MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER RELATIONS ON LEADERSHIP STYLES AND PERFORMANCE OF WOMEN LED ORGANISATIONS: A CASE OF ARUA CITY, UGANDA

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Avako Patricia, declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted for any degree or academic award in any other university or institution of higher learning. To the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

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APPROVAL

This dissertation has been submitted for examination with my approval as the supervisor.

Signed:_____ Date: 24/8/2026

Supervisor: Prof. Josephine Ahikire

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, spouse, children, and mentors for their unwavering support, encouragement, and belief in my academic journey. Their sacrifices and guidance have been instrumental in the completion of this dissertation.

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May God bless you all

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CSO: Civil Society Organization

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

GESI: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

MEMPROW: Mentoring and Empowerment Programme for Young Women

SIHA Network: Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa Network

SMEs: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

TVET: Technical, Vocational and Education Training

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UWONET: Uganda Women's Network

ABSTRACT

This study explored the influence of Gender Relation on Leadership Styles and Performance of Women Led Organizations using Arua City, Uganda as a case. The study was guided by social role theory and Intersectionality theory, and explored how women leaders navigate societal expectations, gendered power dynamics, and organizational demands. Specifically, the objectives were: (1) to identify and analyze the leadership styles employed by women leaders in women-led organizations, (2) to examine the influence of gender relations on these leadership styles, and (3) to assess the effect of gendered leadership styles on organizational performance.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. Data through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with women leaders was collected through women leaders, staff, and community members across a range of private and public organizations. This ensured diverse perspectives from both men and women while maintaining participant confidentiality. Data were thematically analyzed to identify patterns, contrasts, and gendered distinctions in leadership practices.

The study revealed that some women leaders employed participatory, transformational, others employed servant and adaptive leadership styles, which contrasted with the more directive approaches often associated with male leaders. Gender relations played a central role in shaping women's leadership practices, with participants noting that women had to balance authority with empathy to gain legitimacy in patriarchal settings. However, women leaders faced several challenges, including resistance from male counterparts who questioned their authority, limited access to decision-making spaces, cultural stereotypes that portrayed women as weak for leadership, and the constant pressure to prove their competence while maintaining community acceptance. Despite these challenges, gendered leadership styles positively contributed to organizational performance by fostering teamwork, accountability, staff motivation, donor trust, and community confidence.

The study concludes that women's leadership is both a response to and a negotiation with gendered societal expectations, indicating that women's relational and inclusive approaches could be strategically mobilized to achieve organizational effectiveness and social change. The study recommended targeted capacity-building programs for women leaders, undoing structural gender barriers through policy and community sensitization, and institutionalizing gender-responsive leadership practices in organizations. For future studies, comparative, intersectional, and longitudinal study should be conducted to deepen understanding of gendered leadership dynamics and their long-term organizational impacts.

Keywords: Women leaders, gender relations, leadership styles, organizational performance

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Globally, in the past 20 years, women have gradually assumed leadership roles across different sectors, encouraging scholars to examine how their leadership styles differ and what impact they have on organizational performance. Meta-analyses suggest that, while women remain underrepresented in top leadership positions occupying roughly 31% of leadership roles globally, those who lead often demonstrate more transformational behaviors such as inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation compared to men (World Economic Forum, 2022; Deloitte Global, 2022; Eagly et al., 2024). These gendered leadership traits are associated with improved team cohesion, stronger innovation, and improved organizational outcomes (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; CID Consulting, n.d.).

Women-led organizations provide an important context for understanding leadership because they operate within organizational environments where leadership practices are continuously shaped by institutional expectations, gender norms, and organizational goals. Instead of assuming that women leaders adopt uniform leadership approaches, studies show that leadership styles differ across organizational contexts and are influenced by the interaction between individual leadership characteristics and prevailing gender relations (Northouse, 2022; Yukl, 2020). As a result, examining leadership styles within women-led organizations provides a more comprehensive understanding of how leadership practices materialize and how they contribute to organizational performance.

Gender relations such as cultural expectations, power imbalances, and societal norms act as key influencers shaping how women lead and how effective their leadership becomes (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Role congruity theory explains that women in leadership roles may face prejudice when leadership is viewed as misaligned with female gender roles, affecting both their leadership emergence and performance (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Studies across diverse sectors highlight that women's empathetic and inclusive leadership behavior fosters stronger teamwork, higher quality outputs, and better adaptability to change (ScienceDirect, 2022; CID Consulting, n.d.). According to Orozco Collazos & Botero (2024), these strengths do not always translate into performance gains uniformly in organizations.

Gender relations shape how women leaders exercise leadership, how followers respond to leadership behaviours, and ultimately how leadership styles influence organizational performance (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This suggests a sequential relationship in which gender relations influence leadership styles, and its shown that leadership styles affect organizational performance, and these interactions occur within women-led organizations as the organizational setting of the study (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Northouse, 2022).

Regionally across Africa, women's leadership has expanded in politics, business, and civil society, but gender relations are still rooted in social norms, power hierarchies, and expectations about appropriate roles which continue to shape how women lead and how their organizations also perform. Studies show broad support for women's leadership however persistent gaps in actual representation still exist, suggesting continuing norm-based constraints that can influence leadership behaviour and authority (Afrobarometer, 2023; International IDEA, 2024). Tripp (2023) noted that Sub-Saharan Africa records high parity in labour-force participation and remarkable advances in women's decision-making roles, even as barriers remains. These dynamics matter for leadership style especially where gender relations are supportive, women leaders are able to practice inclusive and transformational approaches.

Greater gender inclusion is linked to stronger organizational health and economic performance, although stressing that context moderates these effects (McKinsey & Company, 2016; McKinsey Global Institute, 2019). In environments where gender relations constrain resources, voice, and networks, even capable leaders whether women or men struggle to translate participatory styles into measurable performance. When institutions and stakeholders recognize women's authority, the same styles are associated with better team cohesion, innovation, and delivery (McKinsey & Company, 2016; McKinsey Global Institute, 2019; International IDEA, 2024).

At regional and global levels, women's leadership has been gradually recognized as a critical factor in organizational success and societal development. However, gender relations shaped by cultural norms, power dynamics, and societal expectations continue to influence how women lead and the performance of their organizations. Studies by Gallup (2024); UN Women (2022) indicate that while women in East Africa are making significant strides in leadership roles, they often face challenges such as gender biases, limited access to resources, and societal expectations that can impact their leadership styles and organizational outcomes (Gallup, 2024; UN Women, 2022).

These gendered dynamics necessitate a closer examination of how gender relations affect leadership practices and organizational performance.

A study in Tanzania has shown that women leaders often adopt collaborative and inclusive leadership styles, which have been linked to improved organizational performance (Brookings, 2024). Programs like the WomenLift Health's Thematic Leadership Journey aim to develop leadership competencies among women in East Africa, stressing the need for approaches that consider gender relations in shaping leadership styles and organizational effectiveness (WomenLift Health, 2025).

At national level in Uganda women's participation in leadership has been a focal point of national development agendas. The country has made strides in promoting gender equality, with women occupying significant positions in government, including 34% of parliamentary seats and 43% of cabinet positions (UNDP Uganda, 2023). Nevertheless, despite these advancements, women continue to face challenges stemming from entrenched gender norms and societal expectations. A study by Afrobarometer (2025) reveals that while 78% of Ugandans support equal opportunities for women in leadership, 22% still believe leadership roles should be reserved for men, indicating a persistent preference for traditional gender norms. These dynamics suggest that gender relations significantly influence the leadership styles adopted by women and, consequently, the performance of women-led organizations.

According to the World Bank (2024), women represented 27.7% of those employed in senior and middle management in Uganda in 2021. This disparity is reflected in the private and public sectors, where women hold only 37% and 36.2% of leadership positions, respectively (Monitor, 2023). This underrepresentation can impact organizational performance, as diverse leadership teams are often associated with improved decision-making and outcomes. Gendered leadership styles, shaped by societal expectations, may influence how women leaders approach organizational challenges and opportunities. Understanding the interplay between gender relations, leadership styles, and organizational performance is crucial for fostering inclusive and effective leadership in Uganda.

Although previous studies have documented women's participation in leadership and the barriers they encounter, comparatively fewer studies have explored the specific leadership styles employed within women-led organizations and the extent to which these styles are shaped by gender relations

while influencing organizational performance. Existing literature always examines these issues independently, creating limited understanding of their interconnectedness within organizational settings, particularly in Uganda. This knowledge gap provided the basis for investigating the relationships among gender relations, leadership styles, and organizational performance in women-led organizations.

Women-led organizations in Arua City provided an appropriate setting for examining the leadership styles employed by women leaders and understanding how these leadership styles are shaped by gender relations while influencing organizational performance. As organizations operating within a socio-cultural environment characterized by evolving gender norms, they present an opportunity to explore the interaction between organizational context, gender relations, leadership practices, and organizational outcomes. Programs such as MEMPROW's Women's Voice and Leadership Project and challenges identified among women market vendors highlight the importance of understanding gendered power dynamics for organizational effectiveness (MEMPROW, 2025; SIHA Network, 2025). Beyond Arua, these dynamics reflect broader patterns across Africa and globally, where women leaders continue to navigate structural inequalities, cultural stereotypes, and institutional barriers. International organizations such as UN Women and the ILO have emphasized that advancing women's leadership is not only a question of gender equality but also a driver of inclusive governance and sustainable development. Thus, this study contributes both locally and globally to debates on how gendered power relations influence leadership practices and organizational performance.

This dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter One introduces the introduction of the study. Chapter Two presents the theoretical and empirical literature review. Chapter Three discusses the methodology adopted for the study. Chapter Four presents and analyzes the findings and provides the discussions, and Chapter Five provides conclusions and recommendations.

1.2 Problem Statement

Women-led private organizations in Arua City play a critical role in promoting social and economic development, particularly in supporting community empowerment and service delivery. Despite their growing contribution, many of these organizations continue to experience leadership-related challenges, including difficulties in decision-making, stakeholder engagement, organizational sustainability, and achieving consistent organizational performance. These

challenges occur within a socio-cultural environment where gender relations continue to shape leadership practices and organizational processes. Cultural expectations, patriarchal norms, and unequal power dynamics often shape how women leaders manage their organizations, make decisions, and interact with stakeholders (Eagly & Karau, 2002; SIHA Network, 2025). Consequently, leadership styles in women-led organizations are not developed in isolation but are shaped by prevailing gender relations, with implications for organizational performance.

Existing studies globally, regionally and nationally indicate that gender relations shape leadership styles and outcomes. A study in East Africa indicated that women leaders often adopt participatory and transformational approaches when supported by equitable gender norms, which relates with higher organizational performance (Brookings, 2024; WomenLift Health, 2025). On the other hand, restrictive gender relations constrain women's leadership potential, leading to less effective management and lower organizational impact (Afrobarometer, 2023; MEMPROW, 2025). However, most of these studies have examined gender relations, leadership styles, organizational performance as separate issues and have concentrated on women in politics, public institutions, and mixed-gender organizations. Therefore, there is limited empirical evidence explaining how gender relations influence leadership styles and how these leadership styles, in turn, affect organizational performance specifically within women-led private organizations in Arua City.

This knowledge gap makes it difficult for policymakers, development partners, and organizational leaders to identify leadership approaches that effectively respond to gendered organizational realities while improving organizational performance. Without such evidence, interventions aimed at strengthening women-led organizations may fail to address the gender relations that shape leadership behaviour and organizational effectiveness.

Therefore, this study examined the influence of gender relations on leadership styles and organizational performance in women-led private organizations in Arua City by exploring how gender relations shape leadership styles and how these leadership styles contribute to organizational performance within women-led organizations.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 Overall Objective

To explore the influence of gender relations on leadership styles and performance of women-led organizations in Arua City, Uganda.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To identify and analyze the leadership styles employed by women leaders in women-led organizations in Arua City.
2. To examine the influence of gender relations on leadership styles of women leaders in women-led organizations in Arua City.
3. To assess the effect of gendered leadership styles on organizational performance in women-led organizations in Arua City.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What leadership styles are employed by women leaders in women-led organizations in Arua City?
2. How do gender relations influence the leadership styles of women leaders in women-led organizations in Arua City?
3. What is the effect of gendered leadership styles on the performance of women-led organizations in Arua City?

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study was conducted in the two divisions of Arua City i.e. Central division and Ayivu Division in Arua City and took place in the period between March 2024 and July 2025. Key targets included Community Development department, NGO Forum, Departmental Heads, community leaders. Women Leaders in Women-Led Organizations, Academia/Research, Community, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will inform government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and development partners about the importance of creating supportive environments for women leaders. Policies and programs that address gender-based barriers and promote equitable

leadership opportunities could improve the performance and impact of women-led organizations in Arua City and in Uganda at large.

The study adds to the existing academic knowledge on gendered leadership in Uganda, particularly at the local level. It is noted that while previous studies have mainly focused on women in politics and general organizational (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Brookings, 2024), this study fills this gap by exploring gender relations, leadership styles, and organizational outcomes in women-led organizations. This could provide a foundation for more study on gender-sensitive leadership and organizational development in Uganda and East Africa.

The findings of this study would provide evidence to inform policies, programs, and leadership development initiatives that strengthen women's organizational effectiveness.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Social Role Theory and Intersectionality, which together provide a complementary framework for understanding women's leadership in women-led organizations. Social Role Theory posits that societal expectations and norm shape individuals' behaviors, roles, and opportunities based on perceived social positions (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). In women-led organizations, this theory helped to explain how traditional gender roles and societal stereotypes influence perceptions of women's leadership capacities and the leadership styles they adopt. For instance, as women increasingly occupy leadership roles traditionally held by men, differences in leadership styles such as transformational, transactional, and democratic are shaped by the expectations attached to their gender.

But, Social Role Theory alone cannot fully account for the diverse and intersecting identities of women leaders. Here, Intersectionality, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), adds depth by examining how overlapping social identities such as gender, culture, age, ability, and sexual orientation interact to shape individuals' leadership experiences and access to power (Crenshaw, 2017; Sariola, 2020). Power is central to this theory, as identities afford varying levels of privilege and marginalization (Agency for All, 2023). Intersectionality challenges dominant narratives and highlights the silencing of marginalized voices, encouraging critical reflection and dialogue.

In this study, intersectionality theory shades light on how multiple social factors interact with leadership styles to influence the performance of women-led organizations. Beyond leadership

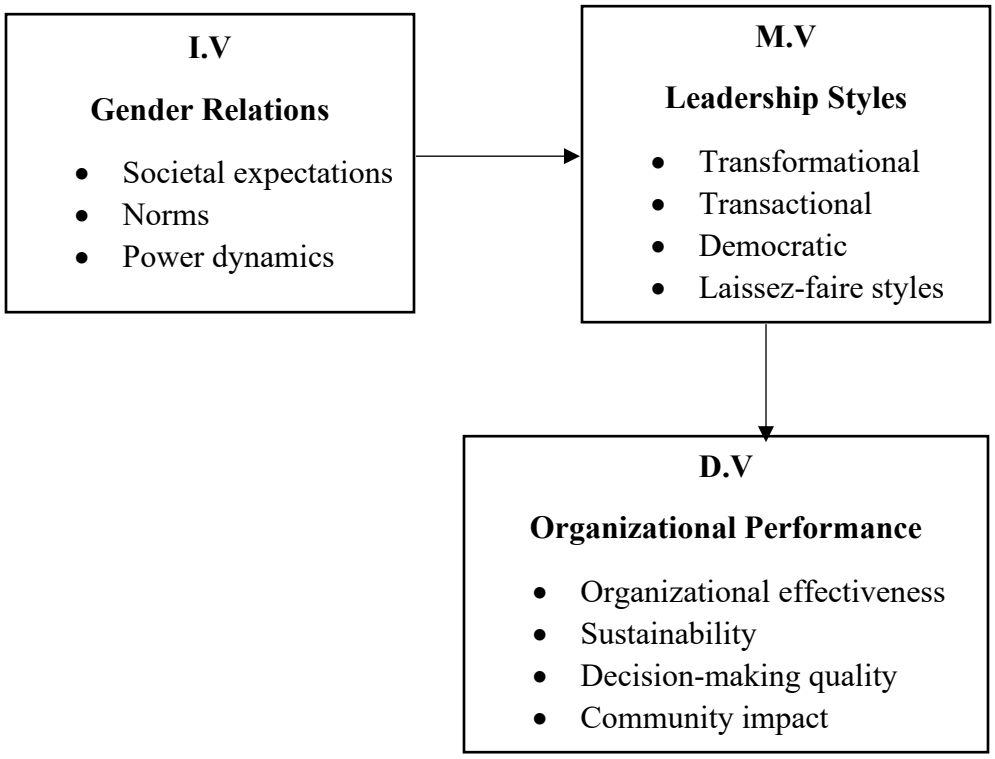
styles alone, factors such as social norms, access to resources, and community expectations intersect to affect organizational effectiveness. Adopting this theory allowed the study to explore the broader gendered dynamics that shape leadership and performance.

1.8 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationships between gender relations, leadership styles of women leaders, and the performance of women-led organizations in Arua City. It is grounded in social role theory and Intersectionality theory, which provided lenses for understanding how societal norms, gender expectations, and overlapping social identities shape leadership practices and organizational outcomes.

In this framework, gender relations were conceptualized as the independent variable. This was so because they define the societal and cultural expectations that influence how women assume leadership roles. Leadership styles served as a mediating variable. This reflected how women leaders navigate these expectations to manage their organizations effectively. The performance of women-led organizations was the dependent variable, covering organizational effectiveness, sustainability, and community impact.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework showing relationships between the variables of the study



In the above conceptual framework, Gender relations refer to the societal expectations, norms, and power dynamics that shape women's roles in leadership. Social role theory explains how these societal norms influence leadership behavior (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Carli, 2007), while Intersectionality theory shows how multiple identities such as gender, class, age, and ethnicity intersect to affect opportunities and constraints (Crenshaw, 1989; Sariola, 2020).

Leadership styles include transformational, transactional, democratic, and laissez-faire approaches. These styles are influenced by gendered expectations and social identities, as explained by social role theory and Intersectionality theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Crenshaw, 2017).

Performance refers to organizational effectiveness, sustainability, decision-making quality, and community impact. Effective leadership styles, shaped by supportive gender relations and intersectional factors, positively influence organizational performance (Northouse, 2021; Brookings, 2024).

1.9 Key Concepts

Gender relations

According to Ridgeway (2011); Eagly & Carli (2007) gender relations refer to the socially constructed roles, responsibilities, and power dynamics between men and women that influence behavior, decision-making, and access to resources. In this study, gender relations were measured through participants' perceptions of societal norms, cultural expectations, power dynamics, and support systems affecting women leaders.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review of the study. This literature review covers three critical themes that are reflected in the study objectives in order to inform the discussion section of the study. These three critical themes included the conceptualization of leadership in women-led organizations; gender relations and societal expectations in shaping women's leadership dynamics; and the effects of gendered leadership styles on organizational performance.

2.1 Conceptualizing Leadership in Women-Led Organizations

Scholarship reflects divergent debates on how leadership should be understood: as a set of traits, a process of influence, and a relational practice embedded in socio-cultural contexts (Northouse, 2019; Ospina & Foldy, 2010). While some scholars emphasize gender-neutral frameworks, others argue that leadership is always gendered because women leaders must negotiate stereotypes, social expectations, and power asymmetries (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This has led to growing attention on whether women adopt distinctive leadership approaches, or whether they adapt existing models to fit organizational and cultural realities.

Transformational leadership has attracted significant attention. It is often praised for being more inclusive, participatory, and value-driven compared to transactional and authoritarian styles (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1990). Scholars argue that transformational leadership echoes strongly with women-led organizations, as it emphasizes collaboration, mentorship, and empowerment qualities stereotypically associated with feminine leadership (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). This association is not without critique. Some argue that linking women leaders primarily with transformational leadership risks reinforcing gender stereotypes, framing women as "naturally communal" and overlooking diversity in their leadership practices (Fine, 2009; Chin, 2013).

Transformational leadership (TL) was introduced by Burns in 1978. Later it was expanded by Bass in 1985. It stresses leaders who inspire and motivate followers to achieve excellent outcomes through vision, intellectual inspiration, and individualized consideration. This leadership style has been widely adopted across various sectors ranging from education, healthcare, to business.

Bass's (1985) model identifies four key components of Transformation Leadership. These are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These dimensions aim to elevate followers' awareness of organizational goals and align their values with those of the organization. Bass and Avolio (1994) demonstrated that TL can lead to increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance.

There was a meta-analysis conducted by Judge and Piccolo in 2004 found a strong correlation between TL and various performance metrics (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Cummings et al., (2018) conducted a study in healthcare settings and reported that TL can improve nurse job satisfaction and patient outcomes (Cummings et al., 2018). In educational contexts, TL has been associated with improved teacher efficacy and student achievement by Leithwood and Jantzi (2006).

Northouse (2018) argue that TL's emphasis on the leader's vision can overshadow the contributions of followers, leading to a leader-centric approach (Northouse, 2018). TL's effectiveness may be contingent upon contextual factors such as organizational culture and follower characteristics (Antonakis & House, 2014). The measurement of TL often relies on self-reported data, which can introduce bias (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

House et al. (2004) suggest that TL may not be universally effective and that cultural dimensions should be considered when implementing TL practices. In collectivist cultures, TL's focus on individual aspirations may conflict with group-oriented values (House et al. 2004). Bass and Riggio (2006) argue that TL's emphasis on change and innovation may be less suitable in stable or traditional organizations.

Kabeer (2005) suggests that empowerment involves not only access to resources but also the ability to exercise agency in making choices. This aligns with transformational leadership, which emphasizes inspiring and motivating followers to achieve a shared vision. Women leaders who are empowered to make decisions can foster an organizational culture that values inclusivity and collaboration, leading to improved performance. Adopting transformational leadership styles can enhance organizational effectiveness

Bass and Avolio (1994) indicates that TL can lead to increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance. Bass and Avolio (1994) found that TL behaviors positively correlated with follower satisfaction and performance. A systematic review by Dong (2023)

revealed that while TL positively impacts organizational performance, an overemphasis on this style may stifle creativity and adaptability, potentially limiting an organization's ability to innovate and respond to changing environments.

Democratic leadership is also known as participative leadership. Gastil (1994) defined it as a style in which leaders actively involve team members in decision-making, encouraging input, discussion, and collaboration while retaining ultimate responsibility (Gastil, 1994). Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) also describe democratic leadership as a pattern of social interaction that promotes group participation, shared responsibility, and collective problem-solving. This leadership approach has been associated with higher levels of employee satisfaction, motivation, and organizational performance because it fosters ownership of decisions and encourages creativity (Somech, 2006). The participative nature of democratic leadership can slow decision-making and complicate accountability when consensus is required (Lewin et al., 1939).

Skogstad et al. (2007) defined Laissez-faire leadership as a non-interventionist leadership style in which leaders provide minimal guidance and allow team members significant autonomy to make decisions and manage their work (Skogstad et al., 2007). Leaders in this style act primarily as resources rather than direct supervisors, offering support only when requested and when critical issues arise (Northouse, 2018). Eisenbeiss et al., (2008) noted that while this approach can improve creativity and independence, study indicates that it may lead to ambiguity, lack of coordination, low morale, and decreased performance when employees are unprepared or lack self-motivation (Eisenbeiss, van Knippenberg, & Boerner, 2008).

2.2 Gender Relations and Leadership Dynamics

Debates on gender relations and leadership often highlight how societal expectations shape both opportunities and constraints for women leaders. Across different cultural contexts, leadership is still coded as a masculine domain, with women expected to embody nurturing and supportive roles rather than authoritative ones (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Ridgeway, 2011). These gendered expectations influence how women’s leadership is perceived and valued, often placing them in a double bind: if they adopt communal styles, they may be dismissed as too soft, but if they assert authority, they risk being seen as unfeminine and too aggressive.

Bunch (1990) argues that women's rights have historically been marginalized within the human rights framework, often relegated to the private sphere and overlooked in public discourse. She contends that this exclusion stems from patriarchal structures that define human rights narrowly, ignoring the systemic nature of gender-based oppression. This perspective challenges traditional leadership models that fail to account for the gendered experiences of women leaders. Societal norms and expectations continue to shape women's roles in leadership. These norms often dictate the acceptable behaviors and responsibilities of women leaders, influencing their leadership styles and effectiveness.

According to Vongalis-Macrow (2016) women are perceived as less agency and greater communion compared to men and are considered as more caring, collegial, and social (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010), and are active listeners, emotionally connected, show motherly instincts and interested in relational exchanges (Fernandes & Cabral-Cardoso, 2003). These traits are mostly seen in elements of transformational leadership style (Eagly et al., 2003; Koenig et al., 2011).

A global report called Taking the Lead surveyed nearly 10,000 girls and young women (ages 15–24) across 19 countries. It found that 94% believed female leaders are not treated as well as male leaders, and 93% reported that female leaders face unwanted physical contact. These negative conditions discourage many young women from pursuing leadership roles (Plan International & Geena Davis Institute, 2019).

In Uganda’s rural areas, women make up a huge part of the farming labor force but harvest 20–30% less than men. Social expectations like women being helpers and mostly tied to domestic chores limit their access to land, credit, and decision-making power. Mobility restrictions and control over finances also hold women back. However, participation in savings groups boosts confidence and agency (ODI, 2021).

At a national summit, women leaders shared that misinformation, GBV, unpaid care, and economic constraints limit leadership participation UWONET Summit, 2025). Media shapes narratives and often sidelines women. Senior women suppressing younger women was also reported (UWONET Summit, 2025). They called for collaboration, media advocacy, and mentorship to combat these norms (UWONET Summit, 2025).

A study by Tumushabe et al. (2024) confirmed that women's leadership in public universities is tightly linked to their levels of gendered participation and representation. Societal stereotypes and caregiving roles reduce women's involvement, leadership pursuit, and advancement (Tumushabe et al., 2024). Less than 29% of leadership roles are held by women at Makerere (Namuddu et al., 2024).

In Uganda's media, only 20% of practitioners are women, and just 25% of news sources are female. Cultural norms encourage women toward soft journalism and discourage them from high-responsibility roles. Maternity leave policies also hinder hiring, reinforcing inequality (Watchdog Uganda, 2024).

In Kampala's informal businesses, cultural norms limit women's financial empowerment. Interviews showed that expectations such as men being better decision-makers block women's access to capital and leadership in enterprises (Nabasirye et al., 2025).

Sylvia Tamale's book entitled: 'When Hens Begin to Crow; Gender and Parliamentary Politics in Uganda" (1999), delves beyond mere numbers of women in Parliament, analyzing how affirmative action policies intersect with entrenched social structures to influence leadership experiences and styles. Tamale begins by situating Uganda within a socio-historical context, demonstrating how the legacy of colonialism and underdevelopment has structured political power along gendered lines (Tamale, 1999). She argues that although Uganda implemented affirmative action in the late 1980s reserving at least 39 parliamentary seats for women such policies alone could not dismantle the underlying patriarchal paradigms that continue to marginalize women leaders (Tamale, 1999). Drawing on in-depth interviews with female and male legislators, NGO workers, and rural constituents, Tamale (1999) reconstructs the life-history profiles of five female politicians. These narratives reveal diverse strategies women employ to assert their agency, resist male dominance, and navigate a political landscape steeped in gendered expectations. She emphasizes that women must craft leadership approaches that both reflect their individual identities and negotiate pervasive institutional constraints. Tamale (1999) notes that female candidates often face attacks rooted not in policy and competence but in personal morality such as accusations concerning their marital status whereas male politicians are critiqued for ideological and administrative shortcomings.

Carless (1998); Chao (2011) label transformational leadership style as feminine leadership style. Though, women leaders often demonstrate different leadership style and different traits on

different environment, such as male-dominated environment where women are perceived to be more assertive and autocratic (Sharif, 2018). How women leaders enact their leadership style is also dependent on socio-cultural environment (Gipson et al. 2017). Ders et al. (2016) found that women try to achieve individual success in a men-dominated environment by shifting to the masculine approach and distancing themselves from other women (Ders et al., 2016). Eagly and Karau, (2002) argue that women are often held to different standards and that there is a mismatch between the expectations of leadership roles and the stereotypically feminine qualities that are associated with women. Rudman & Phelan, (2008) presents evidence of a backlash effect, where women who display dominant and assertive behavior are seen as less likable and less competent than men who exhibit the same behavior.

Johnson *et al*. (2008) suggested that women leaders are seen as more effective when they show both strength and sensitivity and will be perceived as inefficient leaders if they only show strength and sensitivity. Shinbrot *et al*. (2019) posited, even though men and women can have similar contributions as leaders, women are perceived to have uniquely grounded perspectives and novel approaches. One of the domains where women leaders can thrive is in the area of when subordinate need fulfilment and attention. This mother-like behavior improves the mood and the moral of subordinates (Mojza *et al*., 2011). Rosener (1990) stated that the behaviors that define women leadership style come naturally. Rosener added that women are expected to be mothers, wives and stereotyped to certain role such as nurses and office admins.

Hundera (2024) conducted 96 interviews and document reviews, arguing that organizations are not neutral spaces because they actively reproduce gender norms. Hundera (2024) insists that mentoring programs and training alone cannot dismantle these ingrained hierarchies. Instead, we need a holistic approach that tackles structural inequality head-on (Hundera, 2024).

Salami's (2025) piece in The Guardian really pushed my thinking about how African leadership continues to be male-dominated, especially in institutions like the AU. Since 1963, only one woman named Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma has ever held its leadership. Salami critiques how male-defined notions of Africanness marginalize women and calls for an African feminist politics that reimagines leadership to include women's perspectives in shaping institutions (Salami, 2025).

Wyrod's ethnographic mission (2008) into Kampala's Bwaise neighborhood opened my eyes to how local men negotiate changes in women's rights. While there is momentum toward gender

equality, traditional notions of male authority and the provider role still prevail. Organizations and home leadership structures bear the marks of these shifting but resilient masculine ideals (Wyrod, 2008).

Elasu and colleagues (2023) draw my attention to leadership within the home by examining household fuel choices in Uganda. Using national survey data and a regression model, they show that even though women are primary cooks, men often dominate decisions about cooking fuel transitions (Elasu & colleagues, 2003). This not only stresses gendered authority at a domestic level, but also shows how socially constructed roles influence organizational behavior beyond workplaces (Elasu et al., 2023).

Gender relations significantly influence decision-making processes by shaping who participates, whose voices are prioritized, and whose interests are represented. In many contexts, decision-making remains male-dominated, with women's contributions either marginalized or entirely excluded (Goetz, 1998; Tamale, 2020). These dynamics often reinforce structural inequalities, limiting the transformative potential of women's leadership and undermining inclusive governance. For example, Salami (2025), illustrates this at the continental and national levels by examining the African Union and national governance systems, where men dominate leadership and women are often excluded from key decisions. According to Salami (2005), African leadership is framed around masculinity strength, control, authority while women are seen as outsiders unless they adopt these traits. This male-centered view not only silences women but shapes what decisions are prioritized land, defense, and infrastructure over social and gender justice (Salami, 2025). She calls for an African feminist politics where women actively reshape decision-making frameworks from the inside out.

A study by Elasu et al. (2024) in Niger examined married women's involvement in household decision-making covering financial decisions, visiting family, and healthcare choices and how this link relates to reproductive health behaviors. It was found that only 16% of women are involved in all three domains of decision-making. Yet, those who are engaged either alone or jointly have significantly higher odds of using modern contraception and attending antenatal care (Elasu et al., 2024).

2.3 Intersectionality and leadership experiences

Bunch (1990) emphasizes that women's experiences of oppression are complex, intersecting with race, class, sexuality, and other identities. She advocates for a human rights framework that recognizes these intersections, ensuring that women's diverse experiences are acknowledged and addressed. This intersectional approach is vital for understanding the complexities of leadership in women-led organizations. In Arua City, women leaders often navigate multiple layers of identity, including ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability. These intersecting identities can either constrain and enhance their leadership opportunities. Kabeer (2005) emphasizes that women's empowerment must be understood as a process of gaining the ability to make choices. However, the extent to which women can exercise this agency is often constrained by intersecting factors such as class, ethnicity, and marital status. This intersectional approach underscores the need to consider multiple dimensions of identity when analyzing women's leadership experiences.

An intersectional lens reveals that race, class, and professional tier deeply shape who's able to ascend in leadership (BMC Human Resources for Health, 2019). Women often face complex, compounding disadvantages that go unnoticed when gender is viewed in isolation. Intersectional strategies are essential to dismantle these hidden barriers and truly diversify leadership across global health systems.

Moorosi, Fuller, and Reilly (2018) studied Black women principals across South Africa, England, and the U.S. They found that gender, race, and class shape unique leadership styles characterized by holistic care and community focus. However, leadership training programs often fail to address these intersecting identities, leading to a one-size-fits-all approach that doesn’t meet the needs of these leaders.

In occupational therapy, a qualitative study found by American Journal of Occupational Therapy (2024) found that women of color’s leadership development are influenced not just by race and gender, but also by organizational norms and historical contexts (American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 2024).

Theory of multiple jeopardy by King (1988) argues that overlapping discriminations, such as those based on race, gender, and class, do not just add up but multiply. This means the leadership challenges faced by women of color are uniquely severe, requiring intentional strategies to dismantle.

2.4 Leadership Styles and Organizational Performance

Bass and Riggio (2006) found that transformational leadership positively impacts organizational performance by inspiring and motivating employees beyond transactional rewards. Transformational leaders encourage innovation, foster trust, and align employees' values with organizational goals, which in turn improves productivity and job satisfaction (Bass & Riggio, 2006). A recent meta-analysis by Wang, Oh, Courtright, and Colbert (2011) confirmed that transformational leadership correlates strongly with both individual and organizational performance outcomes.

Transactional leadership focuses on exchanges between leaders and followers, using rewards and punishments to maintain performance standards (Burns, 1978). It fosters not only innovation, transactional leadership is effective in highly structured and routine environments where consistency and clarity are key. A study by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990) found transactional leadership useful for short-term goal attainment but less impactful on long-term organizational growth.

Servant leadership is a style where the leader prioritizes the needs and development of followers, creating a culture of care and ethical behavior (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson, 2008). A study by Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) shows that servant leadership improves employee engagement, trust, and performance. Organizations with servant leaders tend to have higher organizational citizenship behavior and lower turnover, positively impacting overall performance (Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson, 2008).

Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership theory argues that effective leadership depends on adapting style according to followers' maturity and task complexity. Leaders who flexibly apply directing, coaching, supporting, or delegating behaviors can improve team performance by meeting specific needs. Recent by Thompson and Glasø (2018) supports that adaptability enhances organizational outcomes, especially in dynamic environments (Thompson & Glasø, 2018).

2.5 Influence of gendered leadership on performance of Women-led Organizations

Women leaders tend to bring leadership styles that emphasize collaboration, empathy, and transformational approaches (Eagly & Carli, 2007). These leadership traits foster inclusive cultures

and drive innovation, both critical for organizational success in today's complex environments. A global meta-analysis by Eagly and Carli (2007) highlights that women leaders are more likely to engage in transformational leadership, which correlates with higher organizational performance worldwide.

Brush et al., (2018) study on women entrepreneurs show that despite operating in male-dominated markets, women-led businesses often excel in social responsibility and sustainable practices, enhancing long-term performance (Brush et al., 2018). It was also noted that these organizations face structural barriers like unequal access to funding and networks, which can limit growth opportunities despite strong leadership (Brush et al., 2018).

In developed countries, women leaders in corporate and nonprofit sectors demonstrate leadership that prioritizes employee development and diversity, which positively impacts organizational climate and performance (Nishii & Mayer, 2009). Such inclusive leadership reduces turnover and increases engagement, key drivers of organizational success.

O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) found that women-led organizations in the nonprofit sector frequently benefit from leadership approaches rooted in transformational and servant leadership models, which enhance mission fulfillment and stakeholder trust (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). These leadership styles promote collaborative decision-making and social justice, improving organizational performance (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).

According to the study by Brush et al. (2018) it was found that in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), women leaders show strengths in relationship-building and risk management, though they often face gendered obstacles like limited access to venture capital (Brush et al., 2018). These barriers impact organizational scalability and long-term success despite strong leadership capacities.

A study by Salami (2025) critiques how traditional gender roles and male-dominated institutional structures limit women's leadership effectiveness in organizations like the African Union and land governance. Despite these challenges, women leaders in African organizations frequently adopt collaborative and community-oriented leadership styles that improve stakeholder engagement and organizational legitimacy (Salami, 2025). Mama (2016) discusses how African feminist leadership

promotes inclusion and social justice, impacting organizational culture and performance by centering women's voices and experiences in decision-making.

A study by Kabeer and Masanyiwa (2019) investigated how gendered leadership practices impact the performance of women-led MSMEs in Uganda. They found that women leaders tend to employ inclusive and participatory management styles that enhance teamwork and innovation. However, challenges such as limited access to finance, cultural expectations, and legal constraints reduce their ability to scale businesses effectively (Kabeer & Masanyiwa 2019).

Baguma and Kyomugasho (2021) explored the role of gender in leadership among university administrators in Uganda. Their study reveals that women in leadership positions often experience tokenism and face stereotypical expectations that undermine their authority. Women leaders who adopt transformational leadership styles positively influence organizational culture and staff morale, thereby improving institutional performance (Baguma and Kyomugasho, 2021).

Nakiganda-Busiku et al. (2020) found that women leaders improve patient outcomes through collaborative and empathetic leadership approaches. Despite these demonstrated contributions to institutional performance, gender biases continue to limit women's progression to top leadership roles, thereby affecting overall organizational effectiveness. The study calls for gender-responsive policies to support women's leadership development in health organizations.

A study by Namusoke (2022) highlights that women leading community-based organizations (CBOs) in Uganda foster participatory decision-making and grassroots empowerment. These leadership practices improve community trust and organizational resilience (Namusoke, 2022). However, persistent gendered power dynamics within communities sometimes limit women leaders' influence on broader policy engagement (Namusoke, 2022).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents methodology used by the study to achieve its objectives. The chapter focuses on research design, population, and instruments. It further points out sample size, selection, methods of data collection, and data analysis.

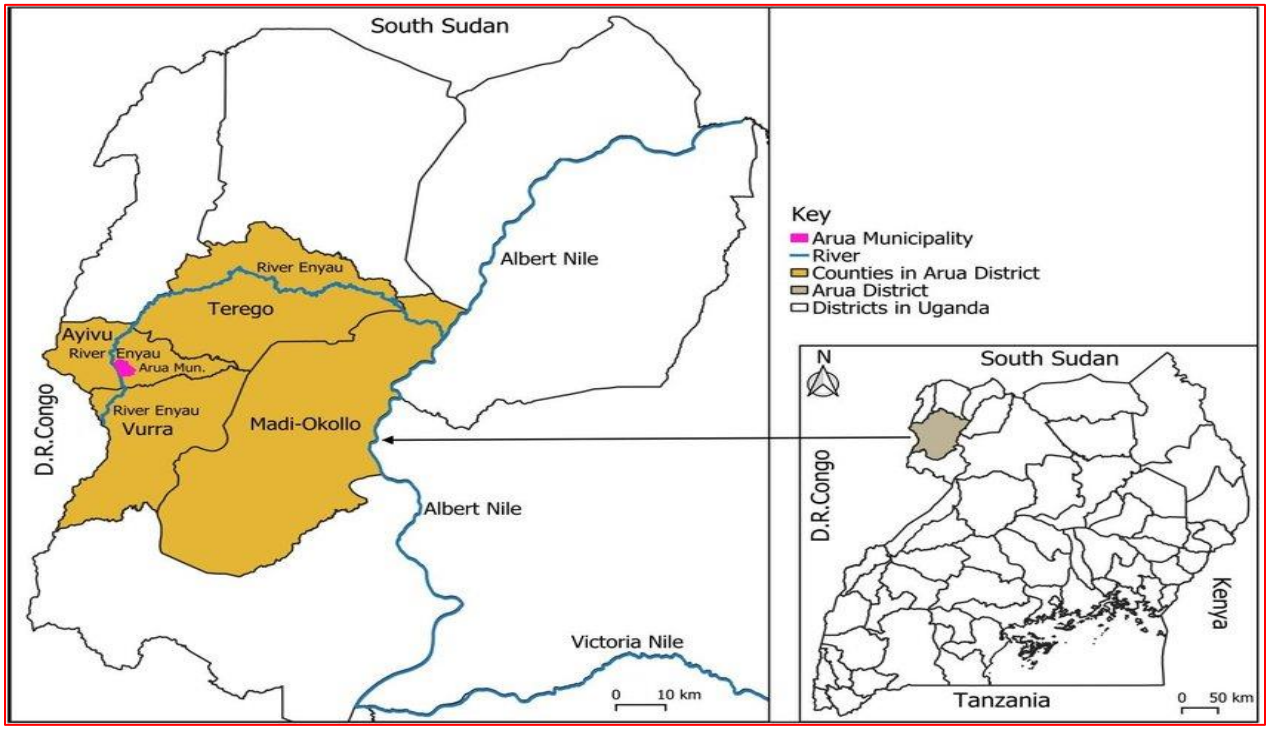
3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to explore and understand the influence of leadership styles employed by women leaders on the performance of women-led organizations in Arua City, Uganda. The study explored how and why particular leadership styles influence organizational performance. These were exploratory questions that aim to capture depth, context, and lived experiences making a qualitative approach most appropriate. The case study design allowed for in-depth exploration of these contextual factors and their influence on leadership and organizational performance. Since the study involves understanding subjective experiences of women leaders and organizational members, a qualitative approach using interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews was ideal for eliciting rich, descriptive data. The Qualitative approach gave explanation of events and descriptions based on interview and document analysis (Sekaran, 2003). Relevant reports were obtained and information pertinent to the study was extracted to inform the research questions.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in the two divisions of central and Ayivu divisions where women led organization were located due to the need for their services for the urban poor but also the urbanization and that had started. The justification for choosing this area was that it was experiencing an increase in the number of Women Led Organizations in this area. There has also been recent move by many organizations to channel funding to women led organizations through the Localization Agenda.

Figure 2: Showing the Location of the Study Area: Arua City



Source: Oloya *et al*., (2019).

3.3 Study Population

The study targeted population of 75 as respondents which included managers, directors of the private organizations/institutions, staff of selected organization, and service beneficiaries. The study also targeted people who influence and those impacted by the organizations like; the city leaders, departmental head, team leaders, funders, UN Agencies, polices and decisions make in those institutions; and beneficiaries of those organization.

The women-led organizations engaged in this study operate within the non-governmental, community-based and faith-based sectors in the Central and Ayivu divisions of Arua City, working mainly in community development, social service delivery and advocacy. In keeping with the confidentiality assurances given to participants and their organizations, the specific names and identifying details of these organizations are withheld.

3.4 Sample Size and Selection

From the population presented in Table 1 below, the sample of individuals were selected using purposive and probability sampling technique for determining sample size from a given population. Purposive sampling was important when desired information was to be obtained from specific target groups because it targets individuals who have got the necessary information required by the study.

Gender was deliberately considered during sampling and data collection. Purposive and simple random selection targeted both female and male participants so that women leaders' own accounts of their leadership could be examined alongside the perspectives of male colleagues or subordinates, stakeholders and beneficiaries, rather than relying on women's voices alone.

Table 1: Sample size

The table above shows the target population from which participants were purposively and randomly drawn. The actual number of participants who took part in data collection is presented. The key informants comprised of City Executive, key departments, funders/United Nations (UN) Agencies, CSO heads and staff; representatives of the private sector and beneficiaries of the women led organization.

Study population	Target population	Sampling technique
Arua City relevant technical staff, community-based services department and political representative)	10	Simple random
Civil Society Organizations (non-governmental organizations, community based organization and faith based organization) members & staff.	40	Simple random
Funders including UN Agencies	5	Purposive sampling
Other stakeholders, and community leaders.	20	Simple random
Total	75	

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Data was collected using two key methods: interview method and document analysis. The questionnaire method involved use of a set of questions printed in a definite order (Kothari, 2004 pg.100). The interview method comprised of personal interviews with individuals who were

believed to hold important and vital information relevant to the objectives of the study. And document review was done by analyzing the contents of documentary materials such as; textbooks, journal articles, newspapers, speeches, operational plans, budgets, staff meeting minutes, strategic plans, progressive reports, minutes and resolutions and activity reports. Purposive and simple random sampling, structured interviewing and document review were selected because they are well suited to eliciting rich, context-specific accounts from a defined population within a qualitative case study design (Sekaran, 2003; Kothari, 2004).

3.6 Data Collection Methods

3.6.1 Interviews

Data was collected through (I) Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): KII was conducted with participants at the city, divisions, key departments, and key staff from the selected organizations, and other relevant stakeholders. Key Informants were selected based on their positions, level of influence or involvement with the WLOs; expert knowledge and experience relevant to gender, leadership, management, and willingness to share experiences. Different KII guides were used to collect qualitative data at the various levels. Each key informant interview was conducted by the researcher, or someone trained and experienced in moderating/note taking.

In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) were held directly with the women leaders who are the primary participants of the study, allowing them to narrate their own leadership experiences at length and in their own words; these narratives form the core of the personal accounts presented in Chapter Four. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), by contrast, were held with individuals who were not themselves the primary subjects of the study but who, by virtue of their position, oversight role or working relationship with the women-led organizations, could provide contextual and corroborating information, such as departmental officials and other stakeholders.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): FGDs were included to surface collective norms, disagreements, and the social interaction that shapes leadership practice. FGDs were particularly useful for exploring shared beliefs about gender expectations and leadership behavior. FGDs were moderated by the researcher or trained facilitators, with a note-taker present. Each FGD lasted 30–60 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and carried out in a private, accessible venue.

Collective norms refer to the shared beliefs, expectations and unwritten rules about leadership and gender that participants converge on, or contest, once they hear one another's views in a group setting, something an individual interview alone would not reveal.

3.7 Procedure

A letter of introduction from Makerere University College of Humanities and Social Sciences School of Women and Gender Studies was sought from the authorities of Arua City, different district departments, the identified CSOs and institutions through which the study was carried out. The selected respondents were requested to complete and return the questionnaires within a given period (4-7 days) without inconveniencing them at any point of data collection. The distributed questionnaires were accompanied by the letter clearly stating the purpose of the study and stressing a statement of confidentiality of the information given.

During the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), the researcher had the opportunity to engage with staff members from different organizations both private and public. In one group, the researcher met with eight staff members that included six males and two females who were actively involved in planning, implementing, and managing organizational programs. Another FGD conducted included fourteen community beneficiaries and they were two males and twelve females who shared their experiences of how women's leadership is perceived and felt at the grassroots level. Not only that the researcher also interacted with five members who were the key informants and these included three males and two females from a community-based initiative, and they gave important insights into how women leaders were viewed within local advocacy and support networks. Additionally, the researcher conducted an FGD with six female staff from a women-led organization, who openly discussed how internal leadership dynamics affect staff motivation, organizational values, and day-to-day operations shaped by gender dynamics.

In total, three Focus Group Discussions and one additional key-informant group were held during data collection, in addition to the individual Key Informant Interviews and In-Depth Interviews described in Section 3.7.1. FGD 1, with organizational staff, engaged 8 participants (6 males, 2 female). FGD 2, with community beneficiaries, engaged 14 participants (2 males, 12 female). FGD 3, with staff of a women-led organization, engaged 6 participants (all female). A key-informant group from a community-based initiative engaged 5 participants (3 males, 2 female). In total, these

sessions engaged 33 participants, comprising 22 females and 11 male participants, in addition to the individually interviewed women leaders and other key informants.

3.8 Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews were arranged into themes according to the objectives, exposed to content analysis and then presented in form of narratives as appropriate. This thematic, objective-led approach to organizing and interpreting the data follows standard practice for qualitative research of this kind (Sekaran, 2003). The analysis was deliberately kept within women-led organizations rather than extended to a direct comparison with men-led organizations. This choice was made because a credible comparison of women's and men's leadership styles would require its own comparative sample and design.

3.9 Study Limitations

The study was confined to women-led organizations operating in only two divisions of Arua City. This geographical and institutional scope might limit the extent to which the results could be generalized to all women-led organizations in Uganda. The qualitative design focused on in-depth perspectives from a selected sample. This approach provides rich contextual insights but it does not allow for statistical generalization. Though, the study offers valuable understanding of leadership dynamics in women-led organizations and provides a foundation for further research in broader settings.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The study considered ethical guidelines and principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Participants were provided with information about the study objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, and their consent was obtained before data collection. Confidentiality was ensured by assigning unique identifiers to participants, and all personal information was kept secure and accessible only to authorized personnel. Information from Personal experiences, opinions, or information that could potentially put the participants at risk was kept confidential. Verbal informed consent was obtained from the participants in circumstances where written informed consent was challenging to obtain. The risks of confidentiality associated with the study were addressed through the use of pseudonyms rather than the participant' names. Confidentiality helps to minimize the risk of stigma by keeping

participants' identities and responses confidential, reducing the likelihood of negative repercussions for disclosing their experiences or perspectives. When participants feel assured of confidentiality, they are more likely to provide accurate and detailed information (Muehleman et al., 1985).

3.11 Positionality

As a woman conducting research on women's leadership, I approached this study both as an outsider gathering evidence and as someone personally invested in the subject matter, which was part of my motivation for undertaking it. I was mindful that this closeness could shape how participants responded to me and how I interpreted their accounts, and I sought to manage this by using standardized interview and FGD guides, involving a trained note-taker for sessions I moderated, and deliberately including male participants' perspectives alongside those of the women leaders so that the findings were not shaped by my own vantage point alone.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the influence of gender relation on leadership styles and performance of women led organizations. The objectives of the study included: to identify and analyse the leadership styles employed by women leaders in women-led organizations; to examine the influence of gender relation on leadership styles of women leaders in women-led organizations and to assess the effect of gendered leadership styles on organizational performance in women-led organizations in Arua City.

The findings below draw on In-Depth Interviews with women leaders, Key Informant Interviews with other stakeholders, and Focus Group Discussions, integrated throughout the chapter. To protect participants' anonymity, direct quotations are attributed using role- and gender-based descriptors instead of personal identifiers, with the data collection method noted where this adds clarity.

4.1 Leadership styles employed by women leaders: Narratives by women leaders in Arua City

During my data collection, I engaged directly with women leaders, staff, and a few male colleagues in various organizations. The findings show that women leaders negotiated leadership within the framework of gendered societal expectations. Women were often expected to be nurturing, empathetic, and collaborative, with strong emphasis on care, consultation, and inclusion. At the same time, they were discouraged from being overly authoritative and confrontational, as such traits are often judged negatively when expressed by women. Equally, men are more readily associated with decisiveness, authority, and efficiency, and are expected to prioritize task completion over relational engagement. These expectations provide the backdrop against which women leaders describe their leadership practices.

These findings align with Social Role Theory (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001), which posits that societal norms shape expectations for gendered behavior. Women leaders' emphasis on consultation, mentoring, and inclusion reflects a translation of socially prescribed caregiving roles

into organizational practices, confirming that leadership behaviors are influenced by gendered socialization rather than being purely individual traits.

The narratives discussed in this section point to five recurring leadership styles among the women leaders interviewed, namely participatory/democratic, transformational, servant, adaptive/situational, and visionary leadership, each of which is illustrated with supporting evidence below before being related to Social Role Theory and Intersectionality.

One female participant in top management role in one of the organizations said, "*I work with the team, consulting them at different levels. I don't make all decisions by myself*." Her statement demonstrates a participatory and democratic leadership approach: by involving staff in decision-making she encourages ownership of organizational goals. Another participant noted that leadership is "*participative in a sense that all staff are given opportunities for capacity building… staff at lower levels are consulted first before major decisions are made*." These voices signal more than personal preference. They reflect how women leaders translate socially expected caregiving and relational skills into organizational strategies using consultation and capacity building both to develop staff and to secure legitimacy for their authority in environments that may otherwise question women's leadership.

The adoption of participatory and democratic leadership by women, as illustrated by participants who actively involved staff in decision-making and capacity building, is consistent with prior scholarship on democratic leadership (Gastil, 1994; Lewin et al., 1939; Somech, 2006). These leadership practices enhanced staff engagement, ownership of organizational goals, and organizational performance. Likewise, the observed use of transformational and servant leadership inspiring, mentoring, and prioritizing staff development echoes studies by Bass and Avolio (1994), Cummings et al. (2018), and Kabeer (2005), which link transformational practices with improved organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and service outcomes. Importantly, this study shows that women leaders' relational approach is not merely a trait-based preference but a strategic response to gendered societal expectations, supporting Eagly & Carli's (2007) argument that women's leadership is always negotiated within a gendered social context.

Some participants described how they inspired and mentored their teams. One female participant who was a leader shared, "*I love coaching and inspiring people I lead. I give people choice so that*

decisions are made jointly." This validates transformational leadership, as she seeks not just to manage but to elevate and develop her staff.

On the other hand, male participants often described leadership more in terms of task completion and efficiency. They focused less on mentorship and relational engagement. One male staff member from one of the organizations noted, "*when deadlines are tight, we need to get things done quickly. I make the decisions and move forward*." His statement explains how gendered social roles influence leadership. Women, balancing home and work responsibilities, often prioritize relational approaches, while men emphasize outputs and control. This approach fosters employee engagement, ownership, and motivation, which are key drivers of organizational performance (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

One woman described, "*I go an extra mile to recommend staff for training and capacity-building opportunities." Another leader explained, "I believe in mentoring many… building capacity*." This is servant leadership. These leaders are actively putting their team members' growth before their own authority, reflecting a caregiving approach extended into organizational life. Participants reported that men rarely emphasized this mentoring dimension, focusing instead on delegation and instruction rather than nurturing. This demonstrates a caregiving approach, where relational skills developed through societal expectations of women are translated into organizational strategies that foster staff competence and engagement (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

At the same time, women leaders acknowledged situations where they needed to be more directive. One participant who is the executive director in the organization admitted, "*for some critical decisions, I tend to dictate*." Another female participant who held leadership position explained, "*in times of crises, I have to adopt an autocratic approach, even if my usual style is democratic*." These accounts show that women leaders are adaptive, flexibly balancing participatory, transformational, and autocratic approaches depending on organizational needs. The ability to shift between styles reveals strategic awareness, reflecting skills practiced through managing complex responsibilities both at work and at home.

This flexibility aligns with Social Role Theory, which explains that women navigate societal expectations of nurturing and collaboration while exercising authority when necessary (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Intersectionality further illuminates how overlapping identities such

as gender, age, and position shape their capacity to make strategic choices in complex organizational environments (Crenshaw, 1989).

One female leader noted, "*I mix visionary leadership with democratic leadership… involving the team to 'buy-in' and co-create the future we desire*." This is described as Visionary Leadership. By this, she meant that while she sets a clear direction for the Organisation speaking a long-term vision she does not impose it separately. Instead, she uses a democratic approach to ensure that staff members participate in shaping that vision. This practice proves both strategic foresight and inclusivity, qualities that align with societal expectations for women to be collaborative and nurturing. At the same time, her emphasis on co-creation reflects an effort to secure legitimacy and reduce resistance, particularly in contexts where women leaders may be scrutinized more harshly for exercising authority.

Thus, her account reveals a hybrid leadership style that blends agentic qualities (vision, direction-setting) with communal traits (consultation, participation), enabling her to balance organizational demands with gendered social norms. This shows that women not only set long-term goals but also bring their teams along, ensuring shared ownership of organizational vision.

Another female participant also explained, "*I always try to anticipate challenges and guide my team to prepare for them*." The narratives of these participants indicate that visionary leadership is deeply social and inclusive, rather than top-down, conflicting with some male leaders who emphasized task completion over strategic alignment and team involvement. This hybrid style reflects Social Role Theory, which suggests that women's leadership is shaped by societal expectations to be nurturing, collaborative, and inclusive (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). By co-creating the vision with their teams, women leaders strategically navigate gendered norms that might otherwise challenge their authority. Intersectionality also helps explain how multiple factors, including gender, organizational position, and cultural expectations, intersect to influence their leadership practices (Crenshaw, 1989).

In reflecting on these observations, it became clear that gendered social expectations shape leadership practices. Women leaders' caregiving roles, domestic responsibilities, and societal expectations for empathy and nurturing influence their practice of participatory, transformational, and servant approaches. Men, with fewer domestic and relational responsibilities, often adopt more task-focused and directive methods. Across the participants, the pattern was consistent. Women

leaders integrated relational, ethical, and community-oriented perspectives into their leadership, while men prioritize efficiency and control.

As researcher, I observed that these women leaders were highly flexible, combining democratic, transformational, servant, adaptive, and visionary practices. Their leadership was not only about achieving organizational goals but also about cultivating human capacity, fostering inclusion, and modeling socially responsible leadership. Gender, therefore, transpires as a defining factor in shaping how leadership was conceived, practiced, and experienced in women-led organizations. These observations align with study suggesting that leadership is socially constructed, with gender norms influencing how authority is exercised and perceived (Rosener, 1990; Helgesen, 1990). Women's leadership is often relational, ethical, and community-oriented, reflecting an integration of professional responsibilities with socially reinforced expectations of care. Men's leadership, by comparison, frequently prioritizes outcomes and control, highlighting the gendered division in organizational behavior.

4.2 Influence of Gender Relations on Women's Leadership Styles

Gendered constraints and protective leadership strategies

As defined in Section 1.9, gender relations in this study refer to the societal norms, power dynamics and expectations that shape how women and men are permitted to lead; the sub-sections below examine how these specific norms and dynamics are experienced by participants as shaping women's leadership choices.

Several participants reported that women leaders often rely on consultative and participatory leadership styles to counter perceptions that women should not be too authoritative. As one female key informant noted: *"when I involve my staff in decisions, they feel ownership, and this avoids the perception that I am being too harsh or dictatorial."* This story reveals how gender relations shape leadership choices. Consultation and inclusion were not only organizational strategies but also protective mechanisms against gendered criticism. A male staff member a FGD in another organization reinforced this point: *"If a woman leader is too strict, people think she is not behaving like a woman. But if she is open and consultative, they respect her."*

According to this analysis, here gender norms prescribe acceptable boundaries for women's behavior, pushing women leaders toward participatory and relational approaches. In comparison,

male in leadership positions were described as more easily accepted when acting decisively with little pushback as compared to women in leadership. These findings suggest that women strategically navigate gendered social norms that prescribe acceptable behavior, reflecting a conscious balance between asserting authority and adhering to societal expectations of femininity. These findings align with previous studies on the double bind in women's leadership (Rudman & Glick, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002), which argues that women leaders are simultaneously expected to be authoritative yet nurturing. The findings also support work by Vongalis-Macrow (2016) and Fernandes & Cabral-Cardoso (2003), showing that women tend to be relational, collegial, and empathetic qualities traditionally valued in feminine leadership roles. The findings correspond to studies in Uganda where gendered expectations restrict women's decision-making power and mobility (ODI, 2021; Nabasirye et al., 2025; UWONET Summit, 2025).

Gendered double binds and adaptive leadership

Some female participants said that they held to stricter standards than their male counterparts. Assertive decision making by male leaders was perceived as strength, while the same behavior in women attracted critique. One key informant explained: *"sometimes you have to take tough decisions, but people judge you differently as a woman. They say you are too emotional or too harsh."*. This voice shows that gender relations create double binds because women are expected to lead but and the same time penalized if they deviate from expected norms of femininity. Such contradictions forced women leaders to adopt adaptive leadership styles, so that they constantly balancing assertiveness with empathy. This was not just a matter of personality, but it was a matter of survival in patriarchal environments, where missteps could undermine credibility. This reveals how gendered social expectations concurrently demand leadership from women while constraining how they exercise authority. These contradictory expectations force women leaders to adopt adaptive leadership styles, balancing assertiveness with empathy to maintain credibility and effectiveness.

These observations align with existing studies on gendered leadership challenges. Eagly and Karau's (2002) Role Congruity Theory similarly argues that women face prejudice when their behavior conflicts with stereotypical feminine norms, creating a "tightrope" where authority risks being interpreted negatively. Rudman and Phelan (2008) also identify the backlash effect, noting that women exhibiting agentic behaviors are often penalized socially, whereas men are rewarded

for the same actions. Studies in Africa support this; Tamale (1999) shows that female politicians negotiate leadership spaces by blending authority with relational strategies to counter societal scrutiny. From a theoretical perspective, Social Role Theory (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001) explains why women internalize and respond to these gendered expectations. Society prescribes norms about emotional expression, empathy, and collaboration for women, which shape how they exercise leadership. Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989) provides additional insight, emphasizing that these pressures are compounded by intersecting identities such as age, marital status, ethnicity, and professional position. Thus, adaptive leadership is not merely a personal trait; it reflects a strategic response to structural inequalities embedded in organizational and social contexts.

Consistency, Resilience, and Gendered Leadership Expectations

The findings also revealed that women leaders were consistency and resilience in their leadership roles than male leaders. By consistency participants meant that women leaders were dependable and steady in pursuing organizational goals, maintaining commitment even when resources were limited and when staff self-confidence was low. Resilience referred to their ability to withstand challenges such as gender bias, limited support, and heavy workloads, while continuing to lead effectively. This was often attributed to the broader societal expectation that women must be patient, enduring, and able to hold things together both at home and in the workplace. As such, women leaders appeared to translate these socially valued traits into organizational settings, using persistence and reliability to earn trust, navigate resistance, and sustain progress in environments where leadership is still widely viewed as a male domain.

One community participant said: *"women are used to struggling for their families, so they also struggle for organizations."*. According to this analysis, I observed that here, organizational resilience is linked to women's socialization into caregiving and endurance roles. Whereas this resilience boosted women performance by ensuring continuity even under resource constraints, it also reflected the gendered burden of sacrifice placed on women. Male leaders on the other hand by comparison, were judged primarily by outcomes, but not by their ability to endure and struggle through hardship. This reveals the unequal gendered expectations of leadership labor.

These results align with the study by Fernandes and Cabral-Cardoso (2003) who note that women leaders are often more relational and socially attentive, characteristics that support persistence and resilience in challenging contexts. Mojza et al. (2011) describe women leaders' nurturing behavior as enhancing team morale and sustaining performance under stress. Unlike men, who are primarily evaluated on outcomes, women are often assessed both for effectiveness and for how well they navigate relational and societal expectations, reinforcing the double burden of leadership.

Relational Leadership and Gendered Expectations of Care

Some participants also reported that there was the association of women's leadership with emotional openness and care. It was reported that some staff members liked women leaders because they combined professional direction with personal support. A female staff member in one of the organization who participated in the study as a key informant stated: *"I can tell my director personal issues and she will understand. That makes me work better."* This relational leadership is closely tied to gender norms that socialize women into listening, caregiving, and nurturing. Women leaders transformed these expectations into organizational assets thereby creating trust, loyalty, and psychological safety. This also imposed other emotional burden not equally demanded of male leaders. Male leaders were described as more likely to keep distance and focus on work without similar expectations to provide universal support.

This suggests that women leaders leverage socially constructed gender norms such as caregiving, listening, and nurturing as organizational assets, creating supportive work environments that facilitate performance. These findings align with studies by Vongalis-Macrow (2016) and Fernandes & Cabral-Cardoso (2003), which observes that women leaders often display greater emotional intelligence, relational orientation, and collegiality. Rosener (1990) also notes that women's leadership frequently includes mother-like qualities that enhance subordinate well-being and morale, strengthening team cohesion. Social Role Theory (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001) explains that expectations socialize women to be attentive, empathetic, and relational, which they then integrate into their leadership practices. These gendered behaviors are not merely personal preferences but strategic adaptations that improve organizational climate and employee engagement. Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989) emphasise that women's relational leadership is shaped by intersecting social identities such as age, marital status, and professional

rank, which may intensify both expectations to provide care and the scrutiny they face when balancing authority and empathy.

Navigating Gendered Resistance and Leadership

Gendered resistance here refers to opposition women leaders encounter specifically because they are women exercising authority, distinct from ordinary organizational pushback, and to the strategies they use to work through it.

Cultural norms that resist female authority was revealed as a central challenge for women leaders. To navigate this resistance, participants explained that they often adopted inclusive and collaborative strategies to soften opposition and secure cooperation from their employees. One participant, a female leader in a Focus Group Discussion explained *"In our culture, men are expected to lead, so as a woman leader, I must show that I respect others' views, even if I make the final decision".* This clarifies how women deliberately perform gendered diplomacy by using collaboration and inclusivity as tools to navigate patriarchal expectations. In doing so, the women created space for leadership without directly confronting cultural norms which ensure both organizational progress and community acceptance prevails.

The study found that gender relations saturate both organizational and community, influencing how women leaders gain legitimacy. Within organizations, gendered norms shape decision-making processes, staff expectations, and authority structures, while in the broader community, women leaders must also navigate cultural expectations and social perceptions to establish credibility and influence. When comparing men's and women's leadership, it was noted that men had more latitude to exercise directive and authoritarian leadership without fear of being delegitimized. Women, however, had to earn legitimacy through participatory, empathetic, and inclusive approaches. This imbalance reveals how leadership itself is gendered, with women forced into more relational and transformational modes not only by preference but by necessity. This shows how women strategically perform gendered diplomacy, leveraging relational and consultative approaches to operate effectively within patriarchal expectations. These findings support Social Role Theory (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001), which posits that societal norms prescribe acceptable behaviors for men and women. Women leaders are socially expected to demonstrate nurturing, empathy, and collaboration; deviation from these norms risks criticism or

delegitimization. In comparison, men enjoy broader latitude to exercise directive or authoritarian leadership without negative judgments, highlighting the gendered double bind women navigate in organizational and community contexts.

Gender Relations as determinants of leadership practices

The study revealed that gender relations are a powerful determinant of leadership practice in women-led organizations. Women leaders in Arua City adopted participatory, transformational, and relational leadership styles as strategies to navigate societal expectations, avoid gendered backlash, and build legitimacy within patriarchal environments. Their leadership was marked by resilience and inclusivity. These qualities both improve organizational performance and reflect the structural constraints of gender norms. When compared to men leadership, men enjoy broader acceptance of authority, women must constantly negotiate the gender order, blending adaptability and empathy with strategic vision. Thus, gender relations do not merely shape women's leadership styles; they define the terms of their practice and legitimacy. As the findings indicate, these leadership approaches were not simply a matter of personal preference; they were shaped by gendered social norms, which prescribe acceptable behavior for women while allowing men greater latitude in demonstrating authority.

This aligns with Social Role Theory (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001), which suggests that societal expectations influence individuals' behavior, roles, and leadership strategies. Women leaders' emphasis on consultation, inclusion, and empathy reflects the socialization of women into caregiving and relational roles, while their strategic vision and adaptability show a deliberate blending of communal and agentic traits to meet organizational goals. Previous studies confirm this, noting that women often face a double bind: communal approaches may be perceived as soft, whereas assertive and directive behaviors risk being judged as unfeminine and harsh (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rudman & Phelan, 2008).

4.3 Effects of Gendered Leadership Styles on Organizational Performance

Empowerment and mentorship in Gendered Leadership

Building on the gendered leadership practices discussed in Section 4.3, this section examines their effects on organizational performance, measured here, consistent with the conceptual framework in Section 1.8, in terms of organizational effectiveness, sustainability, decision-making quality and community impact.

Study participants described their approach to leadership as empowering and mentoring, linking staff development directly to organizational performance. This is evident as one female key informant in one of the organization noted, "*I go an extra mile to recommend them for short courses and any capacity training opportunities*." Such practices, consistent with transformational and servant leadership, clarify how women's socialization towards nurturing and caregiving translates into mentorship, staff growth, and higher engagement.

Another female participant in one of the private organization also said, "*We have successfully implemented the strategic plan… breaking the big picture into goals and aligning them with our priorities has enabled us to be productive*." According to the above, here I have observed that some women leaders combined participatory planning with relational approaches, promoting collective ownership and demonstrating how gendered tendencies toward collaboration improve organizational productivity.

This reveals how women leaders combine participatory planning with relational approaches, promoting collective ownership and cohesion within the organization. Such strategies not only reflect societal expectations that women should be collaborative and inclusive, as noted in social role theory (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001), but also translate these tendencies into tangible organizational advantages. Through blending mentorship, participatory planning, and strategic foresight, women leaders create environments that enhance staff commitment, reduce resistance to change, and improve overall productivity.

These findings align with previous studies showing that transformational and servant leadership approaches positively impact organizational outcomes (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Liden et al., 2008) and that women-led organizations often excel in fostering inclusive cultures, driving innovation, and achieving sustainable results despite structural barriers (Brush et al., 2018; O'Neil &

Bilimoria, 2005). In this way, the gendered tendencies of collaboration, empathy, and relational engagement emerge not merely as personal traits but as deliberate, strategic approaches that enhance organizational performance, demonstrating that women leaders' socialized behaviors can become powerful drivers of institutional effectiveness.

Enhanced organizational outcomes

Participatory and inclusive leadership style were described as a defining feature of women-led organizations. One female participant holding top management position in one of the organization that participated in the study revealed, "*the way I lead has made Amani Initiative a flexible organization… Delegation of duties and opportunity to grow*." Another female participant also stated, "*Openness has made it easier for employees to share ideas*." Women's attention to emotional safety, empathy, and inclusivity often reinforced by their gendered experiences as caregivers created environments where staff, particularly women, felt valued and supported. A female participant also noted, "*If I find a space where a woman is a leader, this is a space I can confide in… women give a listening ear than men who always tend to ignore and sometimes very reserve*."

In comparison, male participant in leadership positions were described as emphasizing efficiency and top-down decision-making. These accounts demonstrate how gendered traits inform leadership style, with women leaders' relational approach boosting engagement, trust, and employee retention which leads to high organization performance as opposed to men leadership style.

These practices align with transformational leadership, which emphasizes inspiring and mentoring employees, fostering trust, and aligning staff with organizational goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Wang et al., 2011). The findings also reflect servant leadership, as women leaders prioritized the needs and development of staff, promoting engagement, psychological safety, and organizational citizenship behavior (Liden et al., 2008).

The study further indicates that women's leadership styles are shaped by gendered socialization. Their relational, empathetic, and nurturing approaches reflect societal expectations for women as caregivers, consistent with social role theory (Eagly & Carli, 2007). By way of leveraging these gendered traits, women leaders translated social expectations into organizational assets, fostering trust, loyalty, and collaboration. Such approaches were particularly effective in retaining

employees, enhancing teamwork, and supporting the implementation of strategic plans, demonstrating a clear link between relational leadership and improved organizational performance.

Strategic vision and goal alignment

Strategic vision and goal alignment were also shaped by gendered perspectives which was seen as leading to high performance within organizations. One female participant said, "*I can motivate and inspire people… The brand, loyalty and trust, and credibility for the brand and this increases our company work productivity*." This reveals a practical application of transformational leadership, where leaders articulate a compelling vision while inspiring and engaging employees to achieve collective goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Wang et al., 2011).

The findings also agree with servant leadership, as women's attention to relational trust, mentoring, and community engagement strengthens organizational cohesion and resilience (Liden et al., 2008). Through blending participatory processes with visionary thinking, women leaders ensure that strategic objectives are both achievable and socially grounded, reflecting the intersection of professional goals with culturally informed relational expectations. Social role theory (Eagly & Carli, 2007) helps explain why women's leadership emphasizes collaboration and trust-building: gendered social norms socialize women toward relational and communal approaches, which they leverage as strategic assets in organizational management.

Another female participant explained, "*we come together and I tell them honestly what we need to achieve so that they work very hard towards our goal. In the end we always win because of being strategic*." It was found that women in leadership duties blend visionary thinking with participatory processes, linking strategic objectives to KPIs such as service impact, donor retention, and program implementation. Participants stressed that these leadership practices improve organizational resilience, align internal efforts with external networks, and strengthen sustainability. Women's attention to relational trust and community engagement as opposed to men ways of doing things, grounded in gendered social norms, ensures that organizational objectives are both achievable and socially rooted.

In comparison to men, whose leadership tends to prioritize efficiency and top-down decision-making, women's gendered leadership practices create inclusive and socially embedded pathways to achieving organizational goals. The integration of vision, participatory engagement, and

strategic goal alignment demonstrates that women leaders not only achieve high performance but also enhance organizational resilience and sustainability. This aligns with studies showing that women-led organizations often excel in long-term planning, staff development, and stakeholder trust despite structural barriers in male-dominated sectors (Brush et al., 2018; Salami, 2025; Kabeer & Masanyiwa, 2019).

Financial stewardship and better accountability

Financial stewardship and accountability was reported by some participants as additional areas where gendered leadership styles influence performance. A female participant noted that, "*women are generally better in resource utilization, even finances than men. Men are not trusted when it comes to resource utilization as they tend not to go into details and take things seriously*." Some participants described women in carefully managing budgets, transparent reporting, and prudent use of scarce resources. This disciplined approach reflects socially reinforced expectations of women as responsible and conscientious, traits often cultivated through caregiving and domestic management roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Rosener, 1990). Participants linked these practices directly to organizational credibility and sustainability, as illustrated by securing long-term funding from donors like CARE International.

One key informant who took part in the study proudly stated, "*we have secured five-year funding from CARE International*," linking transparent financial management to improved organizational credibility and long-term sustainability. On the other hands, male leaders were perceived as less relational in their stewardship, often focusing more narrowly on efficiency than on community trust and staff inclusion. These findings align with servant and transformational leadership theories, which emphasize prioritizing followers' needs, ethical responsibility, and fostering trust (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Liden et al., 2008). Through extending relational attention to financial stewardship, women leaders not only maintain internal accountability but also enhance external confidence from donors and stakeholders, thereby improving organizational resilience and long-term performance.

The focus on meticulous resource management can be understood through social role theory, which posits that gendered expectations influence behavior; women are socially conditioned to be detail-oriented, cautious, and attentive to communal well-being, which translates into effective organizational governance. Male leaders were perceived as more narrowly task, often overlooking

relational aspects of financial management that build staff trust or community confidence. This difference clarifies how gendered norms shape not only leadership style but also organizational outcomes, with women's relational and conscientious tendencies contributing to both internal cohesion and external credibility. Similar patterns have been documented in studies of women-led organizations in Uganda and globally, where women's inclusive, transparent, and ethically guided leadership enhances stakeholder trust, mission fulfillment, and organizational sustainability (Brush et al., 2018; Kabeer & Masanyiwa, 2019; Salami, 2025).

Gendered Socialization

Women leaders also revealed adaptive leadership style by shifting styles strategically to address crises at hand indicating that it's something that is learnt by women at their younger age shaped by gender and norms of the society. A woman leader in one of the studied organization explained, "*In times of crises… I found the need to adopt autocratic leadership*." Another participant also noted, "*for some critical decisions I take on some issues I tend to dictate so that its done otherwise if you be soft your employees might take you for granted and will never do what you expect from them.*" Participant reported that these shifts were temporary and purposeful, showing situational awareness informed by relational intelligence. Women leaders stressed that women's flexibility stems from balancing multiple roles and navigating complex social expectations. One of the women leaders said 'can *you imagine when my husband ran for a public leadership position, I who also is an executive director of a women's organization had to juggle between accompanying my husband for his political campaigns, running home to receive his quests, cook and serve them amidst the pressures from donors and stakeholders within the organizations. This was very burdensome but I had to continue to bear this burden to appear as a good wife, something that I hated to do and this obviously played in the way I led the team that period and my staff thought I was running crazy because I transferred the stress to the organization and people I led'*

Once crises subsided, leaders returned to consultative practices, maintaining cohesion and trust. Such adaptability clarifies how gendered experiences improve organizational resilience, allowing women to balance authority with sympathy. These findings align with Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership theory, which emphasizes adapting leadership behaviors to match followers' needs and task complexity. Women leaders' flexibility is informed by social role theory (Eagly, 1987), which highlights how societal expectations shape women's relational and

multitasking capacities. In situation where women are expected to balance professional responsibilities with caregiving and domestic obligations, these competencies translate into organizational advantages: the ability to navigate crises, maintain trust, and foster resilience among staff.

The participants' narratives also show how gendered expectations create additional burdens, as women juggle multiple domestic and professional roles. For example, one leader described managing organizational pressures while supporting her spouse's political ambitions and household responsibilities, leading to temporary stress transfer to the team. While this stresses the gendered labor of leadership, it also highlights how women's adaptive capacities born from socialization and experiential learning improve organizational resilience and stability (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Rosener, 1990).

Higher staff engagement, better service delivery, and community trust

Women leaders over and over again linked gendered leadership styles to measurable performance outcomes. One participant stated, "*MEMPROW Girls' Network is very active today and their work has contributed to the advancement of individuals, families and communities*." Another FGD participant said, "*because of the good relationship the women leader has with the community, WEID has remained working with our community longer compared to other bigger NGOs*." These stories indicate that participatory, relational, and adaptive leadership styles, shaped by gender norms, lead to higher staff engagement, better service delivery, and sustained community trust. Women leaders' attention to relational and ethical dimensions of leadership enables them to translate vision and values into tangible organizational success.

These findings suggest that gender is not secondary in leadership but rather a fundamental to leadership effectiveness. Women leaders' socialization, societal expectations, and caregiving experiences inform transformational, participatory, adaptive, and relational practices, which in turn enhance organizational performance across staff, operational, and community dimensions. Male leaders on the other hand, shaped by different social expectations, often emphasize task completion and directive approaches, clarifying how gendered leadership styles create distinct organizational outcomes.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of the study by relating the discussion of the study with the literature and the theories that guided the study. The chapter also present the conclusion of the study based on the findings per study objective. Based on the findings revealed in the study and the conclusion derived from the findings, the chapter also gave recommendations for the study.

5.1 Conclusion

This study explored the leadership styles employed by women leaders in women-led organizations, the influence of gender relations on these leadership practices, and how gendered leadership styles affect organizational performance in Arua City. The findings revealed that women leaders employ a diverse range of leadership approaches such as participatory, transformational, servant, visionary, and adaptive styles. Their male counterparts often emphasized directive and efficiency driven methods, but women's leadership practices were marked by inclusion, mentorship, resilience, and accountability. These styles were reflections of individual choice and also deeply shaped by gendered social expectations and the dual roles women occupy in both private and public organizations. Women leaders were often held to stricter standards than men and had to balance assertiveness with empathy to maintain legitimacy within patriarchal structures. Male leaders could exercise authority without much resistance, but women had to adopt consultative and relational strategies to avoid gendered backlash. This confirmed that women's leadership was both a response to societal expectations and a form of negotiation with cultural norms that privilege male authority. The resilience, consistency, and emotional openness associated with women leaders were positively valued which demonstrating how gendered roles though restrictive, could also be transformed into organizational assets. Participatory and inclusive practices promoted teamwork, loyalty, and psychological safety; transformational and visionary approaches strengthened organizational vision and donor trust; and servant and adaptive leadership supported staff capacity building and organizational resilience. This study affirm that gender is not a peripheral factor in leadership but a central determinant of how leadership is conceived, enacted, and experienced in women-led organizations. Women's ability to integrate relational, ethical, and

community-oriented practices into their leadership demonstrates how gendered experiences can be strategically mobilized to achieve both organizational effectiveness and broader social change.

On leadership styles employed, women leaders drew on participatory, transformational, servant, visionary and adaptive approaches; on the influence of gender relations on these styles, cultural expectations and power dynamics pushed women toward relational and consultative approaches while affording men greater latitude for directive authority; and on the effect of gendered leadership styles on performance, these styles were associated with stronger teamwork, donor trust and staff capacity, albeit within the constraints that gendered expectations impose.

5.2 Recommendations

Women leaders in Arua City revealed participatory, transformational, and adaptive leadership styles, but their effectiveness was constrained by limited access to resources, training, and networks. It is recommended that government agencies, NGOs, and development partners invest in structured leadership and management training programs that equip women leaders with strategic planning, fundraising, and negotiation skills. Such initiatives should be directed to acknowledge women's dual roles in family and organizational life to ensure flexible delivery methods that make participation feasible.

The study found that patriarchal attitudes, stereotypes, and donor biases undermine women's legitimacy in leadership. To overcome these challenges, deliberate efforts should be made to integrate gender mainstreaming policies into donor funding frameworks and community-based organizational structures. Engaging men and community leaders in sensitization programs on gender equality will help dismantle resistance to women's authority which shall enable women leaders to exercise diverse leadership styles without fear of cultural backlash.

Beyond visible barriers such as training and funding gaps, this study also points to more hidden, informal gendered power dynamics, such as who is consulted before a decision is finalized, whose mentorship counts as legitimate, and how much diplomatic labour women leaders must perform to have their authority accepted, that shape women's leadership just as much as formal structures do. Organizations and development partners should therefore look beyond formal policy compliance and also invest in naming and addressing these informal dynamics directly, for instance through leadership mentoring that surfaces and validates women's own strategies for

navigating them, and through donor and board-level dialogue that makes such informal gatekeeping visible and open to challenge.

5.3 Areas for Future Study

Future studies should compare leadership styles between women-led and men-led organizations in Arua City and other regions. Such studies would provide deeper insights into how gender relations influence leadership effectiveness differently across genders and organizational contexts.

Future study should adopt longitudinal approaches to track the long-term impacts of women's leadership on organizational growth, sustainability, and community transformation, while also assessing how shifting gender norms reshape leadership practices over time using a mixed method.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction:

- ✓ Introduce myself and the purpose of the interview.
- ✓ Explain the confidentiality and consent procedures.
- ✓ Encourage the participant to share their experiences and perspectives openly.

Interview Questions:

1. Leadership Styles:

a) Can you describe your leadership style in more detail?
b) What are the key principles or values that guide your approach to leadership?
c) How would you say your leadership style has evolved over the course of your career?

2. Rationale for Leadership Style:

a) What factors influenced your choice of leadership style?
b) How do you believe your personal characteristics, background, and experiences have shaped your leadership approach?
c) To what extent do organizational factors, such as culture, structure, and resources, play a role in your leadership style?
d) How do you think contextual factors, such as the socio-economic environment or industry dynamics, have influenced your leadership style?

3. Impact on Organizational Performance:

a. How do you believe your leadership style has impacted the performance of your organization?
b. Can you provide specific examples of how your leadership approach has contributed to the organization's success (or challenges)?
c. In what ways do you think your leadership style has influenced employee engagement, satisfaction, and productivity?

d. How do you assess the effectiveness of your leadership style in achieving the organization's goals and objectives?

4. Organizational and Contextual Factors:

a) What are the key organizational factors that you believe have the most significant influence on your leadership style?
b) How do you navigate the potential tensions or trade-offs between your preferred leadership style and the organizational context?
c) In what ways have broader contextual factors, such as the regulatory environment or industry trends, shaped your leadership approach?
d) Can you share any specific examples of how you have adapted your leadership style to address changes in the organizational or external environment?

Conclusion:

Summarize the key points discussed during the interview.

Invite the participant to add any final thoughts or insights.

Thank the participant for their time and valuable contributions.

APPENDIX THREE: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction (5-10 minutes):

a) Welcome the participants and introduce the purpose of the focus group discussion.
b) Explain the confidentiality and ground rules for the discussion.
c) Encourage open and honest sharing of perspectives and experiences.

Leadership Styles (20-30 minutes):

a) How would you describe the leadership style of the women leaders in your organization?
b) What are the key characteristics or behaviors that you observe in their leadership approach?
c) In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the leadership style employed by the women leaders?

Impact on Organizational Performance (20-30 minutes):

a) How do you think the leadership style of the women leaders has impacted the overall performance of the organization?
b) Can you provide specific examples of how the leadership style has influenced employee engagement, productivity, and satisfaction?
c) In what ways has the leadership style contributed to the organization's success or addressed any challenges?

Organizational and Contextual Factors (20-30 minutes):

a. What organizational factors do you believe have the most significant influence on the leadership style of the women leaders?
b. How do you think the organizational culture, structure, and resources shape the leadership approach of the women leaders?
c. In what ways have broader contextual factors, such as the industry environment or socio-economic conditions, affected the leadership style of the women leaders?
d. Can you share any instances where the women leaders have had to adapt their leadership style to address changes in the organizational or external context?

Wrap-up and Closing (10-15 minutes):

a. Summarize the key points discussed during the focus group.
b. Invite the participants to share any final thoughts or insights.
c. Thank the participants for their valuable contributions and time.