol degree in Biomedical Sciences is 15 Advanced-level points while for a female student is 14 points. This encourages more female students to enrol in the same fields as male students thereby improving the skills and educational requirements needed for women to ascend into positions of power.

***UZ Student Enrolment by Gender***

The study assessed the levels of female student enrolment from 2020-2022 to provide insight into the future trends of women with qualifications and ready to lead the institution. The enrolment systems are institutional systems that are designed to ensure that women are educated and equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to take up leadership positions. The study discovered that from 2020-2022, there has been an increase in the enrolment of female students compared to males for the same period.

**Table 1.4 University of Zimbabwe Undergraduate Student Enrolment Statistics from 2020-2022**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
2020	2815 (48.4%)	3005 (51.6%)	5820
2021	3525 (47.5%)	3894 (52.5%)	7419
2022	2848 (47.7%)	3167 (52.3%)	6015

*University of Zimbabwe Annual Report: (2022)*

Table 1.4 above shows that in 2020, female enrolment was 51.6% then increased to 52.5% in 2021 and maintained at 52% in 2022. This shows that the university is enrolling, more female undergraduates than male since 2020. The university is playing a critical role in preparing young women for future leadership in various science systems.

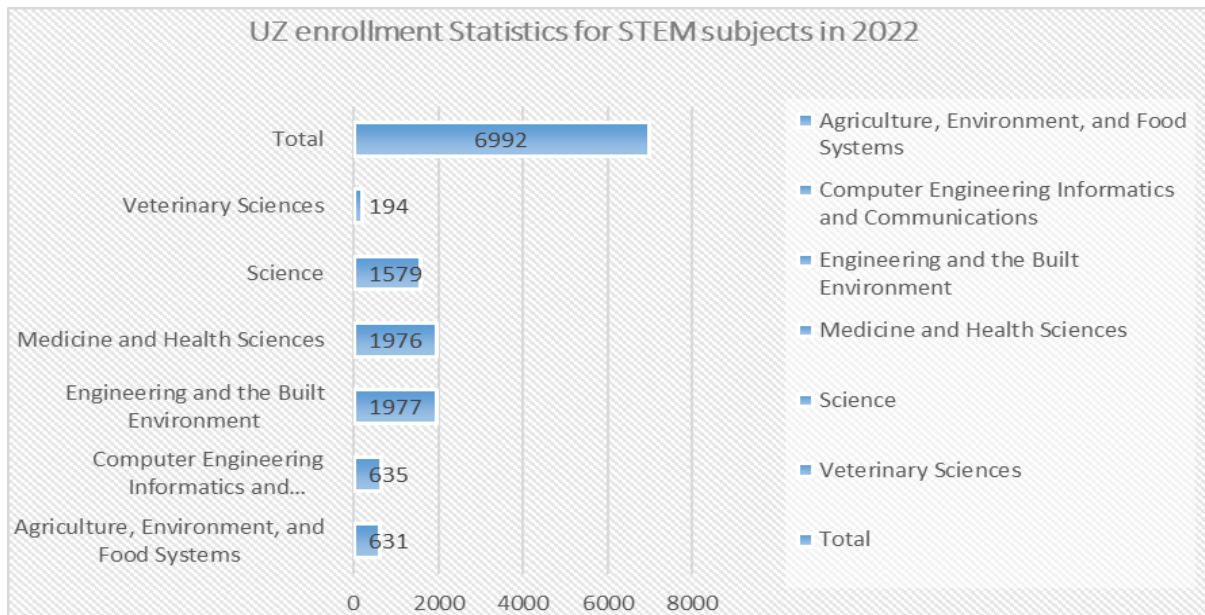
**Table 1.5 University of Zimbabwe Postgraduate Student Enrolment Statistics from 2020-2022**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
2020	10 013 (48.6%)	10 585 (51.4%)	20 595
2021	11 375 (48.5%)	12 060 (51.5%)	23 435
2022	12 634 (49.3%)	12 987 (50.7%)	25 621

*University of Zimbabwe Annual Report: (2022)*

Consistent with the undergraduate enrolment trends, Table 1.5 shows that the enrolment of females in postgraduate degrees from 2020-2022 was also high compared to male students. In 2020, female enrolment in postgraduate studies was at 51.4%, 51.5% in 2021, and 50.7% in 2022. This shows that the university is ensuring that there is a balance in women accessing education to the same level as men for them to be effective and competitive in future leadership systems. This is also a symbol that the University of Zimbabwe is positively acting as a breeding ground for future female academic leaders since relevant qualifications are a pre-requisite for both males and females to be accepted in university leadership. The study decided to take a snapshot of the enrolment statistics of female students in Science,





Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs at the University. Figure 1.3 below shows the distribution of student enrolment into STEM Programmes by gender.

**Figure 1.3 Female Student Enrolment in STEM Programmes**

*University of Zimbabwe Annual Report: (2022)*

Figure 1.3 above indicates that female students enrolled more than male students in STEM programs in the year 2022 at the University of Zimbabwe. It is interesting to show how women are now taking programs previously regarded as challenging and male-dominated fields. This is a positive reflection on how the university systems are moving towards gender parity in both leadership and enrolment systems for a sustained change in attaining gender balance.

**Leadership Development Programs/ Platforms**

**i. Talent identification, nurturing, and mentorship**

The University of Zimbabwe has numerous platforms that are used to empower and enhance the development of skills for women. Strategic objective number four (4) of the University of Zimbabwe focuses on *Talent identification, nurturing, and mentorship toward an industrialization and modernization agenda*. Through talent identification in various faculties, in 2022, the university managed to mentor 30 female mentees across all 11 faculties in various specialty areas (UZ Annual Report 2022). The university provides a platform for staff to develop through mentorship programs. For instance, junior female lecturers are mentored and supervised for Ph.D. studies and publishing. This is one platform that enables women to academically progress and ensures that they have the required skills to attain leadership positions in higher education.

## ii. Awards and Scholarships

The University of Zimbabwe has ensured that both male and female students are afforded an opportunity for awards and scholarships based on competence and need. The university provides that there is an award for the best male and best female student in each program during graduation. This implies that female students are accorded the same opportunity as men for talent recognition and awarding performance. The university also allows all staff members to further their education while they are at work. This gives women the required qualifications for the staff portion and career progression.

## Discussion

The first objective of the study was to assess the levels of participation of women in university leadership at the University of Zimbabwe. The paper found that women at the University of Zimbabwe have been able to penetrate the previously 'reserved' for men in the pre-independence era, where they ought to occupy senior positions and top leadership positions. Currently, women occupy 38% of the overall academic staff establishment which is quite commendable despite having reached the 50:50 gender parity mark. It should be noted that despite the National Gender Policy of 2013 and other international conventions speaking on the need to have 50:50 representation between men and women in all positions, 38% overall academic establishment at the University of Zimbabwe shows a positive trend which if maintained, the 50:50 gender parity mark can be achieved. More so, women occupy 45% of the deanship positions and 50% of the executive positions at the University of Zimbabwe which is a good reflection of the university strides in promoting gender equality in leadership.

The study established that the participation of women as Associate Professors and Full Professors increased by 88.4% from only three (3) in 1995 to 26 in 2023. Further, the position of lecturer and senior lecturer also increased by 42.9% from 161 in 1995 to 282 in 2023. This evidence suggests that there is a significant improvement in the levels of participation of women taking up top university leadership. Despite that the proportion of participation is still far below that of men, the trends in the participation of women suggests that there could be more women in various positions of power if the current gender mainstreaming efforts are intensified.

It should be noted that the current levels of women's participation at the University of Zimbabwe leadership matches the level of participation at the national level. In the 2023 national election, in local government, women increased from 14% in 2018 to 33% in 2023. In the Senate, women increased their representation from 44% in 2018 to 58% in 2023. These findings corroborate well with the observations by Zvobgo (2014) who indicated that there is an increased participation by women in top leadership systems in Zimbabwe. This is agreed by Kipruto (2022) and the University World News (2022) indicating that regardless of the considerable gains in promoting gender parity in higher and tertiary institutions in Africa, the number of female leaders in institutions of higher learning is considerably low as compared

to their male counterparts. This suggests that more efforts are still needed to intensify the levels of participation by women in top university leadership at the University of Zimbabwe.

The second objective of the study was to assess the legislative and institutional mechanisms that support the participation of women in leadership at the University of Zimbabwe. The study observed that the University of Zimbabwe Act Chapter (25: 16), the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment 20 Act 2013, the National Gender Policy of 2013, and the University of Zimbabwe Ordinance 58 among other provisions support the mainstreaming of gender in favor of women. Specifically, section 5.1 of the Ordinance provides that the initial appointment of any academic staff is based on qualifications, experience, research, and registered intellectual property. This implies that the promotion system is gender-blind meaning that it equally places women and men on an equal footing of having the necessary qualifications for promotion eligibility. This saw 32.7% of women being promoted in 2022 at the University of Zimbabwe. It should be noted that the staff grading and promotion system conforms to the national and international legislations that seek to enhance the mainstreaming of gender across all sectors. This generally implies that the legal frameworks are facilitating the participation of women in top university leadership at the University of Zimbabwe.

The study also made a revelation that the University of Zimbabwe has various systems where women are nurtured and supported towards various leadership systems. The university implemented an affirmative action policy on the enrolment of students by lowering the university entry points for female students. To this end, the study noted that more women had been noticed in enrolment in undergraduate and postgraduate programs, with an average of 52% from 2020-2022. In 2020, female enrolment in postgraduate studies was at 51.4%, 51.5% in 2021, and 50.7% in 2022. The trend sets the tone for preparing women for positions of power through education. In support of this, the University through its strategic objective number 4 on talent identification, nurturing, and mentorship managed to mentor 30 female mentees in 2022 (UZ Annual Report 2022). More so, the University of Zimbabwe has ensured that both male and female students are afforded an opportunity for awards and scholarships based on competence and need. This implies that the University has set up its institutional apparatus to intensify the mainstreaming of gender in various university leadership systems. This should be enhanced to ensure the prolonged benefits of gender-sensitive policies and structures.

The last objective of the study was to assess the challenges impeding the effective participation of women in leadership at the University of Zimbabwe. The study made a revelation that the traditional cultural and gender roles, the persistence of the patriarchal culture in Zimbabwe, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment are the main visible challenges affecting the participation of women in top leadership. Gender discrimination and sexual harassment were reported on one of the first-ever female SRC president Abiona Mataranyika who felt it so hard to exercise leadership among their male counterparts. This was a reflection that gender serotyping, discrimination, and harassment are still negatively impacting women to ascend to higher leadership posts. This agrees well with Mapuranga (2013) who indicates that most African systems discriminate against women from taking

leadership positions as they relegate women to domestic and childbearing responsibilities leaving leadership a preserve of men. This implies that a deep-entrenched patriarchal culture in Zimbabwe negatively affects women to freely and effectively participate in leadership.

### **Major Conclusions and Recommendations**

The following conclusions are made:

- i. The University of Zimbabwe Act (25:16), among other policies and national legislation, enhances the participation of women in top University leadership. These policies are inclusive and non-discriminatory to women in the participation in the leadership system.
- ii. There is an increased participation of women in the University of Zimbabwe's leadership matrix. It can be concluded that the share of women in university leadership seats seems to be continuously increasing and will effectively improve the position of women in leadership if the current trajectory is maintained.
- iii. Student enrolment at the University of Zimbabwe shows a trend of more female students enrolling than male students. The study concludes that the rate of enrolment by female students may affect the levels of women participating in top University leadership in the future. This has implications for the sustainability of women's participation in top university leadership.
- iv. Talent identification and nurturing at the University of Zimbabwe seems to be a positive staff and student development program that can potentially address the gender gaps that are still manifest in Zimbabwe.
- v. Traditional cultural roles, gender discrimination, the culture of patriarchy, and harassment appear to be the major constraints impeding the participation of women in positions of leadership.

### **The following recommendations are made:**

- i. Strengthen efforts in talent identification and nurturing. The study recommends that given the promising results of the strategic objective of talent identification and nurturing, there is a need to intensify the program's implementation for effective participation in top university leadership.
- ii. The study recommends that there is a need to continuously support female staff and students to enrol in various programs that will stand as a backbone for leadership appointments.
- iii. The University of Zimbabwe should continuously ensure that it supports the promotion of women to higher levels of leadership to improve the current trajectory of women's participation in positions of power.
- iv. Training programs for women are required to educate them on opportunities available for participation and to break the barriers like traditional gender roles and cultural roles that continue to undermine the participation of women.
- v. Taking legal action against gender discrimination and harassment to promote the participation of women in top leadership.

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