

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

**EXPLORING KARKARA WOMEN'S AND ADOLESCENT GIRLS 'PERCEPTIONS
TOWARD LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AS A VECTOR OF EMPOWERMENT:
A CASE STUDY IN THE SAHEL NIGER**

A Dissertation in

Education, Development and

Community Engagement

by

Halima Therese Gbaguidi Adolphe

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2023

The dissertation of Halima Therese Gbaguidi Adolphe was reviewed and approved by the following:

Nicole Sheree Webster
Professor of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management
Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the College of Health and Human Development
Dissertation Adviser
Chair of Committee

Mark A. Brennan
Professor and UNESCO Chair in Community, Leadership, and Youth Development
Director of Graduate Studies for Education, Development, and Community Engagement

Suzanna Windon
Assistant Professor, Youth and Adult Leadership, Penn State Extension

Maha Marouan
Associate Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and African Studies

Ousseina D Alidou
Professor, Linguistics and African Studies
Faculty Director Center for Women's Global Leadership Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ
Special Member

ABSTRACT

Women's advancement and inclusion in society have been on the rise in many nations, but some countries still have not made significant improvements. The Niger Republic is one country in West Africa where gender inequality is still prevalent in contemporary times. Women and girls, particularly in the country's Karkara¹ communities, have faced decades of gender discrimination due to unequal access to critical social and natural resources, educational opportunities, and services. This inequality has prevented them from participating fully in society and the decision-making process, attaining leadership positions, and learning skills crucial to their well-being. As a result of these gender disparities, few women hold leadership positions in the male-dominated sectors of society.

In the Republic of Niger, since independence in 1960 to the present day, much ink has been spilled about the issue of women's involvement in leadership positions/roles. Women are constantly absent, misrepresented, and often excluded across different societal spheres. A recent report from the United Nations Development Program ranked Niger 154 out of 162 countries in terms of the Gender Inequality Index (UNDP, 2020), highlighting the stark inequalities facing women. The government has made progress in enhancing women's participation in many sectors, including the implementation in 2001 of the Quota Act (Alidou & Alidou, 2008). However, there is still persistent inequality in women's positions. Yet, despite its critical importance, the Quota Law has barely been respected since its inception, and even less, it does not necessarily apply to women and young girls in rural areas who are non-literate or without higher education. This inequality has prevented them from participating fully in society, attaining

¹ Hausa word for rural/remote area

leadership positions, and learning skills crucial to their well-being. As a result of these gender disparities, few women hold leadership positions in the male-dominated sectors of society. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by 193 countries across the globe (including Niger) in September 2015. These goals continue the work begun by the Millennium Development Goals, which were established in 2000 (United Nations, 2015). As part of the original Millennium Development Goals, women's empowerment and gender equality remained fundamental elements. A more sustainable world begins with gender equality as a fundamental human right. Gender equality also supports economic growth, peace, prosperity, and a stronger economy, hence the importance of this study. Currently, there is a dearth of published literature on rural women and girls in Niger, making it quite difficult to ascertain the nuanced situation of the inequalities faced by women and girls. Moreover, there is limited literature on leadership, especially regarding rural women and girls, which is critical to the conversations on advancing women in society. Therefore, this qualitative case study explores how rural women and girls view leadership within their community and how that can contribute to their empowerment. In other words, the study examines how Karkara women and adolescent girls perceive leadership as a vector of empowering them and future generations. The study focuses particularly on rural women and girls in three rural areas within the region of Tahoua in Niger. Findings show that leadership can be a vector to empowerment and that participants' influence in leadership roles is exhibited in diverse ways, such as their involvement in women's groups or associations, the community and within their household.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I will begin by glorifying the almighty God for allowing me to complete this arduous yet rewarding task of earning a Ph.D.

I am immensely grateful for my remarkable committee members' guidance, support, and patience. To my advisor and committee chair, Professor Nicole Sheree Webster, I express a distinctive appreciation. You have provided me with guidance and expertise in this work and have perfectly worn multiple hats. You are an advisor, a mentor, a friend, and "maman Nicole" as I fondly call you occasionally. You believed in my potential and constantly remind me that "this too shall pass" when my morale is down. Your trip to Niger and our wonderful time spent with my family will forever be memorable. My heartfelt thanks are not enough!

I also offer my appreciation to professor. Mark Brennan for his input and encouragement throughout this work. I am deeply thankful to Dr. Suzanna Windon for her insightful comments and kindhearted efforts. My profound gratitude goes to Dr. Maha Marouan for her incredible contribution that refine this work. I am incredibly grateful to professor Ousseina Alidou, my dearest compatriot, whose phenomenal background and expertise in the field shape this work. You are such a great soul with a big heart! I am also thankful to your half, your twin sister, professor Hassana Alidou, for sharing documentation and words of encouragement and proudness. Je vous en suis infiniment reconnaissante!

This work would not have been successful without the contributions and help of many people back in Niger. I am deeply thankful to the staff at the University of Tahoua. A special gratitude to professor Hamadou Daouda Youssoufou, who provided tremendous support and input and pushed me to consider other perspectives in the field. I also appreciate the Chambre Regionale Agriculture (CRA), especially Tiémogo for his prompt and fruitful intervention and Mohamed

Chékaraou, who went to all the research sites with us. I am also grateful to my friend Rachida Boubacar, who accompanied me in the field.

I owe a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation to everyone in Niger who amazingly contributed to this work through insightful information, documentation, conversation, and references. A special thanks to emeritus professor Boureima Alpha Gado, Kio Koudizé, Dr. Zeinabou Hadari, Professor Tijani Alou, and Réki Djermakoye.

This work would not have been possible without the incredible contributions of women and adolescent girls in the Tahoua region who produced the data of this dissertation. They provided me with insightful information and their perceptions. I honor them with my deepest sense of gratitude for their hospitality, kindness, generosity, and contribution. Na godé sosai! Allah ya saka muku da alkhairi!

This accomplishment also would not have been possible without my family's infallible support, unconditional love, guidance, and prayers. They are the backbone of my successes and empowerment. A special gratitude to my beloved mother, Dr. Aichatou Diawara (MD), my role model, my rock, who constantly prays to see me complete this terminal degree. You showed me that a woman could do it all. Your unique love, sacrifice, and support are always noticed, and having you in our lives is a tremendous blessing. To my beloved father, Waly Adolphe Gbaguidi, your sacrifices, motivation and hard work made me who I am today. Your overnight prayers are answered! You are permanently checking on the progress of this work, telling me to remain patient and sending your blessing.

I owe a great deal to my dearest spouse, Abdoul-Aziz, for his unwavering support, unconditional love, motivation, wise advice, patience, and prayers which made this work possible. This degree is also yours!

I am deeply thankful to my second family, my in-laws, for their support and prayers. To my second mother and father, Hadiza Boukar and Oumarou Harou, respectively, my sister Titi, my brother Issaka and sister Abiba, I am thankful for your support, prayers, calls, and messages, which meant a lot. A special thank you to my father, Oumarou Harou. The best father-in-law ever. I will always remember my first trip to Tahoua with you, and I will always cherish your kindness, constant smiles, and anecdotes.

To my siblings, Lamine, Bada and Rita, I am forever grateful to have such unwavering support from you all. My big brother Lamine was one of the first to call me doctor before I even completed the degree! Know that I look up to you in many aspects. Thank you for always being there for me. To your wife, my sister Rayana, thank you also for being there when I needed you. To my little brother Bada, your help, support, and encouragement and your wife Ramatou are very appreciated. To my little sister Rita, my ride or die, my confidence, my bestie for life. I cannot forget the numerous times you drove miles away to come help with the children whenever the need arose. This arduous work would not have been possible without you. This degree is for you! I am also thankful for your spouse Rachid's encouragement.

To my world, my beloved children, the twins Amine and Imara and their sister Lalla-Aisha, mommy is so proud of you. You have been such wonderful children through this journey. It has been challenging to juggle family, work and pursue a Ph.D. in a pandemic. However, you made things easy for us by being good kids. May you always be blessed! This dissertation is dedicated to you!

I would be remiss not to mention the support of my friends, loved ones, my colleagues in the department and staff at Penn State. I am also thankful to the Pan-African Professional Alliance (Pan-APA) at Penn State, which is a family to me and positively impacted this journey.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge my funders at Penn State. I am deeply indebted to the funds from the Bunton Waller and the Agricultural Economics, Sociology and Education Department (AESE) for fully funding this Ph.D. I am also indebted to the African Feminist Initiative (AFI) and Africana Research Center (ARC) scholarships. I am deeply indebted to these funders for their financial support, especially in alleviating some of the field trip expenses. You helped make this work a success!

“Mata²” Song recorded by Groupe Sogha³

I picked and translated this inspiring song with the permission of the Sogha group (see appendix A) as a homage to all the rural and urban women and girls. This song abounds the factual attribute and importance of women and girls in the community. The song is sung in four languages Hausa, Zarma, Tamashek and French and can be found on YouTube at this link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1eTJHbgR9oc&list=RD1eTJHbgR9oc&start_radio=1

Mata ajiyar Allah, suna da baiwa da yawa Allah ya ba su ba za su gazawa ba mata (Bis)

[Women, divine treasure, with enormous given potential, will never fail (Bis)]

Kama-mini in Kama mu ji daidai.

[Let's help each other and go together]

Wani alheri sai da mata yake shigowa a ji dadi...

[Some benefits will only come through woman so that we are happy...]

Allah she ne iko kun ga mata ma ya basu , Allah shi ke daraja kun ga mata ma ya basu ,

[Only God has the power, but also has given it to women.]

Ilimi ya ba mata, gida maza ne aka ba inci, amma basu kai su aje mata.

[God also gave Knowledge to women, within the home, the man has been given the right, however, he cannot do without a woman.]

Mata na cikin birni da kuma mata na cikin kauye ; ku dai ku rike allah. Kowa ya rike allah, ba Za ya tabe ba. Allah na kaunar shi, ga shi nan ga manzon allah , Fatima Nana tana kaunar ta ganshi domin kaunar allah, mata!

[Urban and rural women, have faith in God. Anyone who believes in God will not lose. [God would love him, as was the case of the prophet, or his wife Fatima Nana always experiences the desire to see him for his faith in God.]

² Mata means women in Hausa

³ Groupe Sogha is a musical group mainly composed of three women singers (Aichatou Ali Soumaila, Fati Hallidou, and Nana Mallam Garba) and some instrumentalist. Sogha means “beauty” in the Zarma-Songhay language.

*Mu ne sutura daji mu ne sutura a gida, labule mai sirrin daki. Duk darajar namiji in ya
xviiionad ba auren nan, kun san dai ya rage .*

[We are the bulwark in the bush and at home, we are the curtain, the privacy of the room.

Whatever the prestige of a man if he remains celibate be certain that he is diminished.]

*Mata haske daki ; namijin da duk ya shigo daki, in ya tarda ba matarshi, sai ka ya rude
hankalinai ya tashi, ya bututuce yana ta fada, to wannan babbar daraja ce da allah ya ba mata
Ku gani.*

[Women, light of the house; any man who returns home and does not find his wife,

Immediately he became dazed, worried, and growling all over the place. This testifies to
the great consideration that God has given to women. Do you see!]

Mata ajiyar allah ,suna da baiwa da yawa allah ya ba su ba za su gazawa ba mata ...

[Women, divine treasure, with enormous given potential, will never fail (Bis)]

*Irkoy na iri no darja. A ye ga iri no saaye. Iri no ga ti windi ra ganji. Iri ma tun ga kay care
bande. Zama ndunnaa barmey no. Jarfandey ye jaraway bon. Wayborey.*

[God has given us respect. And given us chance. We are the socle of the house. Let's be
united. The world has change women.

Mata ajiyar Allah, suna da baiwa da yawa Allah ya ba su ba za su gazawa ba mata

[Women, divine treasure, with enormous given potential, will never fail (Bis)]

Si vous nous entendez dire, mata! Wayborey tchidoden, on parle des femmes

[If you hear us say, mata! Woman]

Au-delà on parle de la jeune fille, wondiezey ain mata, tilliayaden.

[Beyond we speak about young girl]

Aujourd'hui on lutte pour l'équité, l'éducation des filles, le bonheur des femmes.

[Today we are fighting for equity, girls education, the happiness of women.]

Mata addini, mata! Mata soyeya, mata! Mata alheri, mata ! Mata sun mamaye duniya da sunan
bautar allah ...mata (Bis)

[women are religious, women! Women love, women! Women are grace, women!

Women have taken over the world in the name of worshiping God...women (Bis)]

I gonda suuru, i gonda amaana, i gonda bakaraw, wayborey (Bis)

[Women, they are patient, they are believer, they have compassion (Bis)

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“When women thrive, all of society benefits, and succeeding generations are given a better start in life.” —Kofi Annan

Women’s advancement and inclusion in society have been on the rise in many nations, but some countries still have not made significant improvements. The Niger Republic is one country in West Africa where gender inequality is still prevalent in contemporary times. Women and girls, particularly in the country’s Karkara⁴ communities, have faced decades of gender discrimination in the form of unequal access to critical social and natural resources, educational opportunities, and services. This inequality has prevented them from participating fully in society and the decision-making process, attaining leadership positions, and learning skills crucial to their well-being. As a result of these gender disparities, few women hold leadership positions in the male-dominated sectors of society.

The World Bank estimates that 83% of the people in Niger live in rural areas (2020) where the majority of residents participate in agricultural activities. Among those at the forefront of these activities are Karkara women, who contribute to a multitude of ways within their rural communities. They fully participate in agricultural actions that benefit the development of not only the community but also the country. In addition to the agricultural sector, women have a strong presence in other sectors of Nigerien society, including market-generating gardening and

⁴ Hausa word for rural/remote area

food processing activities, women's cooperatives or groups, leadership coaching, and development programs. These women and girls face challenges that include social and cultural norms, poverty, illiteracy, gender-based violence, patriarchy, and false interpretation of religious beliefs/practices. Consequently, women and girls lack the opportunity to feel that they can contribute to society and that their voices are heard, considered, or included in decision-making processes, be autonomous, all of which affect their ability to access leadership positions.

A recent report from the United Nations Development Program ranked Niger 154 out of 162 countries in terms of the Gender Inequality Index (UNDP, 2020). When Niger became independent from France in 1960, government leaders drew up a constitution that included statements in support of equal rights for women. In addition, the government has made progress in enhancing women's participation in many sectors, including the implementation in 2001 of the Quota Act (Alidou & Alidou, 2008). This was a plan proposed by the National Assembly of Niger in 2000 and signed into law by President Mamadou Tandja in 2001 as "La Loi sur le quota" or the Quota Act/Law (Alidou & Alidou, 2008; Kang, 2013). It stipulates, "When members of the cabinet and promotions in senior public service are announced, the proportion of either sex must not be less than 25 percent" (Assemblée Nationale du Niger, n.d.; Kang, 2013). The law's intent is to allow more representation of women in elective offices and institutions. This gender quota law was among the first of its kind in African nations (Kang, 2013). The result of the law has been an increase in women's participation in many sectors, including government, from 10% at the time of the law's passage to 25% today.

However, there is still persistent inequality in women's positions. Despite the intent of this important policy, the Quota Law has hardly been fully respected since its implementation. Even less, it does not necessary apply to women and young girls in rural areas who are mostly

illiterate or do not have a higher education. This perpetual lack of inclusion and impartiality towards women's representation is also seen within the most recent government formation of 2021. Of the 42 members of the new government, only seven are women. This means only 16.6% of women are represented instead of the 25% that the law requires. It is apparent that, in spite of the law, institutionalized practices are preventing women and girls from fully participating in the social, economic, and political aspects of life. As a result, more weight is added to the marginalization, misrepresentation and exclusion of women and girls. These numbers are a tangible indication that women in Niger continue to be underrepresented despite the policies in place. Given the unique perspectives of women and the need to incorporate their lived experiences in the context of this research, a qualitative case study was conducted. In order to understand the phenomenon of women marginalization within the Nigerien society, the researcher undertook a case study inquiry focusing particularly on rural women and girls in Keita, Birni-Konni, and Tabalak—all three within the region of Tahoua in Niger—to investigate the importance of women and girls' perceptions of leadership. These geographical sites are important and strategic in shaping the identity of rural areas in Niger, as well as the essential roles these women and girls play within their given context.

Statement of the Problem

There is a dearth of published literature on rural women and girls in Niger. Moreover, there is limited literature on leadership, especially regarding rural women and girls. In contemporary times, developmental programs have recommended that women's participation is vital in any process, and their leadership roles add value to the progress of all nations. However,

in Niger, extensive research on this phenomenon is lacking, mainly with rural women and girls. Many published works within the Nigerien context stress women's underrepresentation within urban settings with a centered analysis on administrative, political, and governmental leadership roles. Research in these areas often focuses on the 1990s democratization era, struggles of Muslim women, and agency within a patriarchal society (Alidou, 2005). Additional research is necessary to understand Karkara women's and girls' perceptions about participating in leadership positions as a vector of empowerment for themselves and future generations. According to the United Nations, development programs, initiatives, and partnerships have proven that empowering women and girls is fundamental for gender equality, realizing women's and girls' rights, and contributing to a country's progress and sustainable development (UN Women, 2022; United Nations, 2019).

As a result of their inclusion in society, they are more likely to participate in decision-making, obtain an education, work, and contribute to the economic, political, and cultural development of the nation. Further, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres stressed that "women's empowerment and gender equality are essential to global progress" in his message for the 2019 International Women's Day (United Nations, 2019).

Nigerien women and girls face various challenges that hinder them from realizing their full potential. Many of these challenges are related to poverty, lack of financial means and support from the government, illiteracy, gender inequality, child marriage, and early and forced marriage, among others. According to UNICEF (2018), Niger has the highest prevalence of child marriage globally. This practice comes with undesirable consequences such as serious health issues (HIV, sexually transmitted diseases, and obstetric fistulation); maternal mortality; premature deliveries; school dropout; and poverty. These consequences, in return, affect the life

of the young girl, her family, community, and the whole nation. Studies show that three out of four girls in Niger are married before their 18th birthday and one in four before 15 (Brides, 2019). For many girls, marriage means leaving school, being a teen mother, and being unable to make decisions for themselves.

Additionally, faced with a lack of access to health care, education, and social infrastructures, women and girls within rural areas bear a significant part of the burden of household activities defined by gender norms and roles inherent in their communities. These gender norms (often guided by the false misinterpretation of Islam in the context of Niger) expect women to stay at home and be the guardians and caregivers of their children and husbands. This widens the existing inequality gaps in society and potentially influences women's low participation rates in leadership opportunities and activities that would improve their access to resources. Studies suggest that gender equality is indispensable for any society to ensure its sustainable development. According to United Nations General Assembly's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, gender equality is a human right, and no one should be left out (United Nations, n.d.).

In September 2015, the United Nations, along with 193 countries across the globe (including Niger), agreed on 17 new goals called the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals continue what was started by the original Millennium Development Goals, established in 2000 (United Nations, 2015). Gender equality and women's empowerment were among the original Millennium Development Goals and remained a fundamental part of the new goals.

As a fundamental human right, gender equality is also an indispensable foundation for societies' development, economic growth, peace, prosperity, and a more sustainable world. An

empowered woman is a critical aspect of achieving gender equality. Women play a vital role in the overall development and flourishing of their families as they are the primary caregivers of their families and when they are empowered, valued, and supported they are able to impact their families and upcoming generations in areas such as economic opportunities, quality healthcare, entrepreneurship, awareness, and protection of their rights, and aspirations for leadership roles.

Within the Nigerien context, the broader concept of leadership is an emergent notion that lately has been gaining attention and is especially being embraced and pursued by youth who want to be involved in entrepreneurial activities. This newfound attention to leadership is primarily exhibited in urban locations and seen less in rural areas. Leadership in Niger remains a male-dominated space where men still hold most top positions and are at the forefront of decision making. If disregarded, this phenomenon will continue to create gender inequality and exclude women, particularly those in remote rural areas. Importantly, women's empowerment is challenged without women's autonomy; yet, as noted above, societal pressures have caused many women to give up on their autonomy in order to accommodate others. This creates an impediment to their empowerment.

Significance of the Study

This study provides insight into how Karkara women and girls perceive leadership opportunities and how that can contribute to their empowerment. As pointed out above, the notion of rural women and girls' leadership has not garnered much attention in the Karkara regions of Niger. The research will contribute to the literature and help close the gap in knowledge about Karkara women and girls within the scope of leadership and autonomy. The study primarily seeks to understand and explore women's and girls' perceptions of leadership

positions as a vector of empowerment in selected regions of Birni N’Konni, Keita, and Tabalak, all in the Tahoua region. Understanding these perceptions is key in addressing the issues of gender disparities, helping women and girls achieve their full potential, creating strategic programs geared toward their needs, and encouraging their participation in the country's development.

Research Question and Objectives

The purpose of the research is to explore Karkara women and girls’ views toward leadership positions, and toward the role of leadership in empowering women. To accomplish this, the study seeks to address the following four research objectives:

1. Understand Karkara women’s and adolescent girls’ perceptions of leadership and willingness to participate in leadership positions, focusing on leadership in the community and in women’s groups or associations.
2. Explore the factors and opportunities that can empower and influence other women and girls to take leadership positions, as well as the factors that leverage or contribute to their participation.
3. Understand the barriers that prevent women and girls from acquiring and participating in leadership positions.
4. Understand the support systems and resources that women and girls need to participate in leadership roles.

Definitions of Terms and Concepts

Defining key terms is an integral constituent of contextualizing terms and concepts used within the study. These terms include particular theoretical constructs and operational definitions that differ from colloquial definitions or schools of thought and discipline. For purposes of the study, the researcher provides key terms that have a unique or specific meaning in a context and that are necessary to understand the actual meaning. Given the geographic location, populations, and language in which the study was conducted, it is necessary to understand the contextualized meaning of these terms and how they are operationalized in this study. A theoretical definition of each concept is centered and grounded within the African and Nigerien conception of the research inquiry. The concepts of leadership and empowerment, which are germane to the research design, will be operationally defined for the study objectives.

Adolescent girl

The purpose of this section is to provide a definition of the girls who are a subgroup of my research population. I derive my definition of “adolescent girl” from the work of two international multinational organizations: the African Union, a body devised to support economic and societal growth across the African states, and the United Nations. These two organizations’ definitions are useful given the social complexities of this particular rural youth population in Niger. The African Union defines youth as individuals between the chronological ages of 15 and 35 (Gyimah-Brempong & Kimenyi, 2013; United Nation Youth, 2013). UN Youth, 2008); the UN recognizes that there are no universally accepted definitions of adolescence and youth, but frames “adolescents” as persons ages 10–19 and “youth” as those between the ages of 15 and 24.

For the purposes of this study, I define adolescent girls as those between 10 and 24 years of age. This definition is most appropriate for my research given the holistic nature in which it defines young people, which considers the social and cultural context of African societies and how youth are socialized into communities and the greater culture at large.

Autonomy

Autonomy⁵, as used in most studies, is a person's capacity to act independently by making their own choices and decisions apart from the authority of others (Osamor & Grady, 2016; Basu, 1992). This includes, for instance, having the capacity to go places, work, or make decisions regarding one's household without asking anyone's permission or pressure.

Dyson and Moore (1983) define autonomy as the technical, social, and psychological ability to obtain information and use it as the basis for making decisions about one's life.

Although women's autonomy is commonly stated in many studies, no sole conventional definition represents the multidimensionality of that autonomy. This study defines autonomy as a woman's ability to decide independently what she wants to accomplish in different spheres of her life. As noted above, autonomy implies freedom, and in many societies, including Niger, the status of women often limits their autonomy and ability to make decisions concerning many aspects of their own lives. Many societies still have solid social structures that strictly define the roles of men and women, usually set in religious, cultural, and social traditions. These constraints often limit the circumstances under which women can be autonomous. As a result, it is crucial to note that a woman cannot be empowered without autonomy.

⁵ Autonomy, also known as autonomization within the francophone world

Empowerment

Empowerment has become a key concept in international development but lacks a clear definition (Hennink, et al.2012), Narayan (2005) framed empowerment as expanding freedom of choice and action to shape one's life. Empowerment in this study is operationalized and grounded as women's and girls' ability to be self-sufficient, make decisions for themselves and their families, and be involved in the decision-making process in their communities. Empowerment is necessary for women's leadership. Kabeer (1999) framed women's empowerment as a "process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability in terms of three interrelated dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements."

Further, Eyben et al. (2008) stated that empowerment is essentially about power. This power refers to one's capability to find the courage and do something, and it emanates from working with others to achieve set goals. Considering that empowerment also means power, I avoid using the word "power" in referring to the empowerment of women within the context of this research. This is because the term is controversial and even menacing in the development of policy and praxis and can have different meanings and perspectives to various groups of people (Eyben et al., 2008). Based on this contextual framing, my research defines empowerment as the ability for women and girls to become self-sufficient and make decisions for themselves and their families.

Hausa

The Hausa language is one of the most prominent languages in Africa and belongs to the Western Chadic branch of the Afro Asiatic family. The Hausa language is spoken in the Republic of Niger and neighboring countries such as Nigeria, Benin, and Burkina Faso, as well as several other African countries (Newman, 2000; Newman, 2022). The Hausas are one of the largest and most culturally influential ethnic groups in Africa, reflecting the impact of the widely spoken language throughout West Africa.

While some Hausa are Christian, the majority are Muslim (Echard, 1991). The population of Tahoua, the selected region of the study, is majority Hausa and speaks the Hausa language. It is essential to include this definition to provide more context about the Hausa ethnic group and their spoken language of communication, the Hausa. The majority of the population in the department of Tahoua and selected sites are also Hausa. In addition, all the interview sessions conducted were in Hausa, and the researcher also spoke the language.

Karkara

Karkara is a Hausa word meaning a rural area that is settled and farmed (Newman & Newman, 2007). This word is used in Hausa to describe remote areas, the countryside, or isolated villages, as opposed to towns or cities. Within the urban capital city of Niamey, there are areas that also fall under the definition of Karkara; these areas are parts of areas or quarters such as Koira Tegui, Saga, and Lamordé, that resemble the characteristics of a village or countryside. This concept of Karkara in my research will apply to the rural identity of women and youth girls living in remote areas (defined above) of the Tahoua regions.

Leadership

Leadership is a term for which there is no universal definition. It is broadly defined by Northouse (2019) as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.” Many African women have held and continue to hold leadership positions in their societies as mothers, presidents, directors, CEOs, queens, or queen mothers⁶, amazons (warriors), and princesses. Therefore, within the scope of this study, I use an indigenous definition of leadership. Indigenous leadership implies that everyone in the community works together to fulfill a common goal and the official leader encourages and engages the followers to exert mutual influence (McCall, 2020; Aliye, 2020; Eyong, 2017).

Indigenous leadership promotes equity for the group because those who are at the center, not just the people at the top, are a part of the decision making at the top (Aliye, 2020; Eyong, 2017).

This study will provide a framework and approach to leadership emanating from Karkara Nigerien women’s and girls’ perceptions. The term “leadership” within the Karkara setting is mainly associated with holding a leadership role within the community, such as in women’s groups or associations and organized group activities working for the community by the community members themselves.

Woman

The term “woman” refers to a person who is an adult female (Meyer, 2015). Womanhood is most often defined as the stage that a female reaches after passing through childhood, puberty,

⁶ Women of power and leaders.

and adolescence. For this research, women are defined as adult females between the ages of 25 and 60.

Overview of Karkara Adolescent Girls and Women: experienced inequalities and marginalization

Many vulnerable groups (for instance people living in extreme poverty) live in Niger, with Karkara women and girls in rural areas being the largest and most vulnerable group. Their vulnerability is dynamic and takes the form of including food insecurity, health issues, lack of access to education, and underdeveloped social networks among other problems. The effect of this marginalization is that these women and girls lack agency and a clear idea of how to navigate their role as pillars in their communities outside their homes. Their disenfranchised status exposes them to a variety of gender-based inequalities manifested at structural, economic, social, and political levels in society.

Structural level

As noted, Nigerien young girls and women experience gender inequality and marginalization at varying levels; this is especially true for the ones in Karkara areas. First, at a structural level, the Karkara population experiences inequality with the absence of and difficult access to adequate resources and infrastructures such as health care locations, schools, access to adequate road, transportation, insufficient government support and investment and means of production such as land, credit, and technology (Doka et.al, 2014; Diarra & Monimart, 2006).

In addition, they also face difficult access to public services and opportunities compared to their counterparts in urban areas. The challenges of accessing the types of infrastructure

mentioned above create a lack of awareness of what is available for overcoming some of the societal inequalities that these women and girls experience daily.

Societal level

At a societal level, women and young girls experience inequality, marginalization, and, to some extent, oppression within the society due to certain traditional sociocultural practices combined with the patriarchal system. Some of these practices are discriminatory toward females and relegate them to a state of inferiority compared to men. For example, starting at a young age, boys are given more opportunities to schooling and most of the time men are the ones that are delegated to lead and be up front.

Along with these discriminatory practices, from an example of a societal practice or norm women are expected to be submissive and subordinate to men. As a result of these practices, a situation engendered by the systematic subjugation of the female gender is created, accentuating the existing patriarchal system, where men are the “ones” who are given more chances socially and encouraged to think of themselves as superior to women. Consequently, women are excluded from decision making at the family, community, and national levels. These issues are more acute within the Karkara setting, where tradition and the social cultural practices are more rigorously guarded and accentuate the marginalization the female gender experiences at different levels. Beyond this, Nigerien women and girls often experience gender-based violence, including both sexual and physical violence (such as intentional assault and battering), female genital mutilation (FGM), physical psychological violence, verbal abuse, early and frequently forced marriage of adolescent girls, rape, and polygamy (Sall & Internationale, 2015). In Niger, traditional practitioners continue to carry out the practice of FGM, although this illegal practice

is less widespread in recent decades due to greater awareness and sanctions such as prison sentences and fines, from the government institutions, local and traditional leaders in order to forbid and ban these horrible practices. During the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent quarantine, these practices (mainly physical, psychological, and verbal abuse) unfortunately became even more prevalent. Studies have shown a recurrence of the situation, which demands pressing action from the international community (Laouan, 2020; Benton, et.al., 2021). In the longer run, we may experience another dimension of the scourge.

Economic level

At the economic level, poverty, unemployment, and economic vulnerability add another layer of inequality and marginalization, contributing to gender violence, primarily among women (World Bank, 2020). The World Bank estimates that 42.9% of the Nigerien population in 2020 lived in extreme poverty, with the majority being women (The World Bank, 2021.). This feminization of poverty has a direct impact on women, such as their health, life expectancy, and overall well-being. Recent studies have also noted that in Niger, poverty affects women more than men which also contributes to gender inequalities (World Bank, 2020; International Monetary Fund African Dept, 2017; United Nations, n.d.; Robinson, 2015). An example of this is the Nigerien unemployment rate, which is twice as high among women than among men (World Bank, 2020). Further, women are poorly represented in economic activities and professional and administrative spheres, and, in turn, political spheres.

Political level

At the political level, inequality and marginalization are manifested in the absence or underrepresentation of women in high political and administrative positions and in elective functions. Women thus lack involvement in decision-making and the development of policies, including ones that affect them directly. This institutionalized inequality creates a stereotype based on the type of job relegated to women and, therefore, a perception that certain higher-level responsibilities are best suited to men (thus a masculinization of higher-level positions) . Although the Quota Act, as noted above, was well-intended and resulted in some progress, in reality it has not been widely enforced and not effective as some hoped, as many organizations and government entities simply ignore it.

Overview of Niger Republic

Providing contextual background and information on the country of Niger as well as the specific location of the study is key to understanding how these definitions were framed and why they were applied to this research. In the following sections, I provide information on the country's location, geopolitics, population, ethnicity, and resources. These components provide further context and ground the essential background information of the country under investigation, especially for readers with no prior knowledge of the Niger Republic. They also provide insight into the significance of the research.

Location

The Republic of Niger is a Francophone West African country located in the Sahel⁷. It is a landlocked country with an area of 1,267,00 Km² (approximately twice the size of Alaska) and is among the largest countries in the world. Three-fourths of the country is covered by deserts, such as the Ténéré, one of the most famous deserts in the world. The country is divided into eight regions: Agadez, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéri, Zinder, Diffa, and Niamey. The capital and largest city is Niamey. Niger is bordered by Algeria and Libya to the north, by Chad to the east, by Nigeria (a country often confused with the Republic of Niger) and Benin to the south, and by Mali and Burkina Faso to the west (see figure 1.1 map of Niger and neighboring countries). This location within the African continent contributes to its political, religious, and cultural landscapes. In addition, as a landlocked Sahelian country, the country faces many climatic constraints such as drought and desertification, low precipitation, a long dry season, and a short rainy season (about three months, depending on the region). All these phenomena constitute a burden on the population and contribute to the weakening of the soil and the degradation of natural resources.

⁷ Sahel or Sahil in Arabic literally means "coast, shore," a reference to the southern edge of the vast Sahara.

Figure 1-1: Map of Niger (WorldAtlas, 2021)



Population and Ethnicity

In 2021 the population was estimated at over 24 million with less than 20% of the population living in the major cities. At the current growth rate, the population is estimated to surpass 50 million people by 2041 and 100 million by 2068 (Niger population, 2022 live). Women constitute more than half of the population, and the fertility rate in 2020 was 6.74 children per woman. A former French colony, the Republic of Niger gained its independence from France on August 3, 1960; French is still the official language.

There are a number of different ethnic groups in Niger. The primary ones (Institut National de la Statistique, 2009) are as follows, with the percentage of the overall population they constitute listed in parentheses:

- the Hausa (55.4%), the majority ethnic group, living primarily in the southern part of the country;

- the Djerma-Songhai (21%), the second largest ethnic group, occupying the southwest part of the country;

- the Tuaregs (9.3%), living mainly in the north;

- the Fulani (8.5%), distributed throughout the country;

- the Kanouris and the Boudoumas (4.7%), living mainly in the southeast;

- the Gourmantchés (0.4%) in the far west;

- the Toubous (0.4%), mainly in the southeast; and

- the Arabs (0.04%), distributed mainly in the northeast and in the capital Niamey

(Institut National de la Statistique, 2009).

This ethnic diversity fosters the practice and expressions of joking relationship (also known as cousinhood) and is at the heart of cultural diversity of the country. This practice is also common among West African countries and has been acknowledged by UNESCO as a cultural heritage.

Resources

The natural resources that abound in the country are uranium, oil, gold, coal, iron, limestone, and phosphates, among others. These resources are seen by the world as of high value. Yet, the UN's Human Development Index (HDI) has consistently ranked the country as

one of the poorest in Sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, in spite of the country's natural resources and its partnerships with the Western world in exploiting these resources there is still a dichotomy within the population, between the "haves" and the "have nots," for example the richest and the poorest. And, as noted earlier, women and girls experience that differential even more acutely.

Political and Historical Context of Feminism in the Republic of Niger

In the Republic of Niger, from the time it gained its independence in 1960 to the present day, much ink has been spilled about women's involvement in decision making. Although initiatives, strategies, and even laws have been put in place to encourage women's participation, women are still underrepresented in top leadership positions. Yet some women continue to advocate courageously for women's inclusion and to improve and extend women's rights and roles within society through feminist or women's organizations.

In Niger it is difficult to trace the trajectory of rural women's feminism trajectory for several reasons, including the lack of documentation, the fact that most rural women's contributions were made in the shadows, and women's lack of literacy. However, it is essential to provide a general historical context of the Nigerian female struggle, which lays the groundwork for what women have done collectively in shaping their future. Therefore, I focus on the political context by examining the historical events that took place through a series of political regimes described below. This information allows one to see the progression of Nigerian women's nonrepresentation within crucial positions in the government, their often-acknowledged invisible power, and the gradual change that emerged where few women began to be represented at higher positions. This historical context will also help the reader understand

and make links between the past and present regarding Nigerien women's general situations and representation in Niger, as well as the place that rural women hold.

It is important to note that this historical narrative focuses specifically on the role of past regimes and events in helping understand women's progress. A significant amount of literature (Hamani, 2001; Alidou, 2005; Tidjani et al., 2015; Koudizé, 2019; Association Des Femmes Juristes De Niger, 2015; Gado, 2021; Idrissa & Decalo 2012) helped to inform this section. This section has further been reinforced with recorded interviews and conversations with Nigerien emeritus professors, historians, political scientists, sociologists, journalists, and scholars who graciously offered to help.

The invisible women (first republic, 1960–1974)

Diori Hamani was the first president of the Niger Republic, ruling the country for 14 years. At the national level, a significant empowering movement of Nigerien women emerged from the Union of Niger Women (*Union des Femmes du Niger*, or UFN), which had been created in 1959 and is known as the first association in Niger to advocate for women's rights. The UFN was initially designed for Nigerien women to be present at the World Conference of Women, decreed by the United Nations (Alidou, 2005; Hassimi et al., 2011); however, as a result of the conference, the focus became the need to focus on women's rights more generally. This initiative was driven by the former president's wife, Aissa Diori, who at that time was the head of the UFN. She advocated for women's and youth rights, particularly the schooling of rural nomadic children, and served as a spokesperson for women throughout the country (Gado, 2021). Despite her role in advancing women's rights, it should be noted that during her husband's presidency, no women were represented in the government. However, as noted during

my interviews with scholars, emeritus professor Boureima Alpha Gado and retired journalist and writer Aboubacari Kio Koudizé, although women were not represented within the government, they played a significant role by the side of their spouses who held top leadership roles. For instance, one of the most prominent figures was the first lady, Aissata Diori, who was seen by her entourage as her husband's main and confidential advisor. On trips throughout his entire presidency, she was always with him (Emeritus Boureima Alpha Gado, personal conversation, August 20, 2022; Aboubacari Kio Koudizé, August 31, 2022). This showed the often-invisible role of advisor and guide played by women. Nevertheless, the physical absence of female officials was evidence of a patriarchal society and government where women were excluded, and their empowerment was not a priority of the government agenda. This first regime was terminated with a coup d'état on April 15, 1974.

The forgotten women (military transition regime, 1974–1987)

The transition into the military regime of General Seyni Kountché, the second president of the Niger Republic, marked a period of women being forgotten in the country. Kountché's reign was that of a dictatorship, manifested by a ruler with an autocratic style of leadership. During this period, the AFN became the Association of Niger Women (*Association des Femmes du Niger*," or AFN) and was the only women's association during that time led by a woman: Fatoumata Diallo (Gado, 2021). Among the purposes of the AFN was to protect the rights of women, promote Nigerien women's integration in development actions, educate them about their civic rights, and foster fraternity, solidarity, and friendship among all women (Tidjani et al., 2015; Hassimi et al., 2011, 2011; Alidou, 2005). The government of Kountché provided support to women, particularly in development actions such as literacy, access to education, health

improvement, family planning, economic opportunities, poverty eradication, and overall promotion of women's rights. However, despite this support, the Kountché regime did not appoint any women to leading governmental or political roles (Hassimi et al.,2011; Alidou, 2005). In addition, women under his leadership were not invited to participate in key decision-making at various levels in society. Then, with Kountché's death and the start of the Second Republic, this persistent phenomenon of non-representation began to shift and take a different turn.

Nigerien women in solidarity (second republic, 1987–1992)

After the death of Seyni Kountché in 1987, his chief of staff, Colonel Ali Saïbou, was designated unanimously by the Supreme Military Council to succeed him as the third president of the Republic of Niger. With a sudden regime change, it took about two years to institutionalize a new Constitution under a new republic known as the Second Republic. Women within that transition period were also finding ways to be involved in political parties and women's organizations activities. For instance, women were fully involved in the actions and activities concerning their own development and emancipation.

Ali Saïbou, compared to his predecessor, was less firm and more willing to listen to the people. On this account, he was named by the Nigerien people as *l'homme de la décrispation*, the “man of relaxation or easing” who was carrying an open political path different from beforehand (Apard, 2015). In keeping with his relaxed temperament, leadership style, and vision for unity, Saïbou released political prisoners, allowed the return of opponents in exile, and abolished the political police. His actions also translated to a favorable environment and opportunity for the AFN to present their complaints. Saïbou also became the first sitting

president to appoint women to top leadership positions: In 1987, Diallo Fatoumata became the first female deputy, followed by Moumouni Aissata, the first female minister (Hassimi et al.,2011; Alidou, 2005). An additional significant development followed in 1990–1991, which was the time when most social movements in the country began to emerge. One example of this is the historic women’s march that took place on May 13, 1991, organized by the AFN. Many women were unhappy with the government that fought for their advancement but excluded them from political discussions, notably the Preparatory Commission for the historic Sovereign National Conference to be held on July 29, 1991. Consequently, women stormed the commissioner’s building, resulting in vigorous negotiations between the prime minister and the women of AFN. Subsequently, four women were appointed to the Preparatory Commission, in addition to the one woman initially selected (Alidou, 2005; Idrissa & Decalo, 2012). The date of May 13, 1991 marked the effective entry of Nigerien women into the democratic process, and since then, Nigerien Women’s Day has been celebrated every year on May 13.

Examples of the gains resulting from the AFN’s efforts include the creation of the National Committee for the Development of the Family Code, the creation of the Board for the Status of Women, a secretary of state for social affairs and women’s groups, and women’s participation in the development of the Rural Code. The AFN’s efforts were crowned in 1987 with the creation of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Promotion of Women, or *Ministère des Affaires Sociales et de la Promotion de la Femme* (Hassimi et al.,2011). The ministry is called today the Ministry of Promotion of Women and the Child Protection (*Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Protection de L’Enfant*). Since its inception, a woman has always held the position of minister of that office. In addition, between 1988 and 1991, the government

appointed four women to minister (i.e., cabinet-level) positions and five as deputies out of the 83 in the parliament (Association Des Femmes Juristes De Niger, 2015).

The Sovereign National Conference mentioned above represented another major event under the Second Republic that played an important role in the women's lives. The primary purposes of the conference were as follows:

- review three decades of governance (the governance of Diori Hamani, Seyni Kountché, and Ali Sabou) and the extensive impact of their actions across all sectors of national life;
- determine collective and individual responsibilities and draw lessons from them;
- establish new perspectives on the political, economic, and sociocultural life of the country and, at the same time, break away from the previous leadership;
- introduce new perspectives of law to be used as the basis for the future constitution and other fundamental texts; and
- establish the electoral calendar and set up a transitional government (Koudizé, 2019).

Hence, from July 29, 1991, to November 3, 1991 (a period of 98 days), the Sovereign National Conference was able to install institutions to manage the democratic transition (Apard, 2015; Koudizé, 2019). Nigeriens used this time to have their voices heard in a blunt discussion of issues such as poor governance, lack of freedom of expression, nepotism, corruption, and lack of personal accountability in the conduct of state affairs (Koudizé, 2019). Therefore, the outcome of the conference was positive for women in many respects. The first grassroots-initiated women's association was freely created in Niger, adding to the AFN. That organization, the Democratic Women's Rally of Niger (*Rassemblement Démocratique des Femmes du Niger*, or RDFN), was created and directed by Bayard Gamatié Mariama. Later, in 2011, she would become the first

woman to run for president in Niger; although she did not win, her actions were seen as a victory for Nigerien women (Hassimi et al., 2011). In addition, following the National Conference, some women were fighting to participate and have their presence felt within all sectors: social, political, religious, and economical. During that struggle, a number of associations were created, including the Action for Integrated Rural Development (*Action pour le Développement Rural Intégré*), the Coordination of Nigerien Women's NGOs and Associations (*la Coordination des ONG et associations féminines nigériennes* or CONGAFEN), and the Association of Women Lawyers in Niger (*L'Association des Femmes Juristes du Niger* or AFJN); these associations continue today. Despite these important developments, women still did not achieve full empowerment; one major reason cited is a lack of awareness of women's rights among women themselves as well as the men (ACHPR, 2011).

Another important outcome of the National Conference was the emergence of democracy and the introduction of multipartyism, which didn't exist before, as previous leaders ran uncontested. The observation was that the single party was reluctant to see women in politics, which leads one to think that the doors for women were blocked by their counterparts—men who control the access to it (Hamani, 2001). Therefore, with the arrival of democracy and multipartyism, new political parties were created, and women were able to play a role in the electoral process, traveling across the country to influence and mobilize others to participate in the development of the nation. As underlined by Cheiffou Amadou, the elected prime minister, in his conference closing speech: “The National Conference in an unsuspected surge of patriotism was able to come to the end of all the pitfalls, thus offering to the world the image of a mature, generous, and responsible nation” (Koudizé, 2019, p. 40). Because of this new spirit of political freedom and women's inclusion, the country held its first democratic elections in

February 1993, effectively ending the Second Republic and ushering in a democratic government.

The awakening of Nigerien women (third republic, 1993–1996)

Following the first democratic election, in which women fully participated as voters and in the election process, Mahamane Ousmane (leader of the Democratic and Social Convention–Rahama political party) was proclaimed as the third president of the Republic of Niger (Oliver, 2016). About 10 days after the inauguration, the newly created women’s organization RDFN, mentioned earlier and presided over by Bayard Gamatié Mariama, held its first statutory congress in Niamey. Among the organization’s commitments were the following:

- defend women against all forms of discrimination;
- promote education for girls and adults to combat illiteracy;
- work to improve the living and working conditions of women, particularly female rural workers, by alleviating domestic work;
- elevate the intellectual, civic, and moral standing of women;
- promote the appointment of women to high-ranking positions;
- initiate the creation of women’s associations and groups based on interest areas; and
- develop links between the association’s members and other associations that share the same goals (Koudizé, 2019, p. 40).

Nigerien women started to be present on the national and international scene. At the national level, their participation in the country’s first organized democratic election in 1993 was warmly applauded. Women for the first time were able to cast their ballots massively. Their integration into the political life was also seen at the international level, with Nigerien women

participating in the International Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995. Despite these important high points, most women's work and contributions were underrepresented and not given enough recognition. Within the government, for instance, only five women were appointed out of the 28 high-ranking officials. The government during this period experienced "cohabitation," a divided government resulting from strong disagreements among government members. Consequently, during the cohabitation era, the government was dissolved and then reconstructed. Of the 16 top officials appointed to the newly created government, only two were women. Ultimately, this era was not favorable for women, who saw their representation in the government reduced and their voices disregarded in solving the issues the country was experiencing.

In short, the political environment under this republic was unstable, and the population constantly complained about issues such as the freezing of salary arrears, strikes by state workers, student protests, the armed rebellion, several motions of censure within the government, and even resignations of government members (Idrissa & Decalo, 2012; Koudizé, 2019). Within these moments of tensions, the awakening of women began to be felt as they united in solidarity to protest for their rights.

Women in the struggle (second military transition regime, January 1996–August 1996)

The chaos the country was experiencing during the Third Republic led to a military coup d'état on January 27, 1996, by the Niger Defense Force (*Force Armée Nigérien* or FAN) headed by Colonel Ibrahim Mainassara Baré, who then took the reins of the state (Idrissa & Decalo, 2012; Koudizé, 2019). When the 24-person transitional government was formed, four women were among the government members. In this circumstance of political and economic

uncertainty, women understood the need for solidarity to empower each other, particularly economically. Consequently, the Women's Savings and Credit Mutual (*Mutuelle d'Epargne et de Credit des Femmes* or MECREF) was created (Koudizé, 2019). The credit mutual was a free and voluntary association of women who decided to put their savings together to help each other. In addition, Nigerien women involved themselves further in the next democratic election.

New dawn for Nigerien women (fourth republic, August 1996–April 1999)

After a disputed democratic presidential election, General Ibrahim Maïnassara Baré claimed victory and became the fifth head of state of the Niger Republic. Baré declared his action in “the dynamics of concord and gathering” (Koudizé, 2019). However, only three women were part of this new 24-person government. Baré did have a plan for addressing girls' education: As part of his presidential platform, he established a committee in Niamey on October 7, 1996, dedicated to giving girls the opportunity to go to school (Koudizé, 2019). Baré's ambition for his country and for uplifting girls came to an end when he was assassinated on April 9, 1999. With his death, the advancement of women and girls in the country came to a halt.

Women as observers (third military transition regime, April 1999–August 1999)

After the assassination of President Baré, described by the perpetrators as an “unfortunate accident,” Daouda Malam Wanké, the squadron leader and head of the presidential guard, became head of state. Thus, the wheels continued to turn as in previous years after a coup d'état, followed by a dissolution of the government and the national assembly and the country's necessity to prepare for new elections. Once again women were underrepresented in the new

government, with only two women among the 24 total members. While the previous period marked a time for girls to be considered in the educational framework, the period that ensued did not bring about further gains for women.

Women in action (fifth republic, August 1999–August 2009)

After two turns of organized presidential elections in 1999, Mamadou Tandja of the National Movement for the Development of Society (MNSD-Nassara) was elected with 59.89% of the votes. His party also won the majority of 55 deputies out of 84 in parliament, with only one of them a woman. Mamadou Tandja's inauguration took place on December 22, 1999. He declared himself resolved to "redress the socioeconomic situation of Niger" one of the problems the country was facing. Under his republic the president instituted a quota system for the elective functions in the government and the administration of the state; one result was the election of two women to hold leadership roles in his administration. Among the appointees was the well-known Aïchatou Mindaoudou, named Minister of Foreign Affairs; she later became the first African woman to serve as the United Nations' Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire and Head of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). Within the second administration of the same fifth regime, four women were elected to the government out of the 28 members, resulting in a total of six women in office within a 10-year period. It should be noted that President Mamadou Tandja was reelected in December 2004 for a second term. Towards the end of his second term, he wanted to run for a third term in order to continue and complete the projects and construction sites for stability and convenience reasons. *Tazartché* was the slogan used for a third mandate; in Hausa it means continuity or overstaying, which was appropriate given his focus on elevating future generations.

Implications for women (sixth republic, August 2009–February 2010)

Out of the 30 members of this government, seven were women. Within this period, the association called National Gathering of Women for the Development of Niger (*Rassemblement National des Femmes pour le Développement du Niger* or RNFD-Niger) was recognized by decree in February 2010. Among the association's aims were to contribute to the emergence of women, strengthen livestock and grassland capacities, and encourage rural women to fatten cattle. All of these aims were critical to the livelihood of women and contributed to their integration as full contributing members in society. However, this administration lasted for only six months as it was interrupted by yet another coup.

Period of ambiguity for women (fourth military transition regime, February 2010–November 2010)

On February 18, 2010, a coup d'état (the fourth in Niger's history) occurred, led by the squadron leader Salou Djibo, who also was head of the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (*Conseil Suprême pour la Restauration de la Démocratie*, or CSRD). He was described as a calm and shy man who would become the seventh president of Niger. Out of the 20 members of the new government, six were women. This government lasted only nine months, followed by organized presidential elections. While the election for a democratic transition was

scheduled under this regime, the agenda of women was quite silent as no major events reflecting societal improvements occurred.

Women in government (seventh republic, August 2011–February 2020)

During the presidential campaign of January 2011, for the first time, Bayard Mariama Gamatié—who ran as an independent—became Niger’s first female presidential candidate. The elections (first and second round) were organized between January and March 2011, from which the candidate of the Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism (commonly known as PNDS-Tarayya), Issoufou Mahamadou, emerged victorious and was inaugurated on April 7, 2011. The Seventh Republic ruled for two terms, a total of 10 years. Six women were appointed to the 24-person government during the first term and five in the second term; during this period, women also held other key positions such as ambassador, director, and national deputy. Collectively, these women were able to accomplish their assignments and missions with high honors and appreciations. Although these numbers were not adequate under the Quota Law enacted in 2001, the women holding these higher-level positions did their due diligence in advocating for more appointments of women to leadership positions.

Women’s dynamic (seven republic continue from April 2021 to 2022)

On April 3, 2021, for the first time in the history of Niger, a democratically elected president handed over power to another democratically elected president. Under the new presidency of President Mahamadou Bazoum, women were tangentially involved in the administration. Following the formation of Bazoum’s administration, seven women were elected

to ministerial positions as well as 51 women in the parliament and a few female ambassadors and deputies. While women applauded this democratic transition and the integration of more women in government, some were still dissatisfied with the lack of women across different associations; they went to the president to address the non-compliance with the Quota Law and the low number of women in the government. One of their demands of the president was to increase the quota percentage, in an effort to achieve greater parity in governmental leadership positions.

Summary of the republics and women's feminism in the Niger Republic

Since Niger's independence, the political instability in which four coups d'état occurred between 1974 and 2010 (with two other attempts within the Seventh Republic) slowed down the country's overall progress, especially with regard to the educational, social, and political development of women and girls. Although there have been steady, gradual changes over the years, the lack of women in the government underscores the need for greater progress. And while the government has been slow to heed the women's needs, both urban and particularly rural women worked mainly behind the scenes for a better future. It was only in 1991, with the preparation for the National Conference, that women really began to manifest themselves, for they felt neglected, forgotten, and marginalized in decision-making in regard to the future of the country (Idrissa & Decalo, 2012). By working together, these women created a radically different trajectory of history, from one when women did not occupy any levels of government (see Table 1-1) to one in which women play crucial roles in civil society. Over the years, women have gradually begun to fill key leadership roles such as ministers, ambassadors, deputies, and directors. Part of this growth was due to each administration's efforts to include women by following the Quota Law, and one of the critical markers of this law was later increased from

10% to 25% of women representation. Yet, this law is barely implemented, and the integration of women is further complicated by social, cultural, and religious obstacles that prevent women from actively participating in politics. Despite the fact that all Nigerien women have faced these obstacles, rural women have borne the brunt of the struggle to become fully integrated into society. Although rural women did not participate directly in these critical government and professional milestones, they contribute in their own way. They are often seen as “silent actors” (Gado, 2021) who fully contribute to the country’s development by uniting forces with other women and by furthering the economy through agriculture, livestock breeding, fishing, crafting, and various other income-generating activities.

The summary of different regimes demonstrates how women have been involved in political movements and how the creation of associations and organizations paved the way for other women, particularly in enabling their access to leadership positions. Women who participated in the development process and who were fortunate to hold leadership roles paved the way for others in addressing gender inequalities. Their rich contributions helped shape the course of the history of Nigerien women.

Table 1-1 : Women's representation within the government from independence (First Republic) to May 2022 (Seventh Republic). Source: (Hamani, 2001; Aboubacar, 2017).

Political Regimes	Number of women	Total members within the government
First Republic (1960–1974)	0	24 ministers
First military transition regime 1974–1987	0	24 ministers
Second Republic 1974–1993	4 Ministers 5 Deputies	24 total ministers Out of 83 deputies in the parliament
Third Republic 1993–1996	5 Ministers 2 Ministers	28 members 16 members
Second military transition regime January 1996–May 1996	4	24 members
Fourth Republic 1996–1999	3	24 members
Third military transition regime April 1999–August 1999	2	24 members
Fifth Republic 1999–2009	2 (first government term) 4 (second government term)	24 members 28 members
Sixth Republic August 2009–February 2010	7	30 members

Fourth military transition regime		20 members
February 2010–November 2010	6	
	6 women (first government term)	24 members
Seventh Republic August 2009–February 2010	5 (second government term)	24 members
2010		
Seventh Republic continues April 2021 to May 2022	7	24 members

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The overall literature justifying the research objectives is grounded in women's roles and status primarily within Africa, and the Nigerien context in particular. To explore African women's perception of leadership within the Sahelian context, the literature I focus on examines (1) gender construction within the African context, and African women identities (roles and status), in the precolonial era; (2) the society's cultural, traditional, and religious norms and beliefs that prevent and diminish women's participation; and (3) the aftermath of colonialism in reshaping women's identities and particularly their participation in leadership roles. Derived from the literature, theories such as the African feminism theory, the intersectionality theory, the social theory, and leadership categorization theory guided the research theoretical framework. The review reveals the gaps in the literature as well as the unique angle I am taking to bridge these gaps in knowledge about Karkara women and girls' leadership within the Sahelian context of Niger. A conceptualization of leadership and empowerment, followed by a conceptual model, is also presented in this section.

Gender Construction and African Women's Identity: Pre-colonial and Postcolonial Era

It is important to understand that gender is often a social construct, meaning that societies assign certain roles to males and females for social, cultural, and traditional reasons. An example of a social construct related to gender is the idea that a particular color is for girls (pink for instance) or boys (blue for instance).

When we speak of gender as a societal construct, it is important to mention the work of John Money, who coined the concept of gender identity in 1966 (Money, 1994). He argued that society influences gender identity, causing divergences and hostility within societies. Similarly, Lorber (1994) provided a fundamental argument in her scholarship where she unpacked gender role construction within the general context of modern times. She referred to gender within a social institution as a *process* of constructing assigned and distinct social statuses and roles—hence the process creates the social differences that define “women” and “men.” She argued that men’s activities hold more esteem than women’s, even if the activities are the same or nearly so. In the scope of this research, it is important to highlight the social construct of gender because within African society and Nigerien society in particular, the role of women is often relegated to the home while men are seen as the “head” and assigned the role of “leader” within and outside the household (Alidou & Maiga, 2020). Colonization played a big role in this social construction of gender within the African society. For instance, in the Yoruba culture, Oyewumi in *The Invention of Women* (1997) decries that gender has been introduced and even more accentuated by the colonizer within the African communities. She highlights this concept by referencing the Oyo-Yoruba people in Nigeria, to show that “Yoruba people do not know gender” in the pre-colonial period. She states that the primary feature of the social hierarchy from the history of the Yoruba culture was age or seniority, not gender or body type. Yet Yoruba peoples acknowledged distinct reproductive roles—*obìnrin* (female) and *òkunrin* (male)—without using them to establish social hierarchy and distribute power. Hence females and males are viewed as a totality rather than exclusive where one gender is superior to the other. Consequently, Oyewumi argues that women were not viewed as being subordinate to their male counterparts in pre-colonial Nigeria but as central to the preservation and continuation of life through their reproductive

roles. Oyewumi also pushes us to deeply dissect the multifaceted legacies of colonialism anchored within African societies, particularly with the example she uses of the Yoruba in Nigeria. Lorber (2005) asserts that colonization created gendered division into colonized countries moving from the standing parallel roles to women's subordination. In other words, coloniality has shifted women's identity and has rigorously impacted African societies.

Throughout the pre-colonial cultural system, women in Africa were not considered subordinates. Instead, they had complementary participation roles, and many assumed leadership roles. These roles were distinguished and diverse, such as chiefs and queens/queen mothers, and were highly respected leadership roles across different parts of Africa (Strobel, 1982; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). In the same framework, Alidou (2005) also argues that French colonization combined with other factors such as the postcolonial educational structure, female domesticity, and the social construction of womanhood and wifehood identities reinforced women and girls' marginalization in Niger. Further supporting this idea that colonization impacted African societies, Oyewumi (2005) focuses on women's identity in Yoruba culture; the context she provides pushes scholars to consider gender within a broader lens in African women's gender discourse. The missing part of Oyewumi's work in women's identities has been captured by Alidou (2005) in *Engaging Modernity: Muslim Women and Politics of Agency in Postcolonial Niger*. Although Alidou did not focus on rural women, she provided an excellent snapshot and a captivating life experience of three prominent Muslim Nigerien women in the 21st century. Alidou focuses on these women's opportunities and obstacles as they attempt to realize their aspirations. She also provides the discourse of the meaning of modernity for Nigerien Muslim

women by being authentic in including her voice as a Nigerien scholar as she profiles these women.

The first woman depicted in Alidou's book is Malama A'ishatu Hamani, who was in her late 70s and was an Islamic scholar who taught in a home-based Qur'anic school called *Makaranta*. A'ishatu also served as a radio host, broadcasting information on Islamic education through sermons and poetry; however, the Afro-Islamic patriarchy did not allow her to expand her knowledge within the dialogue of Islamic knowledge apart from the women's issues program she was broadcasting. While we are not able to capture all of her life experiences as a woman, this particular example demonstrates how women's voices were not readily incorporated or heard in the greater society until the new century. With the profile of Malama A'ishatu, Alidou shows a different dimension of a woman by providing the perspective of motherhood—a state of being a mother from a woman who has not biologically give birth to a child but proudly claims the title of mother through the students she taught (Alidou, 2005). The example of Malama A'ishatu highlights the importance the Nigerien society puts to woman's ability to bear a child, and Alidou states that the "absence of childbearing does not mean absence of mothering" (p. 55). A'ishatu mothered her own sibling until they married, another illustration that the title of motherhood does not necessarily come after giving birth to a child. Rather, motherhood is associated with being a caregiver and with the bonding relationship created between a woman and another, usually a younger person.

Alidou's second profile is that of a female artist willing to impact change: Habsu Garba, a renowned singer, song composer, and editor, and leader of a dance choreography group and a radio talk show. Her profile shows a different dimension of a married women and an artist who

was a leader in society. Her husband, who was her manager and music partner, fully supported his wife's career choice. However, within society, Habsu Garba's role was not understood because of her role as a bold female artist. Her life highlights the example of the struggles and marginalization of Nigerien women who want to contribute to the social fabric of society through art and folklore in the hope to gain their agency and have their voices heard.

The third profile in Alidou's book is Agaisha (a Tuareg), a female conflict mediator and spokeswoman between the armed Tuareg rebellion and the government. Agaisha's life illustrates the stereotypical binary roles of women (seen as passive participants) and men (viewed as active participants) during the 1990s Nigerien military conflict and political instability. As a woman, she played an essential role in restoring peace in a country where the role of women is often relegated to being at home and serving in domesticated positions.

These succinct examples of three distinct women's identities within a particular Sahelian country, Niger, describe how the dialogue of Islam, culture, tradition, and society in general shape women's identities in different forms such as secularism, domestication, womanhood, Islamic/Western schooling, and most essentially, the question of "self" (Alidou, 2005).

Sociocultural, Traditional, and Religious Norms Restraining Women's Participation

As noted, several factors contribute to the degree of gender inequality within Niger, including sociocultural norms, traditional pressures, and religious beliefs and norms.

Niger is still considered a traditionally patriarchal culture, particularly in the rural environment, where gender relations assign roles that limit women's access to natural resources, particularly land ownership (Issoufou et al., 2020; Alidou, 2005; Diarra & Monimart, 2006;

Alidou & Maiga, 2020). One of the sociocultural issues driving women's marginalization is embedded within religious and cultural aspects. About 97% of Nigerien's population is Muslim. The remaining percentage practice Christianity or traditional religions. While most of the population is Muslim, Islam remains an influential communication factor that guides life's principles. Islamic tenets are even present within the agenda and policy implementation of the government. Religious and cultural practices conferred power to men within the household. As Alidou & Maiga (2020) argue, because of the cultural and religious arguments, men are the final decision makers within the family and get more power in the public sphere, while women's power is in the private sphere. Further, the authority of men, particularly those in rural areas, denies their spouses the right to be active participants within the community. As a result of these factors, women and girls have unequal opportunities to occupy male-dominated positions in society traditionally, and they also experience diminished autonomy, disempowerment, and underrepresentation.

In addition, Islam significantly impacts societal behaviors, practices, and—to some extent—the educational systems. For instance, within the Islamic academic/educational school system, Madarasa or Makaranta, the emphasis is on teaching Arabic and memorizing the Quran, starting at a young age. The same is also seen within the traditional French system schools, where in contemporary times, students are introduced to Arabic at a younger age, mainly through the request of parents to broaden their knowledge. The Islamic knowledge system remains primarily dominated by men, who construct the ideological narrative that influences the silencing of women, particularly in the public sphere (Alidou, 2005). The patriarchal system in African societies already allows men to exercise more authority, as Adichie (2012) noted in her novel *Purple Hibiscus*. Religion and the state thus accentuate and put more weight on African

patriarchal practices (Adichie, 2012), causing women to be on the margin of society. The result is less female participation in society and a lack of female leaders, particularly in rural settings. Alidou (2005) argues that the traditional patriarchy, indigenous traditions, Islam, and the impact of French colonialism on Nigerien society give more authority to men in the household and within the community. However, she points out that in contemporary times, more women are taking control of their lives and families and opposing the restraining forces mentioned above. Overall, Lorber (1994), similarly to Alidou (2005), discusses patriarchy as an ideology of women's inferiority within society; this notion is essential to be considered along with culture, ideology, and traditions when considering the improvement of gender inequality.

The aftermath of colonization

It is essential to recognize and understand the large-scale impacts that colonialization had on Africans and the ideological baggage imposed onto the subjugated societies. Colonialism introduced new viewpoints to African societies, leaving psychological scars that have become part of citizens' societal identity, dooming them to constantly abide with them in their everyday lives (Gomez, 1998). Oyewumi (1997) discusses this point in her book *The Invention of Women*, in which she denounces the reality that African societies today are still strongly affected by colonization. She criticizes colonization's irrefutable impact and the reinforcing character of patriarchy imposed on African societies. Indeed, the word colonization itself has taken hold of a gender connotation—the masculine one, always at the forefront, with women as just spectators. Women were observers of a drastic revolution of masculinized leadership, to the detriment of the female figures already present.

A more accentuated masculinity becomes the paradigm shift, and the male perspective is more prominent in decision making; this was of paramount importance to the colonizers.

Oyewumi (1997) also discussed a fascinating notion of double oppression of which Black women have been victims: The colonizers brought their views that disadvantaged women, where they then denigrated and displaced the role of women of color.

Consequently, two ideas emerged from this phenomenon: (1) a perceived inferiority of women in comparison to men, and a sense of masculinity and superiority, and (2) the impact of colonizers on race that further exacerbated the plight of Black women.

Prior to the arrival of the colonizers, women had fully respected positions and places in Nigerian society. Yet patriarchy existed in African nations long before colonization. This was manifested through multifaceted characteristics depending on the culture within a given society. Oyewumi (1997) in *The Invention of Women* further discusses how in Nigeria, the British colonized the Yoruba people and reinforced and accentuated gender inequality by favoring the male figure, giving men the monopoly of leadership. Therefore, when we look at the relationship between colonizer and colonized, we notice that the male figure has a dominant presence. As a result, colonialism did not strengthen or positively normalize man's patriarchal image, but rather undeniably introduced a new form of patriarchy. Cultures travel with the people, and therefore people understand how some of the European cultural practices and conceptions infiltrated among the colonized people.

Another point worth noting about the impact of colonialism in Niger is the example of the historical female figure Sarraounia Mangou—a powerful queen and leader of the Azna people of Lougou who reigned in the 19th century (Alou, 2009). Although she was a respected leader for the Azna, when the French colonizers came, they automatically discredited her

leadership by calling her names like “sorcerer” or “priestess.” Sarraounia Mangou is just one example among a number of African female monarchs, leaders, and rulers who made history, such as Nana Asma’u in Nigeria, the Amazon female warriors of Dahomey in Benin, Queen Amina of Kano, Yaa Asantewaa of Ghana, and Queen Nzinga of Angola and the Congo. Their reigns illustrate that in the pre-colonial era, African women exercised leadership roles within society and significantly impacted the development of their countries—and, to some extent, shifted and disrupted the arrival of the colonizers (Alou, 2009; Alidou, 2005; Steady, 2011).

Steady (2005) argues that a study of gender in Africa cannot escape postcolonial domination realities. Therefore, an African feminist theoretical framework conceptualizes the phenomena from within and provides a critical stance on the conditions of women and girls in Niger. A feminist theory examines how women are viewed within a society, the forces that create and support inequality, oppression, and marginalization, resulting in women’s non-participation. Numerous African feminists such as Filomina Steady, Oyeronke Oyewumi, Ousseina Alidou, and Abdoulaye Mamani provide an important lens on African women’s representations and identities. Feminist scholars such as Jacqui Alexander, Chimamanda Adichie, and Chandra Mohanty expand the lens of women’s representation in society and offer a framework for understanding women’s issues grounded within Africa and the global south.

Aftermath of colonization within the Nigerien context

Colonization in Niger constitutes a centerpiece that contributes to the inequality and marginalization that women and adolescent girls face to this day. For instance, during French colonialism in Niger, only boys were allowed to attend French colonial school, while girls were

made to stay home and help their mothers with domestic work or participate in Islamic school. The lack of opportunities for girls to participate in secular schools created an education gap between boys and girls. Alidou (2005) writes about the gender gap in educational opportunities and outcomes in colonial and postcolonial times within French Catholic missionary schools. She explains that the “French Catholic missionary school first opened its doors in 1949 in the capital Niamey” and only male students were accepted (p. 61). Following a 12-year gap, in 1961, the missionary school began to admit girls. The educational gap during this period made it challenging for females to catch up to the educational levels of their male counterparts and hold leadership positions. Thus, European colonialism strengthened patriarchal ideologies and further engrained women’s marginalization within the social, economic, educational, political, and public domains, with the complicity of the Nigerien government (Alidou, 2005).

In Niger, structural disparities that emphasize inequalities for women and girls are also argued through the theoretical critique of the nation-state by Jacqui Alexander (2006). She argues that the state often polices women and girls and their bodies by using religion and culture as a tool to domesticize and subjectivize. Alexander’s critique is important as an example of the conflation of religion and state, considering how women’s dress is governed. Even though the state should impart a secular stance on dress, it does not. The state inscription of what the ideal woman’s or girl’s modest body should be and look like is often influenced by religion. The state’s systematic discourse regarding dress codes for women and girls is an oppressive praxis that dictates how human bodies should look. Alexander argues that through the institution of sexualization difference by the colonizers, Black women’s bodies were constructed as wild and

untamed, and black men were to be feared. Thus, the colonizers positioned Black men to be superior and black women were taught to stay home.

The idea that women are supposed to be at home has further been reinforced by colonialism, resulting in the brainwashing of women into thinking that the ideal persona is one who is submissive and domesticized. The state also uses religion to marginalize women, for instance, by requiring the veil or hijab, which is different from the religious or traditional attire of modesty that women and girls wear. Alidou (2005) argues that the hijab has numerous and ambiguous meanings for women of both secular and religious persuasions:

This imposition of hijab on all the women in Niger blurs the traditional cultural code of dress that distinguishes unmarried from married women. This reinforces the patriarchy's image of the woman as a subversive performance device against the nation's exploitative patriarchal political and religious bodies that subjugate them (p. 160).

Additionally, the state maintains a locus of control over people (primarily women and girls) in limiting their agency to control their choices, resources, and actions. The state predefines who Nigerien women are and who they should be. Mohanty (2003) adds to this conversation by offering a debate in the literature on women's right to choose what to do with their bodies and their lives without putting aside the possibility of collective action discussing gender inequality. Further, she refers to the concept of "consciousness" as thinking about the different aspects of life as through a "reflective solidarity," in which researchers should reflect on their condition and from where they come and, at the same time, know what puts them in opposition to others. Mohanty argues that how we examine and interpret various aspects of life is very important as the struggles and realities of the people in each setting are often different and constantly emerging. Therefore, she suggests that people be self-reflective in their thinking of where others

come from and acknowledge that any kind of feminism is political; women should be self-reconceptualized, engage in political mobilization, and work in solidarity with others.

Colonialism self-reflection is therefore necessary.

Coloniality also has had an impact on many Nigerien regions—for instance, Keita, Birni N’konni, and Abalak, sites of the current research. Before the colonizers came, these regions were not considered Karkara (i.e., remote, or rural); the colonizers defined and redefined communities, moved the epicenter of social and political happenings, and made the capital city “the place” where most undertakings occur. The reorganization of colonizers led to the neglect of once-flourishing indigenous towns and, more importantly, a shift in the importance of rural women and girls.

Conceptualizing Leadership, Empowerment and Autonomy

Leadership

A number of different definitions can be used to describe leadership. Northouse (2019) defines leadership as a process in which an individual influences a group of individuals in order to accomplish a common goal. Within the African context, leadership is dependent on the sociocultural, ethical, political, and historical norms that shaped power relationships and the way in which women can lead (Amadiume 1987; Steady 2011). In general, among the multitude of styles of leadership available, the most common are servant, coaching, visionary, autocratic, democratic (participative), transformational, bureaucratic, and laissez-faire or “hands-off” (Goodman, 2020). While various forms of leadership are part of the discourse, scholars argue

that empirical and theoretical literature on African women in leadership is sparse, and therefore more research is needed to understand African women's leadership experiences, status, and potential (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Poltera, 2019).

Nkomo and Ngambi (2009) advise using an African feminism theoretical framework to study African women in leadership and management, which allows researchers to investigate historical, cultural, economic, and political factors that influence African women's leadership. They argue that in Africa, female leaders and managers experience significant gender-related interpersonal and structural/organizational barriers to their advancement. In addition, culture exerts a major influence on gender stereotyping, socialization, family and work relationships, and the status of women (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009).

Scholars such as Steady (2011) suggest using an indigenous African perspective to examine female leadership in areas such as politics, economy, religion, tradition, and professional and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Steady's work also examines how the phenomenon of women leadership results from conventional values, colonization, international policies, and corporate globalization, as well as the role of the UN in promoting gender equality and the advancement of women. While their work provides a general context on African female leadership, other scholars such as Mamani (1985) provide a nuanced perspective of a Nigerien female leader within the pre-colonial era.

In his novel *Sarraounia*, Mamani (1980) provided an African-centered conception of female leadership with a tribute to the 19th-century Nigerien queen, Sarraounia Mangou. As mentioned by Alou Antoinette (2009), Sarraouni's role and legacy have shaped how we view traditional female leaders in Niger and across borders. She was not only influential, knowledgeable, and well-respected among the Azna of Lougou, but she was bold enough to fight

the French colonizers, Paul Voulet and Julien Chanoine, who led a French military expedition sent to conquer French territories in West Africa in the 1890s (Mamani, 1985; Alou, 2009). Sarraounia is one palpable example (among others within African countries) that women in Niger and in Africa generally have long been leaders who impacted their community since the precolonial era. However, the introduction of Islam in the 11th century, as well as colonization and the practices of indigenous beliefs, changed the course of the preceding conditions (Alidou & Hima, 2021). Although there is not a specific definition of leadership, within the Nigerien context, the meaning tied to specific titles such as *Sarraounia*, *Inna*, *Tambara*, *Wangari*, *Magagia*, among others, represents salient attributes that also refer to a female leader or highly respected female. Following the different titles attributed to respected female leaders, African authors such as Steady (2011) provided more context to the mothering conversation within African societies.

Steady also advanced the concept of “mothering the nation,” from which she took an Afro-centric perspective that motherhood empowers and does not subordinate. Therefore, mothering the nation conveys the idea of restoring and diffusing power rather than centralizing it by patriarchal ideologies (Steady, 2011). Steady’s theoretical framework helps conceptualize leadership in a more significant dimension, which I linked with the renowned attribute to women in reference to the term *Uwar Guida*, meaning “mother of the household or family” in Hausa. With the notion of *Uwar Guida*, I hope to textualize and depict the often invisible or neglected leadership roles that many Nigerien women play within their household. Therefore, as I realized within the literature, the concept of *Uwar Guida* has not been deeply explored. I conceptualize the notion of *Uwar Guida* in parallel with Steady’s concept of “mothering the nation” to show and expand how Nigerien women such as *Uwar Guida* have innumerable powers and leadership

roles like no others. This concept applies to rural and urban women, for whom, most of the time, their powerful roles may not be recognized outside of the household or within the greater society. However, women hold the positive power of guiding, advising, supporting, and helping their spouse, children, and entire household with their family rules and principles. My personal life experience and that from our mothers, grandmothers, and aunts shows that the powerful and influential leadership role played by the past and present generation made us into who we are today.

The concept of *Uwar Guida* has a significant connotation, but it is not often recognized, because the feminine gender is not valued enough—at least not in the public eye. During the development of my literature review, I realized, as scholars, Alidou & Maiga (2020) recently argued, that there is a dearth of published scholarship centered around Sahelian women's political leadership. In addition, I also realized this shortage of literature is even more garish toward rural women's contributions to leadership and representation in Niger and other sub-Saharan countries. Most scholarship concentrates on female leadership within the urban context, often examining women working in traditionally male-dominated positions. This lack of attention to what leadership looks like in other contexts creates more disparities and reduces opportunities for all women to be empowered and aspire to leadership roles no matter their location. I hope using the concept of *Uwar Guida* as a theory will showcase both urban and rural women in leadership roles that empower others.

In this study, I use an indigenous definition of leadership because leadership needs to be contextually based, sensitive to cultural differences, and historically nuanced (Gumede, 2017). African researchers argue that African leaders need to be grounded in Africa-centric ideologies, with Africa-centered orientations, which means that the context for African communities' ways

of existence is given preference and that the starting point is influenced by what is best for Africans (Gumede, 2017; Aliye, 2020; Steady, 2011).

While there are numerous leadership theories (Cherry, 2012; Vasilescu, 2019; Steady, 2011; Aliye, 2020) that can be used to support the leadership styles of leaders, it is important to connect theories that work in tandem with the culture of the leader. A supportive framework that takes into consideration the group's values, mores, and beliefs is particularly important to consider. As noted above, leadership theories that work in parallel with African leaders' indigenous leadership style are based on characteristics such as collectivism, humanism, participation, and consent. An indigenous style of leadership may be more effective in African communities than the more common individualistic Western theory-based leadership (Aliye, 2020). Thus, indigenous leadership should revive and support social democratic participation within communities to better harness the members' contributions and commitment and reduce self-serving, manipulative actions (Aliye 2020, White & Jha, 2018). I discuss below some leadership theories that work parallel to the African indigenous leadership style.

Leadership theories

Self-leadership

Researchers have shown that leadership theories play a powerful impact on people's lives, communities, and organizations (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017; Manz & Sims, 1991). One important theory focused on by many is self-leadership. Charles C. Manz first identified self-leadership in organizational management literature, and he later defined it as a "comprehensive self-influence perspective that concerns leading oneself toward the performance of naturally

motivating tasks as well as managing oneself to do work that must be done but is not naturally motivating” (Manz, 1986). Further, Manz & Sims (1991) argued that effective and authentic team leadership begins with self-leadership. They believe authentic leadership comes mainly from within a person, not outside; this leadership arises from within the leader's strength and capacity to maximize the contributions of others via recognition of their right to shape their own identities, as opposed to the leader's capacity to persuade others to do what he or she wants (Manz & Sims, 1991).

Furthermore, Goleman (2005) asserts that two of the four pillars of emotional intelligence—self-awareness and self-management—form the foundation of self-leadership. As a result, the practice of self-leadership requires understanding who you are, recognizing your ideal experiences, and purposefully directing yourself accordingly. Self-leadership also encompasses what we choose to do, how we do it, and why we do it.

As the current study demonstrates, self-leadership is essential for women and adolescents to highlight their capacities, strengths, skills, and aspirations and apply them in ways that will create a pathway to their autonomy and empowerment. For instance, women can embrace their capacity to lead and inspire others by taking a leadership role within a group of people in their community. This intentional action may allow the individual to reconnect, explore, and lead with her skills from within and eventually create or make a positive change in herself, her environment, and the lives of others. However, as noted above, these women and adolescents do not have much control over their selves because of social, cultural, and traditional factors. As self-leadership suggests, how can one lead others if he/she cannot lead himself/herself, and what motivational factors push others to lead?

Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory (STD) is another paradigm widely used by many disciplines, including leadership. STD relates to a person's motivation to lead or handle their own life when their three basic psychological needs are met. These psychological needs are autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). To be autonomous, people need to feel that they have control and freedom over their actions and purposes, which will result in self-determination. To be competent, people must master and learn new skills to help them reach their goals. To experience relatedness, people need a sense of togetherness and closeness to others (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). In this study, self-determination is essential as it may create and allow women and adolescent girls to have a voice, sense of purpose, motivation, and belonging to accomplish goals. Socially, women within rural areas are much more likely to have more autonomy and be driven to empower others to the extent that they can have their voices heard and aspire to leadership roles.

Self-determination theory has long entailed identifying the social-contextual factors that support autonomous motivation through empirical research. The theory's primary focus has been fostering need-supportive environments across domains that enable people to motivate themselves independently, leading to productive behavior and positive feelings. Research on job characteristics, kinds of justice, managerial styles, and types of leadership has exploded because work contexts that fulfill fundamental psychological demands provide better results. One study by White & Jha (2018) focused on the well-being of people working in different fields such as health, social care, education, employment, and policy evaluation settings. The study confirms that STD accurately predicts participants' affirmations of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, all of which are significant to well-being. The conception of population well-being is

mainly based on interpersonal and material factors such as supporting one's family and having resources to give to those in need. This is reflected in the shapes that competence, autonomy, and relatedness assume. They usually relate to the daily struggles of making ends meet, such as the ability to support one's family, the freedom to manage one's house as one sees fit, and the importance of relationships as the backdrop for meeting needs and producing resources. This implies that competence, autonomy, and relatedness—at least in the context of the population that White and Jha studied, the Chiawa—do not appear to constitute independent psychological requirements as much as mutually constitutive modes of being (White & Jha, 2018). All of these are important in building human and social capital, which leads to the next topic: the importance of leader development and leadership development.

Leader development and leadership development

To date there has been little research that examines the connection between leader development and leadership development in Niger, or in rural areas. The concepts of leader development and leadership development are essential in building and influencing individual and organizational goals. Day (2000) argued that the difference between leader and leadership development goes beyond simple semantics. The fundamental distinction is that leader development focuses on building human capital while leadership development focuses on social capital (Day, 2000). The ability of an organization's members to participate effectively in leadership positions and processes is characterized as its collective capacity for leadership development. The roles of leadership include those that come both with and without official authority, and they involve enhancing a group's ability to figure out how to solve unforeseen difficulties that were unforeseen.

The emphasis on formal leadership roles related to individual-based knowledge, skills, and talents is typical in leader development.

When one intentionally invests in their human capital to increase their intrapersonal competency, leadership growth follows. This competence may take the form of self-awareness, self-regulation, or self-motivation (Day, 2020).

The proposed differentiation between leader development and leadership development is crucial because these two concepts are founded on different leadership models. The basic premise is that leader development results in the more efficient development of the individual leader. It also presupposes that organizations can add leadership to boost social and operational effectiveness. A more modern, relational leadership paradigm is where leadership development started. This paradigm assumes that social resources and interpersonal interactions are essential to leadership. Leadership is seen as a characteristic of social systems that emerge rather than something added to already existing systems (Salancik et al., 1975). In the context of Niger, both leader development and leadership development are essential and can work together to build human and social capital. For instance, if any given organization provides rural community women and adolescent girls with leadership training and skills, those women and girls will be helpful to others. These women and adolescent girls will also gain more confidence in their own competence and will make positive contributions to their community. As a result, everyone is viewed as an active participant playing a leadership role. This adds a degree of autonomy and empowerment, fostering women who can step forward and become actively engaged within the community.

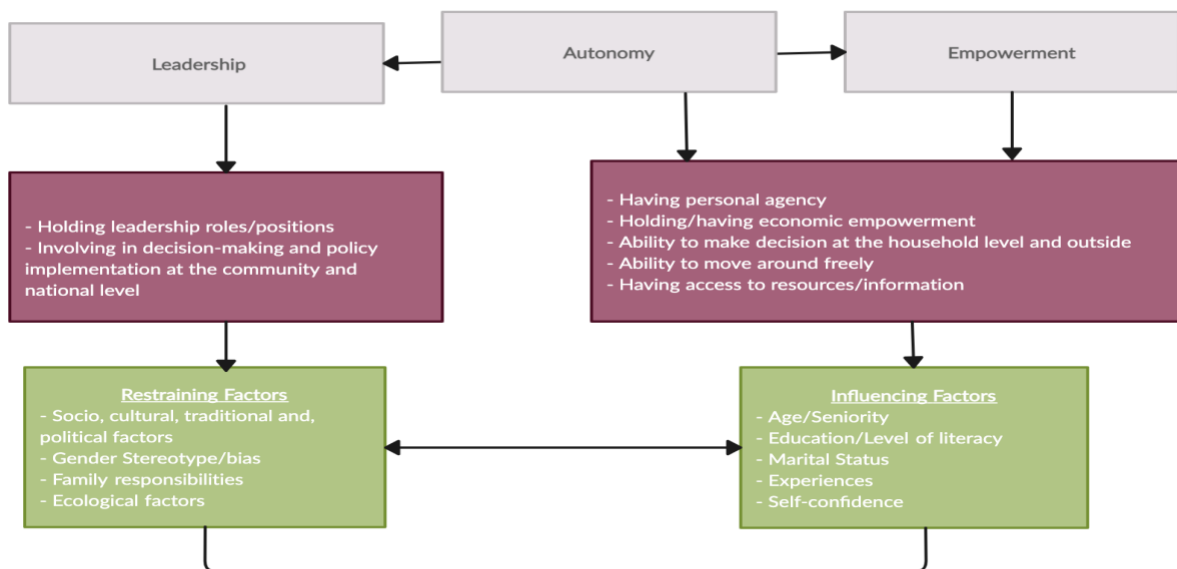
In contemporary times in Niger, leadership is a concept that is constantly evolving. Lately, the idea has gained more attention and is being embraced and pursued by women and

youth who are involved in entrepreneurial activities. However, this attention to leadership is primarily manifested within urban locations and tends to be overlooked and neglected in rural areas. As a result, I have constructed a conceptual model that considers the complexities of rural Karkara women while expanding the concept of leadership.

Conceptual Framework Model

The conceptual framework model below (see Figure 2.1) lays the groundwork for the research and is guided by the literature on leadership and empowerment within Africa generally and Niger specifically. Leadership is the predictor or treatment variable, while autonomy and empowerment are the outcome or response variables. Therefore, the study tries to understand the relationship between leadership roles/positions and women's and girls' autonomy and empowerment. The boxes in purple in Figure 2.1 provide the types of leadership roles and autonomy and empowerment, respectively. At the bottom, the green boxes portray the restraining and influencing factors that affect all the variables. These factors are interconnected and show how leadership positions impact empowerment. However, in order to be empowered, one needs to be autonomous. The conceptual model (see Figure 2.1) below guides this research.

Figure 2-1: Conceptual Model



Empowerment

Empowerment is a complex concept broadly discussed in the international development literature; however, it is difficult to define, and its meaning often varies from one organization to another (Heywood & Tomlinson, 2020; Hennink et al., 2012; Kabeer, 1999). In addition, when defining empowerment, it is necessary to consider the context—i.e., the social, traditional, cultural, and political dimensions—of the targeted society. The word “empowerment” borrowed from the English language is also common within the Francophone and Nigerien contexts and is frequently used interchangeably with the word “autonomy.” For the current study, the term “empowerment” is used because it fits more closely with the purpose and objectives of the study.

Within the patriarchal Nigerien context and essentially the rural sites in the Tahoua region that are the focus of this study, women's and adolescent girls' empowerment primarily refers to their economic capacity to be self-sufficient and to support themselves and their household. Other empowering factors are level of education through different types of schooling (Western or Islamic), access to resources such as adequate training, and being a part of women's associations, groups, or clubs. In the past three decades, researchers from development viewpoints have argued that empowerment can effectively alleviate poverty, social exclusion, and reduce health disparities (Wallerstein, 2006; Eyben et al., 2008).

Several scholars have measured and conceptualized empowerment in different dimensions and contexts. Kabeer (1999) framed women's empowerment as a "process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability in terms of three interrelated dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements." Further, Kabeer argues that empowerment allows women to control their lives through the three dimensions noted. Narayan (2005) stated that empowerment refers to the extension of freedom of choice and action over resources and decision in influencing one's life. This definition broadly entails the "expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" (Narayan, 2005). Within a given society, Narayan posits, this definition could be worthwhile for tracking variations in the unequal relationships between poor people and the state, markets, or civil society, as well as gender inequalities and other excluded groups, within the household and at the community level.

According to Bailey (1992), precisely defining empowerment within projects and programs depends on the specific people and context involved. Keller and Mbwewe (1991) provide a uniquely different discussion of empowerment as "a process whereby women can

organize themselves to increase their self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their subordination”.

Moghadam and Senftova (2005) discuss the importance of women’s empowerment as a multi-dimensional process of accomplishing skills, accessing legal rights, and participating in social, economic, political, and cultural domains. Their research sets up a framework of development areas that gauge social development or human development. Efforts that support excluded groups, such as women, frequently require empowerment. Asaolu et al. (2018) discuss women’s empowerment and gender equality as essential in promoting sustainable health, human development, nourishment, and socioeconomic standing of women and their offspring. Scholars such as Kabeer (1999) framed women’s empowerment as a “process through which individuals who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability.” These abilities are further elaborated in three interrelated dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements. Kabeer describes resources as materials available to individuals based on their needs and culture. Agency includes the actions and capacity for an individual to act. Achievements are a result that individuals attain based on decisions made.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, also known as UN Women, stresses the vital role of rural women as critical agents for achieving transformational economic, environmental, and social changes required for sustainable development. In light of the complexity of defining empowerment, the research for this paper defines empowerment as women and adolescent girls’ ability to become self-sufficient by being economically independent, make decisions, have some freedom of choice among options for themselves their families, and also be involved in their communities’ decision-making process.

This aligns with Kabeer's (1999) and Narayan's (2005) definitions of empowerment. Centering around this definition, this study explores how the participation of rural women and adolescent girls in leadership opportunities could be a vector to empower them economically and societally. Empowering these women is key to the well-being of individuals, families, and rural communities, as well as overall economic productivity, given women's prominent presence in the development of the nation. To achieve empowerment, these women need to be supported with what they need within their context.

Considering the poverty levels of communities in Niger and particularly within Karkara communities, it is, therefore, essential to understand how economic autonomy is crucial in influencing women's empowerment and their aspirations for obtaining leadership roles. Eyben et al. (2008) defined economic empowerment as:

"The capacity of poor women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in terms which recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible for them to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth (p. 10)."

According to Narayan (2005), the economic realm of empowerment, such as the impact of microcredit, has undergone the most extensive research and has been measured qualitatively at the individual, local, and governmental levels. Examples of these different levels of analysis can be seen in various segments of society. For example, in the home, women's influence over household finances can be at the individual level, while assets, employment opportunities, trade association participation, and market access are all considered at the community level (Narayan, 2005). This construct may be used nationally for laws and policies promoting labor equality and workforce representation (Narayan, 2005). For instance, allowing women at the community level

to access employment, engage in critical decision-making processes, own property, and fully participate in trade and markets is essential. At the national level, it is fundamental to have women be represented in different jobs and included in federal budgets, and to have strict laws that guarantee equal pay for equal work and fairness in all aspects.

Autonomy

In recent decades, feminist literature has focused on women's autonomy as crucial to moving toward political, economic, and social equality. Scholars have noted that the status of women frequently restricts their autonomy and ability to make decisions about their own lives in many societies, especially in developing or low-income countries (Osamor & Grady, 2016; McBride, 1990). Many women find themselves sacrificing their autonomy, including in situations pertaining to their own health, in order to please others (Osamor & Grady, 2016).

Within the French and Nigerien lexicon, the word "autonomization" is often used to mean autonomy, even within the literature. According to Chickering (1969), having autonomy is composed of emotional and instrumental independence. Emotional autonomy is the absence of an urgent need for validation and assurance. In contrast, instrumental autonomy is the ability to interact with the outside world, engage in activities, deal with issues, and act to satisfy one's needs. Within African society, having both emotional and instrumental autonomy may be complex. For instance, emotional autonomy means being able to define oneself rather than to be defined by others. Yet, in Niger, society most often defines what an ideal woman or a girl should be. This limits women's autonomy, which constitutes a significant obstacle to female empowerment.

Other scholars, such as Heath (1990), Sacks and Einstein (1979), and Perls (1970), saw different forms of autonomy as necessary in working with people. For instance, Heath (1980) saw autonomy as being more self-regulatory, more in charge of oneself, and more independent from the expectations and control of others. Sacks and Einstein (1979), on the other hand, focused on women's psychological autonomy, characterizing it as having confidence in one's abilities to take action, achieve goals, and experience a sense of power. Further, the work of Perls (1970) is also valuable in looking at autonomy. He asserted that humans require others to survive physically and mentally; however, as we mature, we learn to rely on ourselves, stand on our own two feet, build our environment, become financially independent, and develop emotional independence. Additionally, to achieve instrumental autonomy, women must fight centuries of stereotypes and customs.

Support Systems

In rural Africa, especially in Niger, members of communities, especially women, help each other through support systems. Within rural Niger, women have been intricately involved in leading and managing such support systems. For example women's cooperative market gardening is done informally in nature yet is extremely powerful in that it provides women with a level of social and financial independence not afforded in other areas of their lives. Take the informal nature of cooperatives, which have been in existence for thousands of years, known by the local word, *Asusu*, which means tontine. These cooperatives target financial difficulties that most women experience as an obstacle to empowerment. They also offer loans as well as cattle for breeding, which assists women in gaining confidence, adding to their cadre of social capital and power in the community.

A vivid example of this is seen in the CARE Mata Masu Dubara (MMD), meaning “Women on the Move,” concept that was created in Niger in 1991. This powerful initiative empowered many rural women (Grant, 2002). The MMD approach was initially focused on women’s economic empowerment and poverty reduction and has since been used as a platform for more holistic women’s empowerment programming (Grant, 2002). Many UN Programs such as USAID, UN Women, the UN Population Fund, and the FAO, as well as organizations such as Global Giving, CARE Niger, and Aid for Africa, also support rural Nigerien women through projects that aim to decrease poverty and hunger, reduce gender inequalities, and empower women and girls. The support strategies include income regeneration, agricultural innovations, provision of new seed varieties, and new farming strategies (Tabbo & Amadou, 2017; Arnould, 1989).

Theoretical Framework

Osanloo and Grant (2016) contended that a theoretical framework is one of the most significant components of the research process, functioning as a blueprint or guide for the researcher. It serves as the foundation, a road map upon which the research is constructed, and is borrowed by the researcher to build his/her own house (Grant & Osanloo, 2016; Sinclair, 2007). The theoretical framework guiding the research in this paper is grounded on theories such as African feminism theory, intersectionality theory, social role theory, and leadership categorization theory.

African Feminist Theories

Scholars using an African feminism theory lens examine how African women are viewed within the African society; the forces that create and support inequality, oppression, and marginalization; and how these outcomes affect and influence women's non-participation in many aspects of life. Filomina Steady (2011) developed the concept of "mothering the nation" and "motherhood" using an African feminist theory framework. Steady provides an indigenous and epistemological theoretical framework and an alternative to what she perceived as a governance disaster by a male-dominated leadership. Further, she takes an Afrocentric perspective that motherhood empowers and does not subordinate women; therefore, mothering the nation conveys the idea of restoring and diffusing power rather than centralizing it by patriarchal ideologies.

Steady brings African women's voices, histories, and experiences to describe the issues and realities of their lives and leadership involvement. Her description of African feminism is centered on the narrative that women are "dealing with multiple oppressions." Her theory helps conceptualize leadership through a more significant dimension and provides context for the qualities of women within Africa more broadly. However, Steady largely omitted rural women's leadership, which the research for this paper will emphasize; instead, she focused primarily on women's political representation and contributions at a national level.

Intersectionality Theory

As more attention is focused on urban women's struggles rather than those of rural women, these phenomena engender what Crenshaw (1991) defined and explained as intersectionality theory. As a mutually constitutive relationship among social identities, intersectionality has become an essential principle of feminist thinking and how gender is debated (Shields, 2008). Crenshaw defined intersectionality as a realm where people's life experiences are based on various factors such as race, gender, identity, and history, along with several other structural elements (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality theory facilitates answering many of the questions in the current study and the struggles of Karkara women that this study investigates. Crenshaw describes three categories of intersectionality: (a) *Structural intersectionality* refers to the paradigm of how Karkara women's and girls' experiences differ from those of women in cities or urban areas; (b) *political intersectionality* addresses the reality that policies in place do not necessarily consider or apply to women and girls; and (c) *representational intersectionality* examines how Karkara women's and girls' inequalities are depicted through the critique of their misrepresentation.

Structural intersectionality

Rural women and girls in Niger have faced years of gender disparities. In contemporary times, these disparities have caused unequal access to critical resources and opportunities that would foster their participation in decision-making, help them acquire leadership positions, make fundamental training available, and allow their voices to be heard. Crenshaw (1991), using structural intersectionality, discusses how the location of women of color at the intersection of

race and gender makes their experiences different. This case applies to Karkara women and girls in Niger who regularly face challenges and insufficient resources. The lack of resources causes Karkara women to operate differently than those in urban cities or *Birni* (the Hausa word for urban), who often have better access to resources and governmental structures (Issoufou et al., 2020; Diarra & Monimart, 2006). For instance, it is not uncommon for Karkara women to travel for miles—often via a donkey ride—to reach the nearest hospital or access administrative offices. Thus, the geographical location of Karaka women and girls is a continuing issue that has reinforced the challenges they face because of their given position, which is further defined and redefined by their identity as rural dwellers. These females represent almost 50% of the population in Niger and are the majority in rural areas.

Political intersectionality

Political intersectionality as argued by Crenshaw (1991) refers to how inequalities and their connections are relevant to policies and political strategies of groups of people who occupy multiple subordinate identities. Within Niger, Crenshaw's political intersectionality dimensions apply in relation to the policies that intensify and add more weight to rural women and girls' marginalization and exclusion from social, economic, and political aspects of life. This marginalization also has prevailed within the Nigerien government across many administrations. The Republic of Niger became one of the first African countries to adopt a gender quota law to increase women's political representation (Alidou & Alidou, 2008, Kang, 2013). This Quota Bill was proposed by the National Assembly of Niger in 2000 and signed into law by President Mamadou Tandja in 2001 as *la Loi sur le quota*, the Quota Act/Law (Alidou & Alidou, 2008;

Kang, 2013). It should be noted that the Confederation of Women's Associations of Niger (COGAFEN) played a key role in pushing for this law to guarantee gender equality in elective positions in public affairs. At first, the law increased the required proportion of women's representation in parliament to 10% compared to only 1.5% in 1999 (Alidou & Hima, 2021). Years later, in 2014, the law was revisited and increased the quota from 10% to 15% for elected offices (Alidou & Hima, 2021). The law stipulates, "When members of the cabinet and promotions in senior public service are announced, the proportion of either sex must not be less than 25 percent" (Kang, 2013, Alidou & Alidou, 2008). This law is assumed to facilitate more representation of women in elective offices and institutions. Based on this law, one can argue that the Nigerien government has made progress in enhancing women's participation in many sectors, including the government. Most recently, in December 2019, the General Assembly address the necessity to revisit the quota percentage of women representation from 25% to 30% (Assemblée Nationale du Niger, 2021). However, this has not yet been implemented.

In reality, the Quota Law has hardly been fully respected since its implementation. Its most recent blatant nonfulfillment, which, as usual, raised many concerns, is portrayed within the newest government formation of April 2021. Out of the 42 members of the government, only seven are women, amounting to 16.6% instead of the 30% provided for by the updated law of December 24, 2019 (Assemblée Nationale du Niger, 2021). As Alidou and Alidou (2008) argue, the Quota Law has provided opportunities to women and empowered them to access significant positions of responsibility, but the law's limitations have resulted in it not being fully realized due to (1) inconsistencies in its implementation and level of literacy comprehension for the ones it intends to serve, (2) the state's patronization of the document, (3) the conflicted conversation

around legal and Islamist ideologies within a particular agenda, and (4) the crafting of the law's language . In addition to these issues, several agendas were presented by women's associations controlled by the Confederation of Women's Associations of Niger (CONGAFEN) to revisit the Quota Act (Alidou & Alidou, 2008). This law in general is difficult to apply to the lives of Karkara women due to their educational levels and low (sometimes nonexistent) literacy.

Representational intersectionality

Historically in Niger, from 1957 to 1974, when the nation was an overseas territory ruled by a series of political regimes, women were not represented or involved in the government. They primarily had roles as consumers, followers, and occupiers of low-level jobs (Alidou, 2005). They were regarded as recipients, consumers, and followers. The democratization years of the 1990s in Niger were a turning point for women determined to have their voices heard through campaigns for their rights and a demand for improved living conditions. Until the end of 1990, amid organizing the National Conference, there was only one woman, Houa Alio, out of the 68 delegates on the preparation committee (Niger Women Campaign for Inclusion in National Assembly, 1991). The underrepresentation of women in such a significant turning point for the future of Niger was problematic, and Houa Alio had to resign in solidarity to lead the protest movement demanding women's rights. The first significant women's protest emanated from this frustration. Although the country is now sovereign and independent, the analysis suggests that the Niger government still follows a European hegemonic model. Therefore, Nigerien women experience discrimination due to their gender; however, rural women share a double burden of

discrimination because of their non literacy, gender and their remoteness that restrains them from participating in urban political, social, and cultural activities.

Social role theory

Social role theory, also known as social structural theory or sociocultural theory, emphasizes the way a society is organized in term of gender roles. Eagly (1987) argued that, generally, shared gender stereotypes are developed from the gender division of labor that characterizes a society. Eagly and Wood (2019), for instance, contend that the division in labor between men (whose roles are presumed to be outside the home) and women (whose responsibilities are assumed to be in the house) is the result of the social construction of gender roles, power, expectations, and status. This experience of division of labor shapes our behavior, the way we think, and—to an extent—the way we see ourselves.

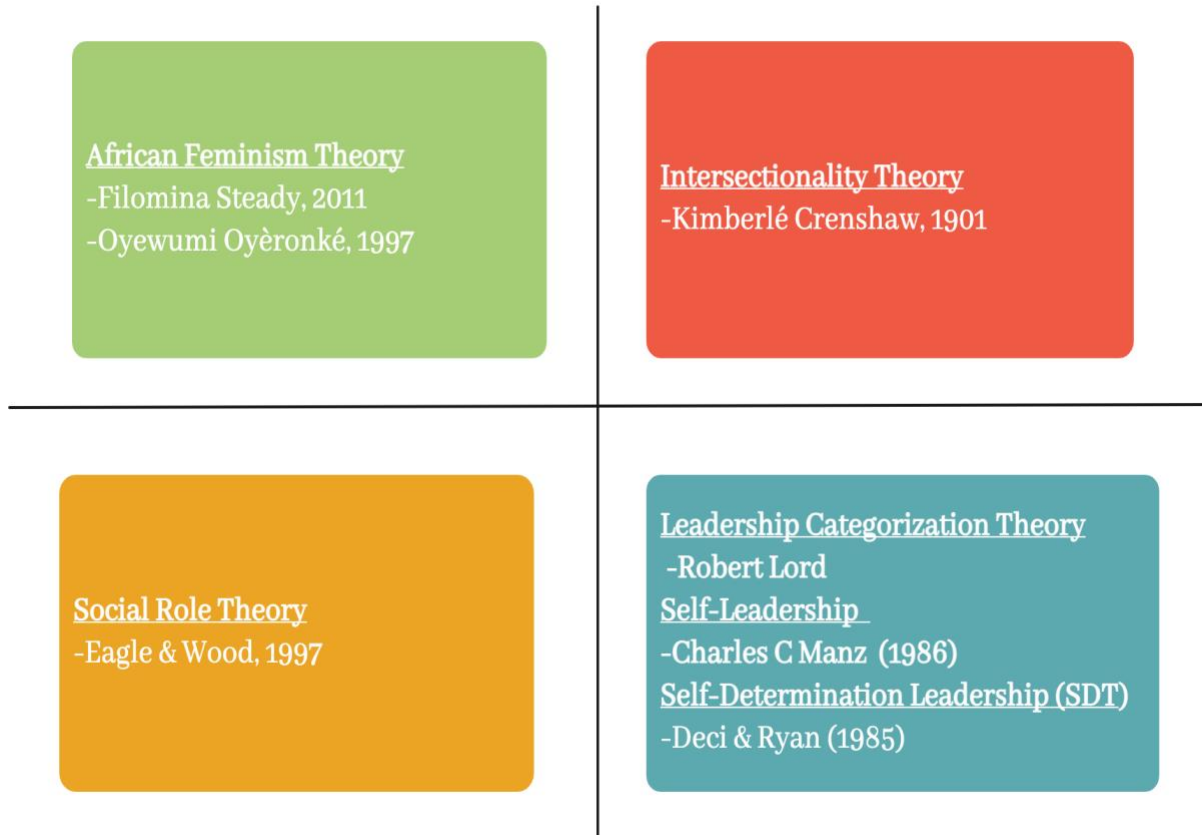
Thus, social role theory argues that societal expectations promote gender stereotypes and that each gender must function accordingly (Eagly et al., 2000). The importance of this theory is that it provides a paradigm for how Karkara women's roles are performed within society. Within the patriarchal African and Nigerien society, these gender roles are particularly common. Many factors creating social roles are within the social ideology or perception, the cultural and traditional factors, and some combine with religious beliefs. Meaning what, exactly? For many, women are not supposed to hold specific leadership roles or to lead men. The people with that mindset believe that women should stay home, take care of the family, and be responsible for household duties. As a result of challenges such as gender discrimination, hostile work environments, and being constantly labeled within the society, many women shy away from holding certain leadership roles. In addition, as a result of the stereotypes and bias that many

women have encountered, other women are reticent to follow their sisters' footsteps. We see fewer women aspiring to specific roles such as president, minister, or director, as they fear they will be misjudged or discredited.

Leadership Categorization Theory

The leadership categorization theory (LCT or implicit leadership theory) scrutinizes the layperson's understanding of leadership (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). It implies that individual expectations and perceptions of leaders come because of interactions, experiences, and/or the leaders' influences and accomplishments (Zacher et al., 2011). The premise in this paradigm is the tendency of an individual to approve of leaders whose characteristics fit their own perceptions about what a leader looks like. Further, LCT theory implies that followers form inherent opinions about their leaders' characteristics based on their interactions or past experiences with the leaders. The followers' perceptions determine how they judge, identify, or determine the leaders—meaning that what a leader looks like or should act like is related to certain characteristics. These characteristics often come from stereotypes, snap judgements, or unconscious biases based on factors such as gender, race, age, verbal interaction, and physical characteristics (for instance, height). The fundamental premise is that people tend to approve of individuals whose characteristics fit these perceived leaders' prototypes, which are often invalid. Figure 2.2 below presents a visual snapshot of all the theories mentioned in the current study.

Figure 2.2: Visual model of theories used in the research



Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature on leadership and empowerment within the African and Nigerien contexts. In particular, the chapter primarily reviews literature that emphasizes gender construction within African society and African women's identities in the pre-colonial era through the aftermath of colonialism and how that evolution has reshaped women's identities, particularly their participation in leadership roles. The chapter also draws on theories such as

African feminism theory, intersectionality theory, social theory, and leadership categorization theory to guide the theoretical research framework. The detailed theoretical and conceptual model presented in this chapter is derived from the literature noted above, which offers more context for the study. In the following section, I present the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter describes the methods I used to explore the guiding question of the inquiry: how women and adolescent girls perceive leadership positions within their community as a vector of empowerment. The chapter features the research design, analysis, research sites, participant sampling procedure, instruments, means for ensuring validity and reliability, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to explore how rural women and girls view leadership within their community as a means of empowerment. The study seeks to address the following objectives:

1. Understand Karkara women's and adolescent girls' perceptions of leadership and willingness to participate in leadership positions, focusing on leadership in the community and in women's groups or associations.
2. Explore the factors and opportunities that can empower and influence other women and girls to take leadership positions, as well as the factors that leverage or contribute to their participation.
3. Understand the barriers that prevent women and girls from acquiring and participating in leadership positions.

4. Understand the support systems and resources that women and girls need to participate in leadership roles.

Research Design

Creswell (2012) explained that a research design is a plan, structure, and strategy of investigation to obtain answers to research questions. Creswell stated that qualitative researchers use an “emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study and conduct data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes” (2012, p. 44). Thereby, the researcher can address participants’ problems within their particular contexts and use the gathered patterns and themes to move from general to specific characteristics in the study. A qualitative research method was used in the current study due to the cultural, social, and traditional features of the population being studied. To gain an even deeper understanding of the cultural phenomenon found within the Karkara sites of research, I employed a case study methodology. This approach aims to understand an issue explored through a case within a bounded system (Creswell, 2012, p. 98). Similarly, qualitative case studies provide opportunities to explore a particular phenomenon within its context by collecting multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, reports, and documents (Baxter et al., 2008; Creswell, 2012). A case study also provides an in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2012, p.100; Creswell & Poth, 2016). A case study in the study of the Karkara context of Niger will offer an in-depth understanding and opportunity to gain a range of perspectives about the leadership of girls and women in each site and how those perspectives will be measured as a path to empowerment.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process used by researchers to reduce data to a story and interpret it to derive insights (LeCompte, 2000). It can essentially be comprehended as the process of studying how research is completed in a scientific method. The current study used the discourse analysis method, which is well-suited to studying written or spoken language in relation to its social context. It aims to investigate how language is used within a given context (Brown et al., 1983). Given the population and geographic location, I wanted to ensure that I captured the essence of how language was used to express women's thoughts during their interviews. Using discourse analysis, I was able to make connections between the richness, depth and nuances of the Hausa language and culture in relation to how and why participants used particular words and phrases. Therefore, using this analysis added greater value to the data.

To address the above research objectives, a total of 12 questions were asked in Hausa during the face-to-face interview sessions; these questions are listed in Appendix B. Considering that the study was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, I also asked a question about the impact of the pandemic on women's and girls' daily community interactions, activities, and business. I also used a focus group discussion, guided by a questionnaire in Hausa shown in Appendix C, to allow participants to share their experiences through personal stories in a natural format. The focus group also allowed me another opportunity to gather information and gain a deeper understanding of the women's thoughts. Further, the focus group gave me a greater opportunity to collect another set of responses from participants. Before the interview sessions, each participant was given the research purpose, and all participants gave their verbal consent. Face-to-face interview sessions lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and were all conducted in Hausa. Focus group sessions took between 35 and 45 minutes. The focus group sessions were

conducted in a conversation format in which participants were encouraged to share personal stories to help support their responses.

Research Sites

The research was conducted within the Tahoua region, located about 555 kilometers northeast of Niamey, the capital city of the Niger Republic. While Niger has eight regions and multiple departments and municipalities encompassed within each area, I selected Tahoua based on its cultural dynamics. I focused specifically on three departments in Tahoua: Keita, Birni-N'Konni, and Tabalak. These sites were selected due to their distinct characteristics and the noted levels of discrimination women face in these areas. Additionally, the rural locations highlight the burden of discrimination on women because of the high rates of illiteracy (as referenced in the language of the Quota Act), gender differences, and their remote locations that limit their ability to participate in urban political, social, and cultural activities in the Tahoua region.

Tahoua

Crossed by the sub-Saharan zone and the savannah, the Tahoua region covers an area of 113,371 km². It is bounded by Agadez in the north, Tillabéri and the Republic of Mali to the West, to the east by the region of Maradi, and the south by the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The region is essentially an agro-pastoral area where agricultural activities such as raising livestock are practiced. The Tahoua region has 12 departments: Abalak, Bagaroua, Birni N'Konni, Bouza, Illéla, Keita, Madaoua, Malbaza, Tahoua, Tassara, Tchintabaraden, and Tillia. The departments

themselves are subdivided into 42 communes (see Figure 3.1, which shows Tahoua municipalities with the research sites in green) with the majority (35) rural and seven being urban (Haut Commissariat a l'Initiative 3N, n.d.). Tahoua is the fourth largest city in Niger (see Figure 3.2 images) and is home to 3 328 3652 inhabitants in 2021 (OCHA Niger, 2021). The city serves as a trading center for the surrounding agricultural regions and is the meeting center of the Tuareg and Fulani ethnic groups (see photos I captured). The population of the region is made up of multiple ethnic groups: Adérawas, Gobérawas, Konnawas, Tuareg, Peulhs, Lissawanes, Kourfayawas, Arabs, Bouzous, and Maouris.

Figure 3-1: Map of Tahoua with the 42 communes/municipalities; the three study research sites are shown in green (map created for the study).

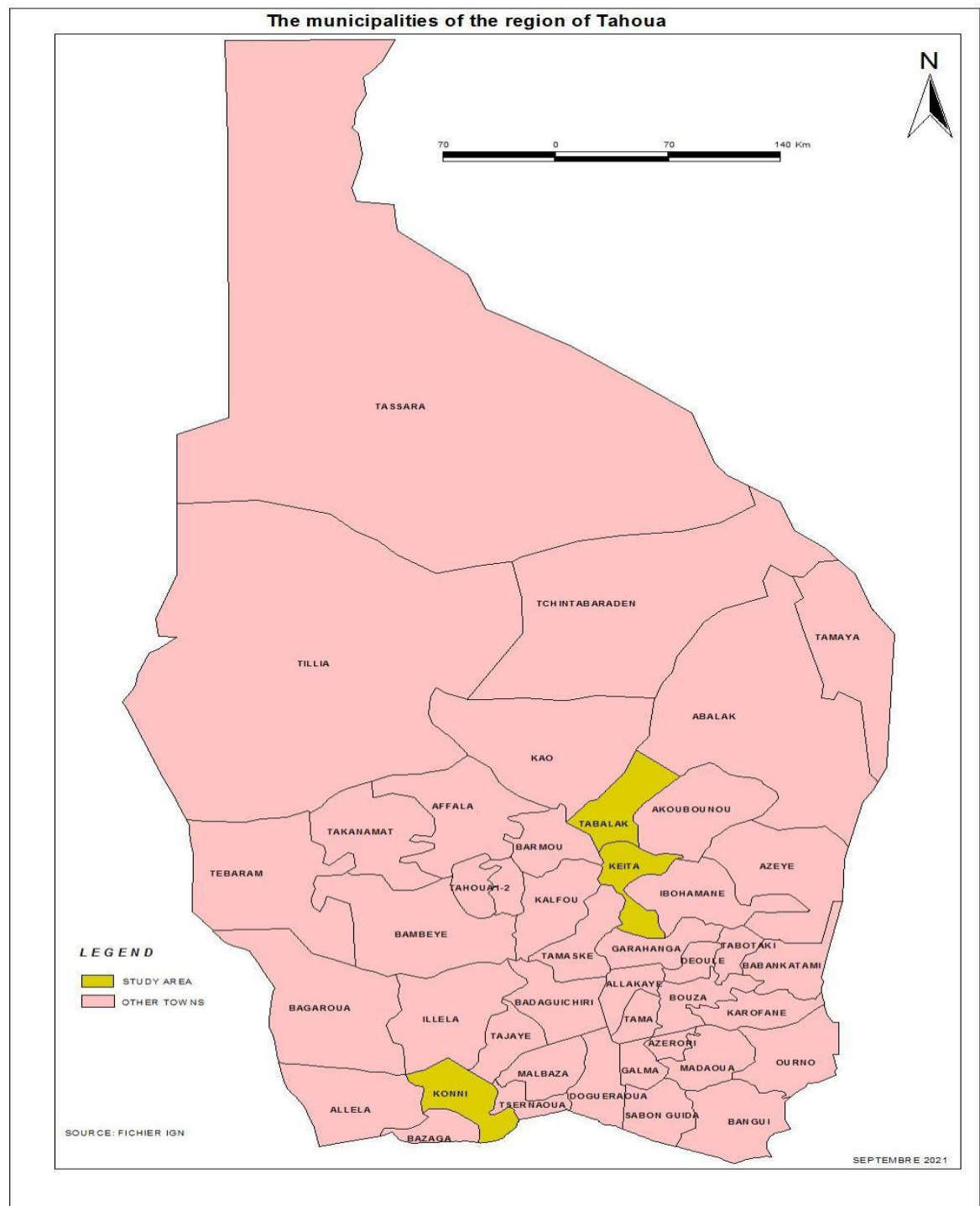




Figure 3-2: Entrance (borderline) of Tahoua (left); Tahoua city

As noted above, I initially selected three departments, Keita, Birni-Konni, and Abalak. However, Tabalak was substituted for Abalak, due to security warnings given by the government at the time of the research. It was an appropriate substitute because it is located a few kilometers away and shares similar regional and structural characteristics as Abalak. Table 3.1 below describes the three research sites.

Table 3.1 : Sites description table

Selected Department/Municipalities	Location	Population	Activities/Particularity
Tabalak (instead of Abalak)	50 km east of the city of Tahoua	Hausa	- Agriculture, fishing, and breeding. - Rural municipality
Keita	72 km southeast of Tahoua	Mostly Hausa who coexist with Tuaregs and Fulani	- Agriculture, livestock, crafting and trade. - Urban municipality
Birni N’Konni	510 km from the capital Niamey	Hausa called the Konnawas	- Ancient Gobir kingdom Traders, farmers, breeders, and crafting. -Border with Nigeria - Urban municipality

Tabalak

Tabalak is a rural pastoral commune that belongs to the department of Abalak. The population is mainly Tuareg and Hausa and leads both pastoral and sedentary lives. Tabalak has one of the most significant ponds in Niger called “Fallé” (see Figure 3-3), which symbolizes the economic life of the local population, who mainly make a living from agriculture, fishing, and breeding. Women and youth play an important role in the economy of the commune. They are mainly at the forefront of agriculture as well as fishing and livestock breeding in the community

(see Figure 3-4, which shows houses in Tabalak and the traditional fish drying process). Women and youth were the primary beneficiaries of programs such as the counter season perimeter in the 1980s and 1990s. However, women and youth are becoming a minority on these irrigation sites (Lefore, 2019).



Figure 3-3: Tabalak's Pond. Picture by Halima Therese Gbaguidi Adolphe (September 21, 2021).



Figure 3-4: Houses in Tabalak and traditional fish drying under the sun. Picture by Halima Therese Gbaguidi Adolphe (September 21, 2021).

With these different departments, each having its own distinctive characteristics, the study presents different socio-cultural traditions and characteristics and hence a variety of women's and girls' leadership and empowerment perspectives.

Keita

Keita is located 72 km southeast of Tahoua, the regional capital. It is bordered to the east by the rural commune of Ibohamane, to the west by Tamaské and Kalfou, to the north by the rural communes of Tabalak, and to the south by the rural commune of Garhanga (Plan de Development Communal, 2016). The population is estimated to 75 273 in 2015 and is mostly Hausa, Tuareg, and Fulani (Plan de Development Communal, 2016). The department is

organized traditionally and administratively. There is a regional chief called “Sarki” (meaning “chief” in Hausa). Within the region’s villages, there are chiefs or “Hakimi,” and at the neighborhood level there is “Mai angoua” (“head of the neighborhood” in Hausa). Within families, which follow a patriarchal structure, the heads of families are men and are called “Mai guida” (head of the household). At the administrative level, the supervision of the municipality is exercised by the prefect, who acts under the authority of the regional governor. Additionally, the municipality has a decentralized organization that consists of a deliberative body, the Municipal Council, with an executive body, the mayor and his/her deputy, and various collaborators and opinion leaders (Plan de Development Communal, 2016).

Women in Keita play a leading role in economic and social development, a role that has been recognized beyond the national borders of Niger. Their renowned dynamism was praised during the implementation of the Keita Integrated Project, which was implemented in the 1980s when the department underwent environmental challenges including severe drought and deforestation. However, the residents, particularly women, were resilient and successfully aided in restoring the ecosystem in collaboration with the Nigerien government and Italy in 1983 with the noted Keita Integrated Project. I selected this department because of the enthusiastic character of the women in understanding how or if this type of project has impacted women in the long run. Knowing this information was critical for providing more context for the inquiry of study.

Birni N’ Konni

Konni (short name for Birni N’Konni) is a department located 510 km from the capital Niamey (see Figure 3-5 captured images, which show the Konni entrance and the city). Konni

has a population of 147,956 distributed in 56 villages and nine districts (ONEP, 2019). The department is bordered to the south by the Federal Republic of Nigeria, to the east by Tsarnaoua, to the north by Illéla, and to the west by Bazaga. Much of the population is Hausa and consists primarily of traders, farmers, breeders, and artisans. Konni is a major commercial and economical city and transportation hub, and its proximity to Northern Nigeria provides distinct characteristics. Niger and Northern Nigeria share the same religion, Islam, culture, and tradition, and Hausa is the lingua franca of both regions.



Figure 3-5: Entrance (borderline) of Birni N’Konni (left); Birni N’K’onni city

It should be noted that, historically, the French Voulet-Chanoine Mission of the late 1890s massacred more than 3,000 people in the Sokoto Caliphate—the area that today is Birni Konni in southern Niger and northern Nigeria. The city of Birni N’Konni is the historic center of the small pre-colonial Hausa state of Konni. It was also the ancient kingdom of Gobir conquered by Sheikh Usman dan Fodio in the 1700s (Hama, 1967). The population is mostly Hausa, and,

like Keita, it is organized traditionally and administratively. Traditionally, there is a chief Sarki⁸ (usually a male) within the region. Alongside the Sarki, there is also a distinguished man, called a “Marafa,” and a distinguished woman, or “Magagia,” elected in a traditional ceremony; they are mainly in charge of concerns within the chiefdom and community. Further, an appointed distinguished woman often receives the title of “Tambara,” meaning amazon or warrior. This title is also given to a strong, brave, and hardworking woman as the queen of women’s affairs in the region (kingdom). This region was selected for the study primarily due to its proximity to Nigeria and its influence on women’s everyday lives.

Participant Sampling Procedure

Pilot phase

A pilot test interview was conducted in Badaguichi, one of the municipalities of the region of Tahoua (see map above). Potential participants were identified and 15 women from ages 18 through 60 were selected, five from each site—Keita, Tabalak, and Birni N’konni. The women and girls were interviewed within a three-day period in the September 2021. In each of the selected sites, two of the women (ages 30-60) were housewives; two were current leaders or had been involved in leadership roles within the community and/or women groups; and one was a young woman (age 18–25) with no leadership position (see Table 3.2). During the pilot test, a one-on-one questionnaire followed by a focus group questionnaire was performed in the two selected sites. One of the women held a leadership position, and the other did not. Although I was an insider in the field this pilot test was necessary for me to be well prepared as a novice

⁸ Hausa word for “chief”

researcher and to gauge potential interviewees' understanding of the questionnaires. Specifically, as the pilot study relates to language and context, it must be noted that the Hausa language has variations within the region. In Tahoua, this dialect is called "Adaranci," which was a focal reason to include a pilot test. The recruitment process was made possible with the assistance of Professor Youssoufa at the University of Tahoua, as well as Tiémogo and Mohamed, both from the Chambre Regional d'Agriculture of Tahoua (CRA).

Tiémogo and Mohamed already work with various women's groups, known as "Groupements féminins," women's groups or associations across the Tahoua region, including the sites selected for the research. A relay person was contacted ahead of time to mobilize and schedule the interview date and time. A relay person is supposed to be the point person that serves as an intermediary between two or more persons.

Table 3.2 : Visual Sampling procedure

Participants (gender)	Number	Age	Type of involvement
Woman	Four	30-60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two women who hold or have previously held leadership positions within the community - Two women without a leadership position within the community
Youth girl	One	18-25	No leadership position within the community

Instrumentation

The study used a qualitative data collection framework using a twofold phases instrument. The first phase involved in-depth, one-on-one interview sessions with the 15 participants. Twelve questions were asked within a 30- to 45-minute time frame. An important point worth noting is that I was capable of going through the questions and receiving answers to each question more quickly than expected. That is partly due to the cultural context of communication: The nuances of the Hausa language often require fewer words to get to the point compared to other languages.

The second phase consisted of focus group discussions and storytelling with all participants interviewed in each site to discuss leadership and female leaders empowered and influenced by the participants at the community level. The focus group questionnaire session was done after each one-on-one interview to gather further information; it lasted about one hour and employed a storytelling approach. Based on an extensive literature review I developed a series of questions regarding leadership roles and women empowerment, which allowed me to have an open conversation with the participants during both the face-to-face interviews and the focus groups. Table 3.3 below outlines the research questions and informed literature.

Table 3.3: Visual instrumentation table

Questions	Linked with research question objectives (RQO)	Informed Literature
<p>Questions #1 through #4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you start by telling me something about yourself, such as your occupation, your educational background and marital status? -What are your thoughts about rural women and girls’ leadership? - Have you tried to occupy any leadership position in your community? - Are you inspired by your fellow women or girls who are occupying or occupied any leadership position? 	<p>These set of questions are an attempt to unpack and help under research objectives #1 and #2</p>	<p>Informed by literature review on women’s opinion of leadership within the African context.</p> <p>(World Bank, 2019; Anigwe, 2014)</p>

Questions #5 through #7

-What are your opinions about taking a leadership position?

- What are the assets you believe you will gain in holding a leadership position?

- Do you think that leadership and empowerment go hand in hand? Why and why not?

These set of questions are an attempt to unpack and help under objectives #2 and #3

Informed by literature review and previous research on women's willingness to take, and benefits of taking, leadership roles.

(Robinson, 2015; World Bank, 2019).

<p>Questions #8 through #12</p> <p>-Do you believe that you may be empowered when holding a leadership role? Why or why not?</p> <p>- What are the challenges that restrict you from being empowered?</p> <p>-Do you see leadership as a way to become empowered?</p> <p>- As rural dwellers, what are your perceptions of empowerment and leadership?</p> <p>- Do you feel supported or discouraged when you want to engage in your community?</p>	<p>Objectives #3 and #4</p>	<p>Informed by literature reviews on women already holding leadership roles, women empowerment, and the benefit of empowerment for countries' development. The following set of questions were also informed by influencing and restraining factors from being empowered or holding leadership roles.</p> <p>(Steady, 2011; Narayan, 2005; Robinson, 2015; Poltera, 2019; Bisung & Dickin, 2019).</p>
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Validity and Reliability

Throughout this research, I was very transparent about the purpose of the study, which was to explore how rural girls and women perceive leadership, particularly community leadership and leadership of women's groups, based on their lived experiences as rural residents within the Nigerien Karkara context. The validation strategies utilized in this inquiry aimed to document the study's accuracy (Creswell, 2012). These strategies were also helpful in evaluating qualitative researchers' truth value, rigor, and usefulness (Rossman & Rallis, 2016).

The research also used the eight validation strategies proposed by Creswell & Miller (2000). One strategy was to clarify my own biases as a researcher to identify what might shape the methodology and the interpretations of the results. Reliability refers to the researcher's consistency across researchers and projects (Creswell, 2012). To enhance the reliability of the study, I followed the recommendations of Creswell, who conceives of reliability as the "stability of responses to multiple coders of data set" (2013, p. 210). The first step towards research reliability included checking the transcriptions for errors and the use of a sound recorder to obtain detailed field notes. I also kept the participants' anonymity and stayed true to the voice of the people. Another strategy used by the researcher to increase the validity and quality of the data was triangulation.

Triangulation

The process of triangulation occurs when multiple methods and different sources of information are used to corroborate the findings (Creswell, 2012). Providing details and descriptions of the cases (history, location, and setting) is also a strategy to give more context to the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). One of the first triangulation types performed by the researcher was methods triangulations. These methods included memoing where I conducted extensive observations and created my own field notes, in addition to pictures and videos taken in the field. Another triangulation method used was data source triangulation. The researcher collected data in three locations to gain a broader, more robust, and nuanced perspective to confirm the richness of findings by using three sites. Additionally, the researcher gathered more information through conversations with family, interviews with scholars such as Nigerien

emeritus professors, historians, political scientists, sociologists journalists and the community to gain a different view and history of the investigated phenomenon.

Researcher Positionality

Positionality is described by Merriam et al. (2001) as “where one stands about the other.”

It took me days of meditation to determine how to reflect in writing my positionality, although, in my mind, my objectives and vision for the research were clear. Holmes (2020) rightly puts it that writing about positionality takes much time and “soul searching,” and the process cannot be rushed. As I am conducting research on the motherland and on my compatriot Africa soil, as a Nigerien woman, I inevitably have positions and an epistemological lens that will come to play. Therefore, it is important to address my positionality within the study. I am a woman, daughter, wife, mother, multicultural, quadrilingual, and binational, among other positions that I hold in life which offer different perspectives.

Giametta (2018) contends that the positionality of social researchers “does not operate from a socio-cultural vacuum”; however, the researcher is producing knowledge from a particular perspective and completely submerges in a specific value system. Giametta also argues that the words researchers use, and their given location influence their sensibilities as social investigators (Giametta, 2018). Merriam et al. (2001) and Holmes (2020) stated that, as researchers, we can be insiders and outsiders to a specific community of research participants: at various levels and different times, and that the position of insider and outsider in alignment to or isolation from those whom we study is multiple, and can switch (Merriam et al., 2001; Holmes, 2020).

As an insider born and raised in Niger, I am versed in the culture, tradition, religion, and languages. However, my age, gender, social class, background, education, training, and keen interest in learning from the participants placed me in an within the outsider category. These factors created a complex power dynamic and drew assumptions between my participants and me.

My personal and international professional training, background, and exposure provided me with the opportunity to examine issues within a specific context and lens and to be able to come up with appropriate and distinct perspectives to go about undertaking them. I have always wanted to take an active role in society, particularly in improving the lives of youth and women. I want to see women's rights be upheld and recognized at all levels. I dream of a world of equality where women and men are treated with respect and fairness no matter their sex. A world where chances are given to everyone, male and female, and gender stereotypes are nonexistent.

My exposure at a very young age to young girls' and women's daily issues and lack of opportunities have driven my desire to address their concerns within communities, especially the rural youth and women who are often forgotten. From that perspective, my goal is to have gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved and eventually address these issues by empowering the youth and women to be part of the solutions that directly affect their lives and the generations to come. Hence, my utmost responsibility as a researcher is to remain a researcher of integrity; to explicitly self-assess, critically examine, and reflect on my positionality; and to provide my unique insight along the research process, context, and reflective analysis in a manner that provides a voice to the most marginalized populations in Niger.

Reflexivity and Specific Ethical Considerations

Reflexivity is defined as “a way of emphasizing the importance of self-awareness, political/cultural consciousness, and ownership of one’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 64). Through reflexivity, researchers engage in self-reflection, which assist them to better understand how their lens affects the research project, mainly because qualitative research often includes interactions with participants (Yao & Vital 2018). Reflexivity is frequently addressed in qualitative research as a way to reflect on one’s position and thus extremely important to address mainly within international fieldwork (Yao & Vital, 2018; Sultana, 2007). Since the study is being conducted in the Republic of Niger, in rural areas, reflexivity on how I position myself influences the data collection.

As a Nigerien woman who speaks the languages of the population and is familiar with the culture, I am, therefore, an insider. However, as mentioned earlier, I am also an outsider who came to learn about the people while collecting the data. Consequently, I had to be very explicit with the participant about the purpose of the research. In doing so, I explained that the study was not related to any non-profit or private organization or developmental project they typically encounter. Yet, it was doctoral research, and the fieldwork was part of collecting the data that will be presented to complete the degree. I explained to them that the purpose is to have their voices heard beyond borders and have their perspectives considered within the literature gap. Then right after this vital explanation, most participants took a few minutes to express their satisfaction of seeing one of their compatriots coming from the United States to inquire about their perceptions in general. We all bonded, and I felt the mood change through their body language, showing they were more relaxed and would be having a more natural conversation with one of them. At the same time, because they were comfortable, they used the opportunity to

express their need (seeing me as a relay person) to address the support they needed when I returned. I kept their confidentiality as stated in the Penn State University Park Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulation.

It is important to note that I had never been to these rural areas before, so I had to mentally prepare myself for the unknown and how I should best present myself to the participants. I gained essential insights from my parents, friends, and committee members (who worked or lived in these areas??) . My parents reminded me to be kind and know I am home whenever I go. My friend Rachida, who had the experience of working in various rural areas, urged me that manners mattered. Meaning, when I went into the field, and I was offered water or food, to take at least a sip or bite out of respect. I was also offered valuable advice from committee members before entering the field. Members, such as Professor Alidou prompted me to let the participants do most of the talking while I did most of the listening. Professor Sterling reminded me of how I should be mindful of my outfits as I go on the field, as this signaled that I am an outsider.

Reciprocity

As previously mentioned, all participants were invited to meet within a place they could quickly meet. As noted, because I explained to the participants the purpose of the study, the interchange with the participant was less complex. As one of their compatriots, we instantly connected as a family and were very kind and respectful to each other. I am in contact with most of them who call to check on me, and I also do the same. Although I provided some incentives for each participant at the end of the interview sessions, some of them mentioned that the consideration, care and thought that I showed and had on them coming from the United States

was highly estimated and worth far more than the small tokens given. The connection and relationship I built with participants will be lifelong reciprocity. I hope to keep and stay in touch with them, and I will make sure whenever I return to these communities, I will arrange a few hours to stop by to see them and reconnect.

I hope someday I can create an organization to work with the rural communities to provide them with the necessary support and help for their demands. During my stay in Tahoua, the staff at the University offered me all the guidance and support I needed. As my way of giving back, I organized a seminar where students and I had an insightful dialogue on their perception of leadership within the Nigerien context. The seminar lasted over two hours and over hundreds of students were present, which indicate their interest about the topic and thanks to the swift mobilization of the student's executive board

Many students came to me; we took pictures; they thanked me and appreciated my modest contribution. It was a great opportunity in which students, and I had a rich dialogue. We exchanged contacts with some with whom I am still in touch. Overall, I am indebted for all the support I received, and I hope to return very soon to present and share the findings once the dissertation is completed and approved.

Limitations

The goal of a qualitative study is a complete, detailed description. In this analysis approach, findings cannot be extended to broader populations with the same degree of certainty (Ochieng,2009). Consequently, one of the study's first limitations is that the sample cannot be generalized to other rural communities and cannot be tested to discover whether the findings are statistically significant or due to chance. Further, the sample size can also be considered a

limitation, although the researcher could gain critical insight from the selected sample (more explanation is provided in chapter 5). The second limitation was that the study focused on rural areas and excluded urban ones. Although two selected regions (Keita and Birni N'konni) are considered urban municipalities, the research focuses on rural areas within these municipalities.

A third significant limitation was the budget restrictions for conducting international research conducted in Niger, West Africa. Another limitation was the limited literature and data unavailable within the Nigerien context for the investigated topic and context. Although purposeful, the fourth limitation was excluding male participants during the interview sessions. Another limitation included a sudden change in one of the selected sites due to security reasons (Abalak was declared a red zone by the government) when the study was conducted. The last limitation experienced by the researcher was the lack of detailed information from the adolescent girls, which could have provided a broader perspective from both women and girls (This will be detailed in the limitation and suggestions section). Although the researcher consulted the direction of national archival many of the researcher's questions remained unanswered.

Data Collection

I sent the data collection instrument, consent form, interview questionnaires (face to face, focus group, and series of practices questionnaires), and protocol to the Penn State University Park IRB for approval. The study was successfully approved (Study ID STUDY00017750) in Fall 2021 see Appendix D for the approval and exemption correspondence prior to the fieldwork and data collection. The data collection occurred in Niger, within the Tahoua region in three sites: Tabalak, Keita, and Birni N'Konni. Before the fieldwork, I had correspondence and meetings with staff at the University of Tahoua, who graciously offered to help me with the data

collection process once in the field. As part of the administrative protocol, I also received an approval letter from the University of Tahoua Dean's office to conduct data collection in the region (see Appendix E for the approval letter).

Following a meeting with the expert staff from the Chambre Regional d'Agriculture of Tahoua and the Dean's office at the University of Tahoua, we were able to identify the targeted communities to interview in each site. A CRA staff member, Mohamed Chékaraou, was selected to be the guide and relay person for the fieldwork. Considering the geographical location of each site and my itinerary, it was ideal to start with the department of Tabalak in the east, followed by Keita located in the southeast, then Konni in the center. The relay person contacted the women and girls the day before in order to agree upon the time and location for the interviews. In Tabalak, we met in the community compound; in Keita, in the mayor's office; and in Birni N'Konni, in the family backyard of one of the women. At each site, after introducing myself and explaining the purpose of the research and the meeting, I asked verbal consent/permission to record the interview sessions and take short videos and pictures along the way. We were able to complete the interview process in each site within a day.

Data Analysis

All the recorded interviews, including face-to-face and focus groups, were transcribed from Hausa to French, then French to English. To organize, codify, and create themes, I first started the coding process of the data using the Quirkos software. However, there were some limitations to using Quirkos with the type of analysis I wanted to perform and acknowledging that I have large data. Some of these limitations were being unable to see the different themes on one side without a switch screen. I then switched from using Quirkos to MaxQDA ("MaxQDA",

2020). I realized with the latter software package, I have more robust, sophisticated, and advanced techniques for analyzing, coding, and classifying the data. With my variables, for instance, I had the opportunity to use MaxQDA to see all the coded transcripts with the created themes (on the left side of the screen) all on the same page. I also could color code the themes through the code system, rename them under the code memo box section and organize them as I wished. Once I completed this process, it was easier to code the interview transcripts by analyzing the keywords created. With the variables options, I could put all the variables of the participants, such as gender, age, employment etc.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the type of research utilized to conduct the study: a qualitative research case study analysis. The chapter is structured following the fundamental principles of a research methodology. These essential principles include the study research design and analysis and a description of the research sites. It also presents the participant sampling procedure, the instrumentation followed by the strategy used to ensure validity and reliability. I also presented in this section my positionality as a researcher, my reflexivity and ethical considerations, my experienced reciprocity with people involved in the study, and some of the encountered limitations. The next chapter covered the literature reviews.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

In this chapter, I describe the general findings of the fieldwork. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of Karkara women and girls in the Tahoua regions of Tabalak, Keita, and Konni about leadership positions as a vector of empowerment.

The study was guided by four objectives:

1. Understand Karkara women's and adolescent girls' perceptions of leadership and willingness to participate in leadership positions, focusing on leadership in the community and in women's groups or associations.
2. Explore the factors and opportunities that can empower and influence other women and girls to take leadership positions, as well as the factors that leverage or contribute to their participation.
3. Understand the barriers that prevent women and girls from acquiring and participating in leadership positions.
4. Understand the support systems and resources that women and girls need to participate in leadership roles.

Presentation of the Findings

Results are presented in terms of the above objectives. The presentation of findings begins with a description of the interviewing process. This is followed by profiles of the participants. Third, the pilot phase is described, and the data analysis process is presented.

Fourth, themes are identified, and patterns and subthemes created. Lastly, the findings are described in relation to the research aims. Considering that the study was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, a section is also included on the impact of the pandemic on Karkara women's and girls' daily activities, business, and community interactions.

The Interviewing Process

The interview process began with a systematic review of the different sites that were selected for the data collection. I and two individuals, Rachida Boubacar and Mohamed Chékaraou, went on the sites to collect interview data. Rachida is a childhood friend and an epidemiologist who graciously offer to come with me on the field trip. She had years of experience working with the Karkara population, particularly in conducting interviews during the vaccination campaign organized by the Nigerien Health Ministry in collaboration with other partners such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and Rotary International under the extended immunization program (EPI). Mohamed was a staff from Chambre Régionale d'Agriculture de Tahoua (CRA), the Tahoua Regional Chamber of Agriculture, selected by his supervisor to help the research as a guide and point person. Mohamed was familiar with the study locations and community. He also supervised various *groupements féminin* (women's groups) across the Tahoua region.

On-site interviews were done in three selected locations: Tabalak, Keita, and Konni. Five women and girls were interviewed in each site, making a sample size of 15 participants (n=15). Two women participated (n=2) in the pilot test in Badaguichi, in the Tahoua region. The

recruiting criteria in each site included women with current or past leadership roles, women with no leadership roles, and women 18 or older whom the study referred to as adolescent girls.

The first site was Tabalak, followed by Keita and lastly Birni Konni. It is important to note that the selection of the three sites was designed to ensure diversity in the responses that captured and explored different perceptions within the Tahoua region. The site selection design also assisted in the researcher being able to easily follow the path of saturation of participant responses as I moved from one site to the next. Hence the target sample was appropriate for the intent of the study.

In order to address the research objectives, 12 questions were asked during each one-on-one interview. A list of the questions is presented in Appendix B. In order to add to the richness and depth of responses from the participants, focus groups also were conducted at each site. The focus group discussion questions (see Appendix C) provided participants with a greater opportunity to share personal stories authentically and naturally due to the nature of the questions and the group format. The focus group created an additional opportunity to gather information from like-minded participants and gain an understanding of how a leader is perceived within the Karkara community. Further, the focus groups offered a greater opportunity to expand and layer the responses provided from participants during the one-on-one interviews.

Before each interview, the participant was told the purpose of the research, and all participants gave their verbal consent. A verbal consent was used instead of a written one, because of the low levels of literacy of women in Karkara communities. One-on-one interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes, and all were conducted in Hausa, the local language. Each focus group lasted between 35 and 45 minutes and was conducted in a conversation format in Hausa, in order to provide a level of comfort for participants to share personal stories and

provide greater detail within their responses. All five participants in each site were present in an agreed-upon location, which allowed the interviews to be done all within the same day without interruption. Participants and community members in all sites were welcoming and pleasant, making the interview sessions run smoothly without any issues. All participants identified as Nigerien nationals and spoke the Hausa language, with noted slight nuances and accents between the sites. The participants showed great hospitality across all sites, and in Tabalak, for instance, the researcher and the team were given chairs while the participants sat on mats on the floor. One may think that this seating format created a power dynamic. However, this is culturally appropriate in the Nigerien context and is a common way for people to respectfully welcome their guests. There is a common saying in Hausa, "*Bakon ka Allah ka ne*", meaning your guest is like your god—you treat them with respect and kindness.

At the end of each face-to-face interview, the researcher took a few minutes with the assistance of the team to complete a "series of practice" checklist (see Appendix F). The series of practices were designed to aid in understanding the behavioral nuances observed in that participant and the level of confidence they displayed during the interviews. The confidence level was important for assessing the accuracy of the participant's responses and how they presented their opinions. All interviews were digitally recorded using a voice recorder and stored on both Google Drive and an external hard drive.

In order to gain permission to access the community, the research team paid a courtesy visit to the mayors of Badaguichiri, Tabalak, and Keita before the interviews. The purpose of this visit was twofold: It provided the opportunity to explain the purpose of the intended research to the mayor and their staff while also introducing the team. After a brief introduction to the study and an opportunity to ask questions, the research team was given a proverbial nod of acceptance

and in many cases, the local officials expressed appreciation for their community having been selected.

Description of Participant Profiles

In this section, descriptive profiles of the study participants are provided. A profile of each participant from all sites—Tabalak, Keita, and Birni N’Konni—including age, educational background, marital status, employment status, and leadership position, can be found in Tables 4.1 through 4.4. To preserve each participant’s privacy and confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used. The participants’ social class categorization comes from observations by the research team; factors included the education level, current occupation, assigned status in the community, how other participants referred to the individual (particularly during the focus group session), and how the participant visibly presented during the interviews.

The importance of the social class, age, marital status, ethnicity, and the dress code of the women is critical, as each of these contributes crucial components of the cultural, social, traditional, and religious contexts of the participants. Some components, such as clothing, may seem superficial; however, they help reflect one’s identity and status in the community and society at large and help contextualize the participant’s perspectives and views on various topics. The social class of the participants is categorized as either middle class (working women, unemployed and/or uneducated) or lower middle class (unemployed and/or uneducated). The different ethnicities of the participants are defined below:

Adarawa: The Adarawa are a Hausa ethnic group people from the Tahoua regions. The female is called *Ba’adara* while the male is *Ba’adaré*.

Tuareg: The Tuareg people are a large Berber ethnic group, pastoralists who mainly inhabit the Sahara in North and West Africa (Britannica, 2019). In Niger, Hausa Tuareg is called *Bouzoua* for a female and *Bouzou* for a male. In Zarma, they are called *Baleh*.

Fulani: The Fulani (also called Peul or Fulbé) are a large group of nomadic herders and sedentary farmers who are widely dispersed throughout Africa in the Sahel/Savannah belt (Britannica, 2022).

Konnawa: The Konnawa are a Hausa ethnic group from Birni N’Konni. Among the other Hausa ethnic groups, this group distinguishes itself by this name to refer to the region they are from or live in.

Ba’ara/Ba’are: This is the ethnic group from the region of Doutchi in Niger.

Middle class: Working women, unemployed and/or uneducated.

Lower middle class: Unemployed and/or uneducated.

Table 4.1: Badaguichiri Participant Profile (Pilot Test)

Name	Age	Educational Background	Marital Status	Number of Children	Employment Status (Formal or nonformal work)	Holding or held a leadership position
Fati	55	Not schooled but attended Islamic school (Makaranta or Mohamadia in Hausa)	Widow (a year and 4 months ago)	8	No	Yes
Hamssa	45	Not schooled but did Islamic school (Makaranta or Mohamadia in Hausa)	Married	5	No	No

Table 4.2: Tabalak Participants 'Profile

Name	Age	Educational Background	Marital Status	Number of Children	Employment Status	Holding or held a leadership position
Larey	35	Went to school until 4eme, equivalent to Grade 8 in the U.S. (forced to leave school)	Forced marriage	5	Works with various NGOs as a <i>Maman Lumière</i> or “Light mother”	Yes
Kady	57	Not schooled	Widow (7 years)	7	Self-employed: Sells fried fish and with NGOs that are in the community	Yes
Ramou	Maybe 40 (not exactly sure)	Not schooled	Married	6	Works as a <i>Maman Lumière</i> or “Light Mother”	No
Binta	55	Not schooled but did some Islamic school or Makaranta in Hausa	Widow (23 years)	5	Self-employed: Sells fish and other snacks	No
Abou	18	Left school at 3eme, equivalent of Grade 9 in the U.S.	Married	1	Self-employed: Sews bed sheets by hand	No

Table 4.3: Keita Participants 'Profile

Name	Age	Educational Background	Marital Status	Number of Children	Employment Status	Holding or held a leadership position
Natou	57	Not schooled but did Islamic school (Makaranta or Mohamadia in Hausa)	Widow (19 years)	7	Self-employed: Hand processing activities	Yes
Riya	58	Went to school until 5eme, equivalent to Grade 7	Married	6	Unemployed but president of a women's association	Yes
Ami	20	Went to school until 3eme, equivalent to Grade 9 (married at 15)	Married	1 child and is currently pregnant	Unemployed	No
Zeyna	37	Went to school until CM1, equivalent to Grade 4	Married	5	Unemployed	No
Hady	48	Went to school until CM2, equivalent to Grade 5	Widow (6 years)	10	Unemployed	No

Table 4.4: Birni N’Konni Participants’ Profile

Name	Age	Educational Background	Marital Status	Number of Children	Employment Status	Holding or held a leadership position
Safia	55	Went to school until 4eme, equivalent to Grade 8	Married	4	Unemployed	No leadership position but consulted by many for guidance/advice
Fati	52	Went to school until CM2, equivalent to Grade 5 (Franco-Arab school system)	Divorced (11 years ago)	6 children but one passed away	Involved with politics and sells things	Yes
Biba	37	Went to school until 3eme (Grade 9)	Divorced (4 years ago)	3	Self-employed: Commerce	No
Toua	31	Went to school until CM2 (Grade 5)	Married	4	Self-employed: Sews bed sheets by hand	No
Rahi	19	Went to school until 3eme (Grade 9)	Single	0	Unemployed	No

Pilot phase

The pilot phase was an opportunity to reevaluate and redefine the Hausa interview questionnaires. This allowed me to have synonyms available to substitute, when necessary, to provide clarification on the questions being asked. For instance, when I used the Hausa word *wahayi*, meaning “inspired,” the participant asked what I meant. I had to use synonyms such as *shawa* and *koy koyo*, which the participants understood immediately. The pilot phase also enabled me to mentally prepare for the perseverance I would need to carry out interviews and

focus groups in three different communities. Additionally, it allowed me to prepare for the unknown and the level of improvisation that may be required when asking questions as a novice researcher on the field, and it boosted my confidence level for the following interviews. Among the most salient information from the pilot interviews was the way women reacted, understood, and at the same time responded to the interview questions. This provided me with great insight and confidence on how my questionnaires would be understood by participants. It should be noted that we provided face masks to all participants which they had on.

Badaguichiri

As noted earlier, the pilot test occurred in Badaguichi, a rural commune in the department of Illéla in the Tahoua region. The commune is located about 30 miles from Tahoua city. In 2017, according to the National Institute of Statistics, known as Institut National De La Statistique (INS), the population of the commune of Badaguichi was 138,212—68,891 male and 69,321 female (Institut National De La Statistique, 2018). Badaguichiri was selected for the convenience sampling with two female participants.

The participants were contacted via phone with the help of a liaison, and they expressed their availability and willingness to participate in the pilot test. Afterward, the team and I, including a driver, left Tahoua city for Badaguichiri in the mid-afternoon. I was very eager for the journey as it was also my first time visiting the region. We started at the Badaguichi mayor's office, which is standard protocol when wanting to work or enter into a community. The mayor's office also served as the meeting location for the participants and the team based on the conversation between the relay person and the participant. The mayor and one of his staff

welcomed us before we presented the purpose of the research. We exchanged contact information in case we needed to reach out during our stay or beyond. We also took pictures as a sign of good intent, support, and evidence. These acts of reciprocity assisted in signaling to the mayor and his team that the research project was designed to explore Karkara women's and girls' views of leadership. What follows is the description of the first two participants—Fati and Hamssa—who were part of the pilot study.

*Fati*⁹

The first participant interviewed for the pilot study was Fati, a tall, middle lower-class Hausa woman. One of the indications of her social status is the fact that she was dressed in a casual Nigerien outfit: a midi purple and gray oversized dress made of fabric known as Bazin with the same material wrap underneath. She had a black headscarf over her head and an oversized colorful scarf covering her whole body. She had a wood stick in her mouth (traditionally used to clean teeth), which she was circling over in her mouth using her hand and had to bite with her teeth to secure it from falling over. After the casual Nigerien and Muslim salutation *As-salamu alaykum*, meaning “peace be upon you,” she kept on with the greetings, asking, how was the road? How are we doing? How is the family doing? How are we coping with the weather? In Niger and most African countries, this is a typical way of greeting and welcoming a person.

During the interview I asked Fati to provide some quick background about herself and she mentioned that she was 55. She had been married, but her husband had passed away nearly 16 months ago. She was a mother of eight with three grandchildren. Fati had not attended the

⁹ As mentioned previously, all names of participants have been replaced with pseudonyms.

western school system; however, she had attended the Islamic school commonly known as Makaranta or Mohamadia in Hausa. She was well-versed in how women's associations/groups are organized and structured within the community. Fati stated that, among her children, two of her daughters went to school. One is currently a teacher, and the other is in her last year of high school and will be preparing for the high school examination called *baccalauréat* (BAC), the equivalent of the GED in the United States. She further mentioned that schooling is very important, and that marriage is just a "title." Her advice to her daughters—in particular the one in high school—is to like her other sister and become empowered.

Although Fati was unemployed, she held a unique leadership position within the community as the community advisor. She mentioned:

Jagoranci na guda na, puruje da duk ta zaka a nan dai yankin Badaguichiri in ban zo ta daya ina zakuwa ta biyu. Puruje da duk ta zaka ta na kirana. Da dai na ji an ce ga bakon puruje ba wargi nika ba ba zama nikai ba. Da an she za ayi buro insha Allah mata sun kama ma daraja in an ce ku doki kungiya sai su ce mun bada wance.

[My leadership is that every organization that comes in the region of Badaguichiri will call me. If I don't come first, I will come second when it comes to selecting a woman leader. As soon as I heard there is a new organization, I do not joke. Whenever the organization wanted to set up a committee, God willing, the women (who estimate me) will say that we have given that person.]

What she meant is that she always held either the first place or second place (meaning the leader or the vice leader) when organizations or projects came to the Badaguichi commune, and when they decided to solicit females for the creation of a committee and assigned them leadership roles, women in the committee always selected her. I realized that Fati, as she alluded

to during our session, is well known and respected in the community. She holds several leadership roles within women's associations/groups, such as an advisor, a woman representative, and a go-to person. Although this was my first-time meeting Fati, she was the type of person you felt you had known for a while and her company felt very comfortable. Her smile was contagious, and she was enthusiastic about answering all the questions. I found her very charismatic, social, outspoken, energetic, and down to earth, and while I was filling the series of practice questionnaires, her confidence level was "very confident" and she spoke "freely."

When I asked her to share her view on female leadership, Fati stated:

Mata na karkara abin da a ra'ayinmu da su aure, mu jayo hankalinsu su yi aure. Yara matasa mu ja hankalin uwayensu mu ce su sa su lakkwal. Saboda da, in ka sashi lakkwal balle diya mace ta fi sanin darajar uwa ta. Ko ba gaskiya ba? Humm, Ta fi sanin darajar uwata ehh. Muna zan waye ma mata kai, mou tai karkara mu che koubar iya mata su yi lakkwal. Iya mata kouma kou bar musu auren dole. Aboun da souke so, souyi lakkwal. Danka in ya yi lakkwal say ka chi oun fanin chi. Kouma In ka mishi auren dole lokacin bai kai ba in ya lalace, an ka kawo shi gida ke uwa kin ga arkane. Ba babanta chi ya tafita tai.

[Our opinion about karkara women is marriage¹⁰. We want to remind women to get married. For young children, we remind and persuade their parents to put them in school. Because when you put children in school, particularly a daughter, she knows better the value of her mother. Isn't that true? Humm, she knows better her mother's value, ehh¹¹.

¹⁰ *Aure* in Hausa

¹¹ A way to emphasize something is true or to agree on something

We raise awareness among women, especially in rural areas, so they can let their girls go to school. Not to force them into marriage. What the children want is to go to school. If your child goes to school, you will benefit from it. Again, if you force your child to marry before they get to the [appropriate] age, if she is brought back home, “you” the mother you are the one who will suffer. Her father is not there.]

Fati’s narration excerpt illustrates the importance of marriage status for women in Niger in relation to holding leadership roles. She emphasizes the fundamental value for young girls to be schooled and not be forced into marriage.

Hamssa

Hamssa was the second participant interviewed in Badaguichi. She was wearing a long black and red hijab which went over her knee. You could only see some part of the outfit she was wearing, which is in cloth known as *pagne*—an indication of a lower middle-class women. She also greeted us; however, since Fati is older (and her voice was much louder), Hamssa kept quiet while she was chewing her cola nut. In addition, when asked to introduce herself, she mentioned she didn’t go to *Lakkwal*, meaning school in Hausa, and even the Makaranta (Islamic school) she attended was very basic. As she paused, I asked her if she was married, and her response was “Umm,” meaning yes. I asked her age and she mentioned she is 45 and a mother of five. Throughout the session, Hamssa kept reiterating that she qualified herself as one of Fati’s followers (but not a leader), from whom she received adequate training.

As a follower to a leader, Hamssa noted, *Muna dai biye dasu har kanmu ya waye*, meaning “they are following the other women leaders until they are well trained/educated.”

However, Hamssa foresaw herself as a leader one day when she had the necessary training, as referenced by this comment: *Mu na dey biya, har kanmu ya waye mu yi mu ma shugabanci*, meaning “we are following until we are educated enough to lead as well.”

Hamssa was reserved, and during the focus group discussion that followed where she and Fati were interviewed together, she let Fati do most of the talking. She did more listening than talking. When I pushed Hamssa to provide her own insights, she would say that whatever Fati said was the same as she would say; she rarely added new points.

Hamssa answered the question about her leadership view with a different perspective by noting:

Matan karkara dai kowa ya sansu da wahala. Awo! Suna itace, su yi daka, su yi susuka, su doko ruwa. Ehh!

To, kun san duniya da da aka wuce, da dunia ta yanzu ta zamani da ake ciki an hutashesu suna zamne cikin gida akwai fonfo, akwai mashin ko. Ba a itace sai sayen gaz ko dai a sayo itace. Kenan an houtache sou yanzou. Amma horako, suna walaha, su zo daji, su yi daka, su yi susuka, su yi itace, su doko ruwa kuma ga su da goyo ga ciki. Kinga wahala ta gamou. Da yanzu dunia ta sake ta yi dafi. Ana doka mata konseye, ana doka maire cikin mata, sanan ana doka har premier ministre cikin mata. Kenan yanzu abou ya zo karin gaba. An chi gaba yanzu.

Kuma wan ga chi gaba a bune mai kawo da wanda kanchi ya waye. Wan da ya ga bai da kawo, kenan ha wo kainer ya na chikin daji, Ehh! An ma wanda achikin birni, kainay ya waye. Ayo!

[Rural women are known to carry a lot of burden. *Awo*¹²! They go find wood, they pound, they thresh, they fetch water. Ehh! Well, you know the past compared to the present, many things have changed. Women have less burden, there is tap water today, they have a grinding machine. They don't go out to find wood but rather buy gas or wood. This means they have less to do. But the ones in Karkara are still struggling—they go to the bush, they thresh, they make wood, they plow water, while they carry their babies on the back and are also pregnant. You see the struggles are multiple. Now the world is happy again. Women are appointed as advisors; the mayor is including women as prime ministers. So now there are improvements. Now things have changed. And this change is a good thing for someone with an open mind. Whoever views that as not a good thing, then that one has a backslidden spirit. Ehh! But the one who lives in an urban environment is more open minded. Ayo!

Hamssa's perspective showed how rural women are known to have a lot on their plate. They have to dealt with the household chores daily. However, many things have changed, for instance with the introduction of cooking gas and tap water. Although things have changed, the changes are more visible in the urban setting, where people are open minded and where more and more women now occupy higher leadership roles.

¹² Meaning yes, to approve of something

Selected Research Sites

Tabalak

With the pilot phase complete, we took the road to Tabalak early on September 21, 2021. The bumpy road was paved but tremendously degraded with countless potholes. Tabalak was the community that served as the locale for the first interviews. The commune is located about 54 kilometers from Tahoua city and is very rural. The residents are mostly Tuaregs and Hausa, and the most recent population census in 2017 estimated the total population to be 50,885, distributed between 25,364 males and 25,522 females (Institut National De La Statistique, 2018). Because this trip occurred during the crop season, I was charmed by contemplating the millet and corn that grew remarkably longer in certain places compared to others. The landscape was resplendent, and I breathed the fresh air free of pollution. This was an indicator of a remote countryside. After about an hour and 15 minutes 'drive, we entered the commune; as we did so, the first landmark was the renowned pond of "Fallé" of Tabalak (described in Chapter 3). Surrounding the ponds were canoes and different types of birds flying or resting nearby. We first headed to the town hall to make a courtesy visit to the staff of the mayor's office. Next, we went to a public square where the participants were already seated on a big mat under a large shade tree. Chairs had been reserved for us along with some refreshments as a sign to welcome us—within the African cultural etiquette, offering a drink (commonly water) is a sign of esteem and an effort to make the hosts as comfortable as possible. We introduced ourselves to the participants and explained the purpose of our research. Before we started the face-to-face interviews, we isolated ourselves from the other women seated on the mat. This is a way to avoid other women hearing the answers provided by the ones before them.

Larey

The first woman interviewed in Tabalak was Larey, a middle-class Hausa woman wearing a blue with white polka dot hijab. She introduced herself as a married woman, 35, and a mother of five. Larey said her parents removed her from school at Grade 8 and forced her to marry. Larey had been staying in the household without her willingness. She noted she really wanted to go back to school and get a certificate; she had applied several times to take the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), but had not passed the exam. With years passing, she said she started to get discouraged; however, many people told her to keep trying and not be discouraged. She said she planned to place her application this year, which the team and I encouraged her to do.

Although Larey was a school dropout, she was considered one of the few literates within the community and a female leader in the community. She also said that she was fortunate to get hired to work with almost all NGO programs that came into the commune. She was a *Maman Lumière* or “light mother”; in that role, she contributed to reducing malnutrition rates among children in the community. As part of her work, she educated mothers on preparing nutritious flour to feed their children and, overall, how to care for their wellbeing. Larey led various activities organized by local NGOs and was also involved with women’s group activities in the community. Because Larey attended some school, she can speak and write in French and was among the participants who included some French words during the interview. We felt comfortable including some French words as needed for clarity in the interview.

Kady

The second woman interviewed was Kady, a lower-middle-class woman who was wearing a gray hijab that went down her knees. She was 57 and a mother of seven children. Kady was the oldest among the participants in Tabalak and mentioned that she had been a widow for seven years and did not remarry. Kady did not attend secular school and did not go far either with the Islamic school. She was self-employed, doing a small business selling fried fish (fishing is one of the region's main activities). Kady also worked with NGOs, where she led women's associations/groups, and was considered a leader in the women's association she worked with. Kady was hospitable, and at the end of our session, she brought us fresh fried fish, which she revealed were caught early that morning. She told us to try some and eventually buy some if we wish. Kady's personality, hospitality, and actions were indicative of the genial nature of the individuals within the community.

Ramou

The third woman interviewed was Ramou. She identified as a Tuareg. She was a lower-middle-class woman, and an indication of that status was that she was wearing a white knee-length hijab with a colorful cloth underneath. She was married and a mother of six. When I asked Ramou her age, she was not sure and had to guess. First, she said she was in her late 30s or perhaps in her early 40s; she then affirmed that she was probably 40 and we should go by that age. The fact that Ramou did not know her age was an indication that she was not literate and perhaps didn't even have a birth certificate. Ramou said she did not attend school, but three of her children did, and the remaining three were not yet old enough. I asked Ramou if she went to

an Islamic school (Makaranta), and she said, *Moun yi Makaranta kanan-kanan*, meaning “I did a little bit of Islamic school.” With a smile on her face and a soft Tamashek accent when she spoke Hausa, Ramou jokingly mentioned that Tuareg people in the past were known not to worry about Makaranta. She mentioned that, honestly—as she swore by saying *walahi*, meaning “in the name of God”—it was only in recent years that Tuaregs started to educate themselves or become less ignorant by involving themselves with others and seeking knowledge. (We all laughed alongside her.) Like Larey, Ramou worked as a *Maman Lumière*, going to hospitals to make nutritious porridge out of fried grains (millet, maize, wheat, and sorghum) to feed malnourished children.

Binta

The fourth woman interviewed was Binta. She was also a Tuareg (like Ramou) and, from my observation, fell within the lower-middle social class based on her outfit and profile. She was wearing a colorful white, orange, and black long hijab that went over her knees and had a colorful green, orange, and yellow pagne (cloth) that indicated the social status of most rural women. Binta mentioned she was 55, a mother of five, and a widow for the last 13 years. She was calm and noted that she did not attend school—only a little Makaranta in the past. During the focus groups, the women described her as very reserved, timid, and helpful to others. Binta was self-employed, selling fish and different types of snacks. Binta stated that she did not hold any leadership role in the community but was the leader in her household, which denotes the perception held by some Nigerien women that leadership is a form of organizing and nurturing one’s household.

Abou

Abou was the fifth and final woman interviewed in Tabalak. She was 18 and the youngest of the Tabalak participants. Abou's age falls under the "girl" profile within this research, although she was also a woman. She was married at 16 and had a 16-month-old daughter. Abou was self-employed, sewing handmade sheets for sale. She was Hausa and a middle-class girl, and she mentioned she did not hold any leadership role in the community. She also worked as a *Maman Lumière* with other women at the local integrated health center known as Centre de Santé Intégré (CSI). She mentioned that she attended school until Grade 8. Although she had dropped out, she was seeking to obtain the general certificate of secondary education (GCSE), which she attempted in 2019 but did not pass. Abou said that in 2020, her husband told her not to take the exam since she was pregnant with her first child and was having difficulties with the pregnancy. She stated that, *in sha Allah* (in God willing), she planned to retake the exam in 2022. Despite her attempts to attend secondary school, Abou continued to attend Mohamadia (Islamic school). We noticed that Abou was very calm and reserved as noted by the other women. During the focus group, she remained silent until we asked her to share her opinion. She also had difficulty understanding most of the interview questions. Therefore, we had to skip the questions she was struggling to understand, and in addition, she was rambling over her answers as she was repeating the same responses. In order for Abou to understand the questions, we often used French words to explain what was meant, and she did the same.

Keita

The team and I left early in the morning of September 22, 2021, heading to Keita, our second site. The route between Tahoua city and Keita is about 74 kilometers. The road was extremely rocky, with a few shrubs on some parts indicating that we were moving into a dry and rocky hill terrain. In 2018, the population of Keita was estimated at 80,545, distributed between 40,147 males and 40,398 females (Institut National De La Statistique, 2018). After a drive of approximately an hour and 30 minutes, we arrived in Keita at the mayor's office, where we planned to conduct the interviews. When we arrived, we went to the main office to introduce ourselves and explain the purpose of the research to the first adjunct to the mayor. A few minutes passed and the second adjunct to the major, a woman, also joined us in the office. She was thrilled to learn of our arrival, notably due to the intent of the study and what it entailed and the fact that she was from the region. As one of the few women working at the mayor's office, she volunteered to be part of the focus group participants but not part of the face-to-face interviews. She provided great insights into the challenges women face within the administration, particularly when holding a leadership role where the majority are male.

As we walked outside, we saw the mayor and introduced ourselves, and he wished us the best of luck for this research. We sat on chairs on the terrace of the mayor's office, waiting for the participants. When all the participants were present, we explained the purpose of the research and began the interviews. For privacy reasons, we isolated ourselves under a tree shade, and we invited one woman at a time for the interviews.

Natou

Natou was the first woman interviewed. She joined us first, and as she was trying to sit, she mentioned *Keita Matan Adder* with a laugh, meaning “Keita women of the Adder.” Tahoua is also known as Ader¹³. After briefly mentioning why I selected the woman of Keita, I followed up by asking if she happened to be part of the Keita Integrated Project, and Natou mentioned that indeed she was. Natou was middle class and self-employed, doing hands-on transformation activities such as processing grain into flour. She was wearing a long dark hijab and, from her knee down, had an orange pagne with circle patterns. Her outfit was an indication of a typical Nigerien woman in their later 50s. Natou introduced herself as a widow whose husband had passed away about 19 years ago. She was 57 and the mother of seven. Natou mentioned that she did not attend school but attended Mohamadia (Islamic school). She mentioned that she is Hausa (Ba’adara) from Keita. Natou was a leader of one of the women’s associations called “Matan Adder,” where she led about 87 women. The Matan Adder association trained women in various skills, including hands-on activities, market gardening, and tontines activities. She mentioned that out of the 87 women, 32 were fully trained and could do many activities on their own. As a leader, Natou was very concerned about the women she was leading and expressed her concern about them desperately needing more training. She mentioned that things are hard within the Karkara setting. She had traveled to neighboring countries such as Burkina Faso, where she witnessed how training was done differently.

¹³ L’Ader known as the capital de Tahoua, and Tahoua is often referred to by Ader.

Riya

The second participant was Riya. She was wearing a cloth dress over her knees and *pagne* underneath commonly known in Niger as *Saayi tangara* print. She had a brownish scarf over her head and shoulder, and her outfit was an indication of a middle-class Hausa (Ba'adara) woman from Keita. Riya mentioned that she was born in 1963 and was 58. She dropped out of school in Grade 7. She was married and the mother of six living children. She was unemployed; however, she was the president of a women's association/group called *gani wadahi*. Part of her association work was to loan money to women from their Asusu funds to help them engage in income-generating activities such as breeding and farming. In addition, Riya mentioned that she taught *alfa* in the past and also taught as a *Chef Chantier*, i.e., a "site lead" during the Keita Integrated Project. While the Keita Integrated Project was operating, she was part of the Asusu association leadership. Riya mentioned that although she was unemployed, she was not the kind of woman who would stay home doing nothing. She involved herself with women's associations until she became a leader. Because of her literacy level, Riya was one of the participants who used voluntary or not-French words to get her points across from time to time.

Ami

Ami was the third participant interviewed in Keita and the youngest. She was 20 and was married in 2016, when she was 15. She had one child, and she was heavily pregnant during our interview. She was a middle-class Hausa adolescent girl, and one indication of her social status was that she was wearing a long royal blue hijab from her head down her feet. Ami mentioned that she went to school until Grade 9, then dropped out. She said she was unemployed and had

never held any leadership position. I asked Ami if she was involved with women's associations, and she said she was not. Ami was very reserved, barely sharing her perspectives during the interview, and mostly kept silent during the focus group with the other women.

Zeyna

The fourth participant interviewed was Zeyna. One indication of the middle class to which Zeyna may belong was seen in her outfit, made of cloth *Saayi tangara*, similar to Riya's. She had a white hijab down to her knees, and she stated that she was Hausa from Keita and was 37, married, and the mother of five young children. She attended school up until Grade 4 and was unemployed. Zeyna declared that she never held a leadership position and considered herself to be a follower who was gaining training from other women, whom she described as "our mothers," the elders who are leading them. Zeyna was very open-minded and vocal and made a lot of hand gestures when she spoke. Zeyna mentioned that she once did commerce but had to stop because she was not making any profit. With the children, it was difficult to handle the small business. However, she wanted to work, and she noted she always tried to be involved with women's associations within the community by volunteering and lending a hand as needed.

Hady

The fifth and last woman interviewed in Keita was Hady. She was a middle-class Tuareg woman, wearing a blue cloth with dots and a big white scarf that covered her head and shoulders. Hady noted she was born in 1973 and therefore was 48. She was a widow; her husband passed

away six years ago. She was the mother of 10 children. She went to school until Grade 5 and added: “You know my daughter; in the past, people don’t go too far in school.” She also mentioned that she never held a leadership position but followed the leader (Ramou, who was first interviewed). In doing so, she was still acquiring training and hoped she would be able to lead one day. Hady was the leader in her household and took care of her children. She revealed that her mother and father are also Tuareg. Thus, she was also Tuareg from Keita. When I asked Hady her specific role as she worked with Ramou, she mentioned that she did hands-on activities, notably transforming milk to dry cheese known locally as *Tchoukou*.

Birni N’Konni

Early in the morning on September 24, 2021, we drove to our third site in the region of Birni-N’Konni, also called Birnin-Konni or shortened to Konni/Bkonni. The distance from Tahoua to Konni is 133.8 km, about a two-hour drive. At the entrance to the city, one could notice that it was a bustling, animated town. Several shop stands on each side of the road sold various items (kids’ toys, detergents, foods, and more).

In 2017 Konni’s population was estimated at 178,809, of whom 89,127 were males and 89,682 females (Institut National De La Statistique, 2018). The people of Konni are known as the Konnawas and speak Hausa. Once in Konni, we headed to the house of one of the participants. There was a bakery in the house, and the main entrance to the house was through the bakery entrance door. As instructed, we headed to the back of the house, where there were many fruit trees in the backyard. Under the shade of the trees, all the participants were silently seated on chairs waiting for us. We were warmly welcomed and served some drinks. Upon

introducing ourselves, we explained the purpose of the research; we also clarified to the participants that the research was a dissertation, not within an NGO framework as they suspected. It was a Friday, which for Muslims is the day of the weekly prayer known as Jumu'ah. Considering that the participants and one male in particular wanted to go pray, we paused at the call to prayer.

Safia

The first participant interviewed in Konni was Safia, a middle-class woman, wearing a long green and beige dress made of pagne and an oversized white scarf covering her head and shoulder. She affirmed she was Hausa from Konni; she was born in 1966 and was 55. Safia said that she remarried after her first husband passed away and was the mother of four children. She went to school up to Grade 8 and as a result used French words from time to time during the interviews, along with hand gestures. Safia said she was self-employed and considered a leader in her community, which gave her high esteem. Her first husband owned a bakery business; although she remarried after his death, his family, including the co-wives and stepchildren, designated, and instructed Safia to lead the bakery business. The family's collective decision to allow Safia to take over the bakery came because they witnessed her patience and leadership skills in the household. In addition, she noted that several times, members of the community/quartier would come to her for advice or guidance. Her house was full of people every day, as if there were a celebration happening. She added that it showed that she was a "people person" and very well respected. In addition, people would come to her asking her to represent them in the community by applying for other community leadership roles, such as a

political counselor, advisor, women's association president, or community representative.

Unfortunately, Safia declared she never put in her application, stating that *Allah dey bay so ba na yi*, meaning "The almighty God did not make that happen for me to do it." Safia came across as calm with an imposing demeanor (in a positive way), charismatic, and easily able to persuade someone through her calculated word choice and soft voice.

Fati

Fati was the second participant interviewed in Konni. She was a lower middle-class woman wearing a black hijab that went down to her knee, with a multicolor cloth underneath. Fati was Hausa from Konni and as she spoke, she had a slight Konnawa accent. She mentioned she was 52 and had been married but got divorced 11 years ago. She had six children but one passed away. After her divorce, she did not remarry. She attended the Franco-Arab school system but did not go far since she left at Grade 5. Presently she was doing commerce where she would go to Nigeria and buy items such as pagne cloth and perfume and resell them. She was also involved in politics, holding a leadership role as a political advisor at the mayor's office. During the face-to-face interview, Fati received several phone calls and had to respond to one. Fati was optimistic about a positive future for women, which she occasionally illustrated with the different leadership positions women have held in recent years.

Biba

The third participant interviewed in Konni was Biba, a middle-class woman from the Hausa ethnic group of Konni. She was wearing a red hijab with glitter; it matched her pagne

outfit, which was bright white with red flowers. She noted she was born in 1982 and was 39. She attended school up to Grade 9, had been married, but was divorced about four years ago. She had three children and did not yet hold any leadership positions within the community. She, like Fati, practiced commerce where she went to Nigeria to buy items such as pagnes for resale. Biba also took customized orders from people who would request her to bring large numbers of uniforms for events such as wedding ceremonies and baptisms. She was very dynamic, a risk-taker, and down to earth. Biba was categorical about how a woman should be independent and not always rely on a husband or someone else. Biba said her main focus was her business (which she said was the origin of her divorce, which I will explain in another section) as her essential source of revenue, which allowed her to take care of her children and herself. She added, *Bi sa kan sana a ta walahi Alhamdoulilah na godé ma Allah*, meaning “With my business, I am satisfied and thankful to God.” However, Biba mentioned that as part of commerce and business, sometimes there are profits and sometimes not. Also, sometimes you are happy and sometimes frustrated, especially when you sell your item not for cash but for credit, which is very common in Niger. Biba shared some of the risks she took in her business practice, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. She also mentioned that a while back, she worked on a project where she went to villages to collect data from women.

Toua

The fourth participant interviewed was Toua. She falls within the lower middle-class Hausa woman from Konni. She was wearing a long salmon-color hijab and had her sleeping baby underneath it. She noted she was 31 and a mother of four. She mentioned that she went to school but did not go far, as she left in Grade 5. Toua was self-employed, sewing sheets by hand

for resell. She did not hold any leadership positions; however, women's associations in the community frequently solicited her help to mobilize or assemble people when there was an event or meeting, or during election time. Toua mentioned that she was one of the people who could convince and bring people together by going from one household to another. Toua truly believed that women, men, and girls all need to find a business to do, no matter small or big, to become independent and generate income.

Rahi

Rahi was the last to be interviewed. She was Hausa from Konni and a bright middle-class young girl wearing a black and white hijab and a long colorful dress underneath. She was 19, the youngest of the participants in Konni, and had gone to school until Grade 9 before she dropped out. Rahi was among the few participants who occasionally included French words in her responses. She mentioned she was single, unemployed, and living with her parents. Rakia was constantly smiling but, at the same time, acted reservedly when providing answers to the questions. She admitted that she did not have answers to some of the questions and would like to gently skip them. She had not yet held a leadership position; however, she believed that was something she would like to see one day. Rahi noted that she saw a lot of women leaders in the community whom she admired and who inspired her.

Data Analysis Procedures

The collected data were stored on a local computer drive and an external drive. In the data analysis process, the researcher, immediately after the fieldwork, listened to all the

recordings to be familiar with the data, and took some key notes. The first phase was to transcribe all of the interviews, using expert interpreters from the National Institute of Documentation, Research, and Animation Pedagogies known as L'Institut National de Documentation, de Recherche et d'Animation Pédagogiques (*INDRAP*), located in Niamey. Transcriptions of the recordings were done from Hausa to French, then French to English. The researcher had to partake in several rounds of listening to all the recordings to make sure that terms and meanings were correct. The French-to-English transcriptions were completed by the researcher to ensure accuracy in what the participants shared. During this process, the researcher also made intensive corrections in the transcripts and incorporated important information that she had gathered from notetaking and from notes written after the interviews. All transcripts were uploaded to Quirkos Software, a platform for the qualitative analysis of text data, commonly used in social science. The researcher was able to create themes and organize and color-code the data text by themes. Below is a detailed description of the process.

Discussion of Themes and Subthemes

First round: emerged themes

After listening and relistening to recordings, I went through the interview transcripts to become acquainted with the material and conduct a first round of data coding. I identified themes that emerged from participants' responses during both the interviews and focus group discussions. In the process of creating the themes, I compared participants' responses with the essence of the research questions and objectives to stay within the scope of the research. Each of

the identities that are not necessarily stated above, such as early marriage and its consequences, the religion guidelines, and social and cultural context, were discussed. Therefore, I was able to identify 14 themes derived from participants' responses; these are described in Table 4-5 below. With the help of MAXQDA software, I color-coded and organized the themes. Following the first round, I also perform a first-round coding which is detailed below.

Table 4-5 : First round themes

Theme 1	Participants' educational background, work, and marital status
Theme 2	Leadership opinions/views
Theme 3	Current or past leadership position(s) within the community
Theme 4	Inspired by fellow female leaders
Theme 5	Assets/advantages of holding leadership roles
Theme 6	Reason leadership and empowerment go hand in hand
Theme 7	Reason leadership and empowerment do not go hand in hand
Theme 8	Opinion about taking a leadership role
Theme 9	Empowered when holding a leadership role
Theme 10	Challenges/struggles that restrict empowerment
Theme 11	Perception of empowerment and leadership from the Karkara lens
Theme 12	Supported when engaged in the community
Theme 13	Leadership traits/characteristics
Theme 14	Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Second round: merged themes

In order to synthesize and merge overlapping themes and patterns captured from the first round of coding, I conducted a second round by merging and creating subthemes out of previous themes and renaming them.

First, four themes from the first round—leadership opinions/views, opinion about taking a leadership role, perception of empowerment and leadership from the Karkara lens, and leadership traits/characteristics—became subthemes under a broader theme called “Insights and perceptions of leadership.” These subthemes overlap and complement each other in answering Research Objective 1 (“understand Karkara women’s and adolescent girls’ perceptions of leadership”). Secondly, the next set of themes—perceptions of empowerment and leadership benefits/assets—were merged as subthemes under a theme called “Leadership opportunities for empowerment.” Next, four themes—inspired by fellow female leaders, empowered when holding a leadership role, challenges/struggles that restrict empowerment, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic—were slightly renamed and were merged under a theme called “Factors and barriers of leadership participation.”

Finally, one theme—supported for engaging in the community—became a subtheme under a new theme called “Resources and support systems to leadership participation.” It relates to Research Objective 4 (“understand the support systems and resources that women and girls need to participate in leadership roles”) in providing details about the help and support Karkara women need to aspire to leadership roles and be more empowered. Please see Table 4-6 for a detailed description of themes and merged subthemes.

Table 4-6: Second round themes

Themes	Subthemes
<p>Theme 1- Insights and perceptions of leadership</p>	<p>Subtheme 1: Leadership opinions/views</p> <p>Subtheme 2: Past or present leadership positions</p> <p>Subtheme 3: Opinions about taking a leadership role</p> <p>Subtheme 4: Leadership traits/characteristics</p>
<p>Theme 2- Leadership opportunities for empowerment</p>	<p>Subtheme 5: Perceptions of empowerment</p> <p>Subtheme 6: Leadership benefits/assets</p> <p>Subtheme 7: Inspired by female leaders</p> <p>Subtheme 8: Empowered when holding a leadership role</p>
<p>Theme 3- Factors and barriers of leadership participation</p>	<p>Subtheme 9: Challenges/struggles that restrict empowerment</p> <p>Subtheme 10: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic</p>
<p>Theme 4- Resources and support systems to leadership participation</p>	<p>Subtheme 11: Supported for engaging in the community</p>

Presentation and Description of Findings

This section presents and describes the findings of the different themes. The themes encompass subthemes presented below. It is important to note that the interview questions helped inform the themes and subthemes of the study, and only the findings that answer the research objectives are summarized and presented. The theme *insights and perceptions of leadership* encompasses findings related to Research Objective 1 presented below.

Research Objective 1: Understand Karkara women's and adolescent girls' perceptions of leadership and willingness to participate in leadership positions within their given context, focusing on leadership in the community and women's groups or associations.

Theme 1-Insights and perceptions of leadership

Subtheme 1: Leadership opinions/views

Subtheme 2: Past or present leadership role

Subtheme 3: Opinion about taking a leadership position

Subtheme 4: Leadership traits/characteristics

Subthemes 1 and 2- Leadership views and past or present leadership role

In this section I present the findings of subtheme 1: "leadership opinions/views" with subtheme 2: "current or past leadership role." When participants were asked about their leadership views or perceptions, all the participants collectively, based on their responses, favorably shared that leadership is beneficial. They were all in agreement that female leadership,

specifically in Karkara, is essential in their lives as a way to grow, accomplish set goals, and have a purpose and vision.

For instance, one respondent, Natou, a retired president of one of the women's associations in Keita, expressed her views on leadership by stating in Hausa: *Lalé shi jagoranchi mata da yan mata Karkara abu ne mai mahimmanci so sai*, meaning, "Well, leadership of women and girls is very important." Natou broadly perceived leadership as great. Later in her interview, she shared her opinions of leadership as a result of her past leadership role:

Jagorancin mata muna yin shi kuma wallahi alhamdulillah saboda wanga aiki sarafawa da muke yi shine mata suna zowa inda nika suna aikin kowa abin da ya iya na hannunshi na yake yi. Har ya kai ma in muka yi abu muka saidashi muka ga cikin mu akwai wadda adda cikas. Kamar wadda take son agaji ko wani abu ya faru gareta, sai mu zo cikin asusu nan a bata ramce.

[Women's leadership is what we are doing, and praise be to God, because of the work we are doing, women come to my place and do transformational activities, and each of them does what they can. It even went as far as when we did something and sold it, and we realized that among us, one had issues or challenges, or needed help and support. We came together and found out what happened to her and took the money from our account (Asusu) to lend to her.]

In addition to how they organized themselves within their women's group, I asked Natou whether rural women's leadership is different than in urban settings. Natou said it is because rural areas don't have enough training available. She also noted, having had opportunities to travel (such as to Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire) and witness how women performed their

activities there, she strongly testified to the need for more training for the rural women within her community.

Another participant, Riya, from Keita, who was the president of one of the women's groups, discussed the importance of leadership by saying:

Mu dai saboda Allah mun ji daɗin jagoranci kungiyar mata, kenan muna jan hankalin mata bisa zaman nan na banza da suke yi ba ya da anfani. Su yi kofari su shiga kungiyoyi na kanunsu saboda azan yi da su dan in baka cikin kungiya ba'a yi da kai. Kuma shi jagoranci dai babban abune in ka aza ma kanka. Ko ina dai kai na ga azama kanka shi, ko waje ko cikin gida. Babu mai aza maka shi.

[Praise be to God; we are happy to lead the women's group. That's why we are raising awareness and seeking women's attention to the idleness they are doing. They try to join their own groups so they can be involved in what is happening; otherwise, they will be excluded. Moreover, leadership is a great thing you can put on yourself. No matter where you are, you are the one who sets yourself up for it, whether it is outside or inside the house. No one puts the burden on you!]

Riya believes that women in Karkara should join women's groups and seek leadership; otherwise, no one can do it for them. In doing so, they will be part of the community and involved with what is happening. Leadership is also something that one decides on their own and they do it either in their own family or outside.

Two other participants, Kady and Larey from Tabalak, stated that leadership is undeniably essential. They both had strong opinions during the focus group. Kady mentioned that since she once held a position as an advisor in one of the women's associations, she has

become a “people person,” meaning that people know her and vice versa. She added that when she speaks, her demands are instantly executed. She illustrated her point by stating that when it comes to bringing people together, she could fill a place with people (she used the example of the space we were in). Kady and Larey both argued that leadership is important for the future generation, particularly young girls who are schooled and not forced to marry. First Kady pointed out:

To, mu dai jagoranci ga ganinmu dai bisa diya mata lakkwal. In basu isa ba a bar zahin yi musu aure. Diya mace bakin da an ka yi mata aure ko tana lakkwal zata bar lakkwal ta zan daukar salula tana zan hira da mijinta, kaga wannan aiki lalacewa za shi yi.

[Well, our view of leadership relies on our daughters to be schooled. If they are not ready enough, they should not marry. If a young girl is given to marriage while she is in school, she will be distracted and will take her cell phone talking to her husband. So, you see the work will be damaged.]

I pushed Kady a bit further to explain the difference between the leadership of a girl who has been schooled compared to the one who was not. Kady mentioned that:

Kin san wanda ya yi nisa shi tuni yasan komi. Wanda bai yi nisa ba koya na shikai. wanda ya yi nisa shi aiki na za shi yi.

[You know, the one who has gone far already knows everything. The one who has not gone far needs to learn. The one who has gone far will do the work.]

Larey added to the conversation by weaving in the importance of leadership by declaring:

Ni ko wajen filets sociaux kowa ya san ni, kowa ya san mu duk jama'a dayawa sun san mu likita ma kowa ya san mu duk bisa aikinmu na.

[Me too, when it comes to the social safety nets, everyone knows me, everyone knows us, many people know us, at the hospital everyone knows us because of our work.]

Larey noted her leadership as a *Maman Lumière* by stating:

To, mu dai muna yin jagoranci ga mata bisa filets sociaux, mouna musu horo bisa kamar ban nono zalla nan. Abinci rakiya, wanke hannu wa da ruwa da sabili, saboda kenan shi ban nonon nan yana da anfani wurin yara. Kouma dole yaron da aka yi ma ban nonon nan ana yi mishi abincin rakiya dan shi inganta. Muna cikin « filets sociaux » na muna yin hakanan. Kuma muna nan da ba'are muna aiki bisa ACF (Action Contre la Faim) ta wajen ba'are kuma can likita muna « Mamans Lumières » muna ma yara kanana kunu.

[Well, we practice leadership by giving awareness to women about social safety nets, we do training about exclusive breastfeeding, accompanying food, washing hands with water, and bringing awareness about the importance of breastfeeding for babies. It is required for the baby who has been weaned to receive/be fed with supplement food. We are in our “social safety nets,” and we do that. And here we are, working on the Action Against Hunger (Action Contre la Faim, ACF) by going to the hospital as “Mamans Lumières” to make porridge for the little ones.]

Both Kady's and Larey's statements during the focus group illuminate and contextualize the importance of leadership and holding a leadership role within one's community. The responses and personal stories of those who hold or have held leadership roles were similar across all sites. Their actions in serving the community are praised by the people they serve or lead, and the satisfaction they get from what they do is immeasurable.

Other participants, such as Toua from Birni N’Konni, who have not yet held a leadership role, perceived women’s and adolescent girls’ leadership particularly through the practice of running a small business in order to be self-independent and autonomous. For this purpose, Toua put forward:

Ra'ayi na akan shugabanci shine a jayo hankulan mata da yan mata matasa Karkara bisa kan su maida anniya bisa kan aiki. Wanda dai bai da matsayi shi bidi wani aikin karfi da zai maida ma anniya dan yau wanda baya da wani matsayi shi maido aniya bisa dai yadda zai kokowa shi rike gida nai. Mi a kokowa ? dan in baka iya komai ba, ka kama sana'a ta hannu haka dan sana 'ai yawa garesu. Misali akwai wanda zaya cewa ya iya wani dan taye-tayen, shi koko ya tahi yan itace, duka dai yanda zaka yi ka rike gidan ka dan gudun kunya. Ka yi shi lalle shi na muka anfani. Kuma kayi komi yara su rike lakkwal din su kuma sai su samu matsayi da suka sa kansu.

[My opinion on leadership is to draw the attention of young women and girls from the countryside to focus on work. Those who do not have a position should look for a strong job that will make them earn their money. Today, those who do not have a position should bring their attention to ways they can imitate to manage their household. What do I mean by imitating? If you don't have the skill of something, there are many different types of hands-on businesses/activities you can start. For instance, if you know how to fry and sell something or sell wood, whatever it is, you can do that to be self-sufficient and avoid putting yourself in a shameful situation. Once you do that, you will see its benefit. Plus, it would help if you did everything to keep your children in school so they can one day get the positions/status they desire.]

For Toua, even if women and girls do not hold specific leadership positions or titles, they should be active and find something to do, whether within their community or household. This can be done either through an income-generating activity they implemented themselves, through a remunerating job, or through involvement with women's associations or groups in their areas. She mentioned that her female counterparts should be engaged in any type of income-generating activities in which they can help themselves and their family. She also highlighted the fundamental benefits of keeping children in school so they can become what they want to.

Subtheme 3-Opinion on taking leadership roles

While all participants said that leadership is instrumental and some stated the reasons why they held a leadership role, the majority of participants (nine out of the 15, mostly the younger women and all adolescent girls), had mixed opinions about taking a leadership role. These majority of participants stated that they are not ready or prepared at the moment to accept a leadership role for different reasons such as lack of experience, family responsibilities, the current businesses in which they are engaged, lack of permission from their husbands, or because leadership is a God's will.

For instance, Riya, the president of one of the women's groups, shared her opinion about why she took a leadership position. She eloquently pointed out:

Mu na Jagoranshi mata da yan mata dan saboda ci gaban mata, kuma mu samu incinmu.

Da maganin zaman banza ba yada anfani dan shina ya sa muka nemi shugabanci.

[We are leading women and girls for the sake of women's development, and we want to have our freedom. It is also a solution to idleness, which has no benefits. That is why we take a leadership role.]

Zeyna also said:

To wallali muna so mu gani Jagoranshi mata da yan mata. Ama dey mu yanzu muna biye da uwayen mu muna so mu bi bayansu haka kamin mu kai ga namu lokaci.

[Well, of course we want to see women and girls leading the way. But now we are following our mothers and we want to follow them until we reach our own time.]

Riya was categorical why she sought a leadership role within the women's group. Zeyna, on the other hand, used her own example as to why she was not ready to take a leadership role. She believed for now it was not ideal for her to just follow the "elders," whom she referred to as "the mothers." She added that the latter are experienced and have been leading for years; they are the ones from whom she and the others in the same position are still getting training. She believed that eventually, in God's will, they will take over leadership someday.

In addition to Riya and Zeyna, Hady said she was not ready to take on a leadership role because of her family responsibilities. She stated that she only works within women's group to provide for her family. Hady was a widow with 10 children and needed to be their caregiver and provider. She shared her opinion about taking a leadership by mentioning:

To, dada muna dai biye da manyan mu. Kullum ina gida ina kula da iyana da ayyukan gida. Dattijumar matar da kuka yi hira da ita, wacce ita ce shugabar mu a cikin kungiyarmu ta mata za ta kira ni idan akwai aikin da za a yi da ya shafi sarafawa (yin cuku, juice ko, da sawran sou) don taimaka mata. Wannan shi ne aikin da nake yi don

ciyar da yarana amma banda wannan, watakila wata rana zan jagoranci. Ina da yara a gida, kuma in kana shugabanshi za ku kasance tare da mutane ko da yayo she, ku bar gida. A gare ni, dole ne in kasance a wurin don yarana in yi jagoranchi sou.

[Well, we always follow our elders. I am always at home taking care of my children and doing the household activities. The elder woman you interviewed, who is our leader within our women's group, will call me if there is work to do related to hand-on activities (like making cheese or juice or transforming grain or cereal crops into flour) to help her out. That is the work I do to provide for my children; nothing other than that. Maybe one day I will lead. I have children at home, and as a leader you will always be with others, and you will have to leave the home. For me, I have to be there for my children and be their leader.]

Another participant, Natou, seconded Hady's points by noting:

Tunda in namiji bai nan, dole ke mace baki dibin yaranki hakanan, dole sai kin nemo kin basu. Mace an yi ta dan zaman gida, ita ma jagora gida ta ce.

[Since the man is not here, you, the woman, you have to take care of your children and provide to them. A woman is made to stay at home, she is also the leader of her house.]

As a widow and because of the responsibilities incumbent on her, Hady saw more her contribution within the women's group as a worker with an utmost goal of providing for her family. Through her frequent interaction with the group leader, she noted that she was acquiring different skills from Natou, the leader of the group, and hoped that someday she might also lead. Yet, Hady, following Natou's point, indicated that what she did within her household (caring and providing for her 10 children) was also leadership.

As noted above, all the adolescent girls, Abou, Rahi, and Ami, who were 18, 19, and 20 years old, respectively, were very reserved and shy in their responses and said they were not yet ready for leadership positions. They also noted that women leaders in their community are doing a great job. Ami, for instance, said:

Ban nemi ba jagoranchi, ban tashi ba, say dai shan apres. Nan Mata ma sou Jagoranchi yana da kyawo, tunda suna nuna masu hanya ta kwarai.

[I didn't seek leadership; I am not ready, maybe later. Women leaders here are doing good since they show the right path to others.]

All three adolescent girls honestly mentioned to me that they do not have much to share because they do not assimilate and understand what comes along with taking a leadership role, since they have not yet held that position. They also said that they were not exposed to the women holding leadership, even within their families, to be able to share their input and opinions. Additionally, they mentioned that they might take on a leadership role someday, *In sha Allah*—in God's willing.

While the adolescent girls' responses during the interview sessions were mainly "yes," "no," or "I don't know," their respective reactions and responses suggested that many factors are at play for adolescent girls to provide their perceptions on leadership. Furthermore, their point of view on the fact that in God willing (or if God had subscribed it) they will become leaders was relevant, and the same mindset was shared and mentioned by all the participants who were not yet leaders.

While I tried to push the adolescent girl participants to talk, the older participants rapidly intervened and teased them about providing more details—such as their roles within their family, household, and the community. Consequently, we all prompted them to think even further about

sharing their opinions as leaders, mainly the two adolescent girls who were married and had a child.

For instance, one of the older participants, Natou, reminded them that they are wives and mothers, and all are living with their spouses and children. Natou said to them:

Duka inda mace take cikin gidan ta, da iyalai da miji shima jagorane ne.

[Wherever a woman is in her home, with children and a husband, that is also leadership.]

With that important point mentioned, the conversation automatically shifted. The adolescent girls were therefore prompted for a dialogue, and they noted that indeed they do see themselves as leaders within their own household. Another older participant, Riya, for instance said to Ami:

Komi sai an yi shawara dake? Abin da kika gayi kinga ana aiki da shi? keda mijinki kanku hade?

[You are consulted on everything? No matter what you said, do you see it being executed? You and your husband are one?]

After being asked the above question, Ami, quietly responded with a smile, *Hakanan na*, meaning “Yes, that is true.” Riya, not satisfied with her response, teased Ami back with a big smile and said: *Ba hakanan na ba yi Magana!* Meaning “It is not that, say something!” Then everyone busted out laughing!

This illustrated an example of such a rich moment between participants created an environment where the younger participants were getting help and assistance from the older women to make more effort to share their perceptions. As a researcher, it also showed me how the interactions between older and younger women are often complex.

One last and important point raised by some participants was that some women are not able to take on leadership roles because their husbands do not allow them to go out. For instance, Biba noted that:

Jagoranci daman ba'a son shi ga wanda a matse, in kana matse mijinka bai bari ka shiga moutane ba ka jagoranchi. Ko maza su ce kai ba ta zuwa. Suna da matsala dayawa wallahi.

[Leadership is not for the ones that are under pressure. If you are under pressure, your husband did not let you enter the community; you cannot lead. Or the men will say that she (the wife) will not go out. Wallahi¹⁴ they have many issues.]

Although participants did not provide ample explanations of this point, they highlighted that for married women, the husband plays a vital role in their decision to take a leadership role.

In the next section, participants shared leadership characteristics/traits they found essential to have, or that leaders need to foster.

Leadership traits/characteristics

During the interview sessions, and especially the focus group, participants shared essential characteristics that leaders should have if they are meant to be successful characteristics such as patience, charisma, and courage, which will be detailed below. Some participants also noted that obedience, tolerance, influence, lack of fear, and fairness are also essential leadership characteristics. The details provided by participants emanated from the distinguished leaders

¹⁴ Wallahi or Wallah means swearing to God. The term is also used to add more emphasis.

within their respective communities. The three most discussed features—patience, charisma, and courage—are expanded upon below.

Patience

The number one leadership characteristic noted and emphasized by all participants was patience. The word for it in Hausa is *hakuri*. Participants mentioned that leaders should have or cultivate patience. One participant, Safia, said:

Mai Jagoranchi ana son ka zam mai hakuri da jama'a, komi ka danne, ka ji kaƙi ji ka gani kaƙi gani.

[A leader should be patient with the people; no matter what you see and hear, act like you didn't see it or hear it.]

Another participant, Fati, said this about the importance of patience:

Jagora sai ka yi hakuri da juriya da jama'a balle dai mata. Kana iya zuwa in ka ce a taro mata sai su ce ni bani zuwa, na gaji da tahe-tahen nan.

[As a leader, you have to be patient with the people, in particular with women. For example, if you came and asked for a meeting, women will say they are not coming; they are tired of going and coming every day.]

With her quiet voice, Binta added:

jagoranci kai sai hakuri, sai an gama da daurewa. Sadoda hakuri duk shina a gaba a cikin jagoranchi. In muka yi hakuri duk zamu cimma gurinmu. Da hakuri da adalci duk wanda ya yi su in sha Allahu, Allah na ba shi ikon aikata alheiri.

[Leadership required patience, and extreme patience. Patience is the priority in leadership. If we are patient, we will all reach our purpose. Also, with patience and

justice whoever follow these, in sha Allahu¹⁵, Allah¹⁶ will give them the ability to do good deeds.]

Biba also stressed the patience of a leader and mentioned:

jagoranci yana son hakuri, shi dai abu na mai wuya. Da saada duk an ka nemo ka za'a samunka ko dare ko rana. In kana hakuri mutun ko wane iri na zaka zamna dashi Lahiya. [Leadership requires patience. It is a difficult thing. Also, whenever you are needed, as a leader, you should be there, whether at day or nighttime. If you are patient with a person of any kind, you will be at peace with the person.]

Binta's and Biba's points illustrate how patience is key when dealing with people, and with patience, in God's will, everything will pass.

Charisma

Charisma was the second leadership characteristic discussed by participants. The Hausa word participants used was *Iya Magana*, or *kwarjini*, meaning "being able to speak or talk." Participants describe charisma as being able to talk in front of people or the public. They also pointed out the importance of bringing people together when one speaks and consulting with them regarding decision-making.

One participant in the focus group said:

¹⁵ "In sha Allahu" or "In sha Allah" means "In God willing."

¹⁶ Allah refers to God.

Gaskiya, Jagora ko shugaba na bukatar ya kasance ya iya Magana. Idan ya yi magana, kowa ya yi shiru, ya saurare shi kuma ya aiwatar da abin da ya ce. Jagora yana bukatar samun wannan karfin!

[Honestly, a leader needs to be charismatic. When he/she talks, everyone gets quiet, listens, and executes what he/she says. A leader needs to have this capacity!]

In one of the locations, Birni N’Konni, Rachida (remember she is from the Ba’ara, an ethnic group from Douthi) used the joking relationship to motivate some of the participants to share more about the leader they have selected. She said with a smile on her face:

Duk za ku ce wani abu tunda kuna nan lokacin da ta jagoranchi, ko ba haka ba?

[All of you will say something since you were all here when she led. Aren’t you?]

While we are all enjoying this comment, I added: *Waga Ba’ara bata wassa!* meaning “She is not playing this Ba’ara laugh!”

A side note: Rachida in particular used this joke because, when participants were asked to select an influential leader, they would like to discuss, several of the participants jokingly asked if they could also discuss the non-appreciated factors of the selected leader.

Then one participant put forward that:

Yana da kyau shugaba, musamman mace, ta kasance mai kwarjini. Lokacin da mace ta kasance mai kwarjini, wasu za su yi mata wahayi, ta shanza labarin cewa shugabanci ba na maza kadai ba ne amma mata za su iya zama shugabanni nagari.

[It is good for a leader, particularly a female, to be charismatic. When a female is charismatic, she will be inspired by others, changing the narrative that leadership is not for males only but that women can also be good leaders.]

Courage

One of the characteristics that participants repeatedly noted in a female leader was courage. They indicated that female leaders need to be courageous to maintain leadership roles. In Keita, for instance, participants discussed the courage of a renowned female leader within the community. With a collective voice, they mentioned:

Hadiya ta iya shugabanci! Ita ce shugabar mata ta farko a cikin Jahar Keita. Koun ga ita bata tsoron kowa, kuma duk wanda aka ce hajiya saro tana kira sai ta zo da gudu wallahi. An kama mata daraja har yanzu da bata da lafiya. Walahi ta iya shugabanci.

[Hadiya knew how to lead! She was the first female leader within the community of Keita. See, she was not afraid of anyone, and anyone who Hajiya Saro called, she came running, by God. She has been held in high esteem even now that she is sick by God.

Walahi, she knew how to lead.]

I noticed that all participants were nodding their heads, showing agreement that Hadiya was indeed a courageous woman and leader within the community. Participants in Birni N’Konni also emphasizes firmly the importance of courage for a leader as they pointed out:

Ga mace, matukar ba ki yi wa kanki karfin gwiwa ba, zai yi wuya ki rike matsayinki na shugabar ko jagora. Dole ne ku kasance masu jaruntaka ko ta yaya. Ko da lokacin da kuka ji maganganun da ba su dace ba game da kanku, waɗanda a wasu lokachi za su zama abin kunya, ku kasance cikin nutsuwa da kwanciyar hankali. Komai zai wuce kuma ku ci gaba da in aikin ku yadda ya kamata, akan hanya korey.

[For a woman, as long as you do not arm yourself with courage, it will be tough for you to maintain your position as a woman leader. You have to be brave at all costs. Even when you hear negative comments about yourself, which will sometimes be

demoralizing, remain calm and serene. Everything will pass; keep doing your job the right way.]

With the highlighted leadership characteristics, participants believe, these would help create opportunities for empowerment that will benefit women to accomplish many goals.

Theme 2- Leadership opportunities for empowerment

In this section, the themes and subthemes presented below are findings on the leadership opportunities for empowerment.

Subtheme 5: Perceptions of empowerment

Subtheme 6: Leadership benefits/assets

Subtheme 7: Inspired by female leaders

Subtheme 8: Empowered when holding a leadership role

This section also answers Research Objective 2 presented beneath.

Research Objective 2: Explore the factors and opportunities that can empower and influence other women and girls to take leadership positions, as well as understand the factors that leverage or contribute to their participation in leadership roles.

Perceptions of empowerment

In Hausa, the word empowerment can be said in different ways. The literal translation of work empowerment is *karfafawa*. Other terms such as *samun karkin gwiwa* and *Inci kai* also

refer to empowerment. All participants mentioned that women and girls should be empowered either through education (particularly for the young girls), employment or with a practice of any income-generating activity. All participants see empowerment from gaining more support and opportunities to improve their current situation.

On this point, Biba, and Toua both noted:

Ra'ayinmu game da karfafawa shine, gaskia, mu samu incin kanmu, gaskiya.

[To be honest, our idea of empowerment is to be self-sufficient.]

Biba went further by sharing her personal example as a divorced woman. She said:

Mu gaskiya incin kanmu muka samu mu da bamu da maza. Walahi incin kanmu na tunda yanzu muna yin yadda muke so, babu mai matsa muna. Amma dai muna son karfafawa a kara tallafawa. Tunda dai wani abu baka iya yinshi duka.

[To be honest, we, without husbands, found ourselves empowered. Walahi we are empowered because now we do as we want, there is nobody to put pressure on us.

However, we want to be more empowered by getting more support since you cannot do everything.]

Leadership Benefits/Assets

The majority of participants, particularly the ones who hold or have held a leadership role, said that leadership comes with many benefits or assets. Again, benefits or assets was one of the words that required the team and me to expand upon and provide additional specifics for the participants to understand the questions. In Hausa, *Kadarori* and *bouga gaba* refer to benefits or assets. A few times, participants would say *kadarori?* with a perplexed facial expression. As a result, to enlighten and provide more context to participants, we used the phrase *mi za kou samou*

to make the questions sound less authoritarian. For instance, when we used the term *bouga gaba*, which sounded more like what you will “brag with,” the participants—trying to stay humble—said there is nothing to gain.

One of the participants, Larey, mentioned that a benefit she gained as a result of her leadership role was that people know who she was in the community. For instance, she mentioned, she would not have been invited to participate in the study interview session had she not be a leader. She added:

Kenan in niya jagora wani abu, ni ci gaba da shi, kenan kamar na ci gaban mutane. Sai su ji dadi sai su zaburo su ce ita daman wagga ta taɓa yi tana biyan bukata. Shi kansa fa'ida ce ta gamsuwar da shugaba ya samu.

[As a leader, I lead for the development of people. They will feel happy, and they will be eager to say she does the right thing and had fulfilled the need of people. That itself is a benefit of satisfaction that a leader gained.]

Safia, from Birni N’Konni, mentioned:

To, bugon gaba dai da jagora zai samu shi dai jin dadi ne. Kamar kana gaban mutane kuma suna jin dadinzama da kai. Um, akwai dadi hakanan in kana yin abu na kirki. Ko yanzu nan cikin konni an san darajata an san girmana nan konni an san dai mutumci na.

[Well, the benefit that a leader will get is a feeling of happiness. It is like if you are at the front of people and they enjoy being with you and what you do. Um, there’s happiness involved too if you are doing the right thing. Even now in Konni, people know my dignity, and they respect my person.]

Larey’s and Safia’s comments support some of the noted benefits leaders gained from the position that they held, which in return may inspire others.

Inspired by female leaders

All the participants mentioned that they are, in one way or the other, inspired by female leaders either within the community or at the national level. Ramou, a participant from Tabalak, said:

Muna yin shawa tunda in ka ga mutane suna yin abu, kai ma kana shawa ka shigeshi ka ga yadda yake.

[We are inspired because when you see people doing something, you will also be inspired and do the same and see how it looks.]

Biba from Konni also mentioned how inspired she was by female leaders:

Gaskia muna na shawa jagora mata sosai ma, kamar a ce kai ma kana yi wallahi.

Musamman idan na ga shugabannin mata irin su shugaban kasa, ministoci, ko hafsoshin soja a talabijin. Abu ne mai kyau kuma ina so in ga mata da yawa kamar wannan manyan mukamai. A bu ne mai burgeni sai in ce ku ji dan Allah ga ta nan cikin maza, in ka ganta gwanin shawa wallahi.

[Indeed, we are greatly inspired by women leaders, which pushed you to do the same.

Especially when I see female leaders such as the president, ministers, or military officers on television, it's a beautiful thing, and I want to see more women in higher positions. It's so beautiful, I will tell myself. She's the only woman there among men, if you see her, it is so lovely to see.]

Three participants in Keita all made the same point by saying:

Mouna shawa sou, ama yanzou dey muna dai biye dasu. Jagora mata da kuke gani takin da suka yi, ya na burge mu dan shi muke biye dasu. Muna koykoyonsu kakin Allah shi doƙemu shi kaimu matsayinsu.

[They inspired us, but now we are just following them. Women leaders who you see, their footsteps inspired as and are the reason we follow them. We are imitating them until God helps us to reach their position.]

Their points emphasize the impact that a leader has on their followers, with an eventual possibility that these leaders will influence and even empower them to do the same.

Empowered when holding a leadership role

All participants mentioned that they do believe that they will be empowered when holding a leadership role. For instance, a participant from Tabalak said to me:

Na yarda, za'a bani karfafawa in na nemi aikin jagoranchi. Sabo da na yarda da kaina.

[I agree; I will be empowered when I apply for a leadership role. Because I believe in myself.]

Another participant from Birni N'Konni said with confidence:

Kwarai ko jagoranci yana iya zaman mini wata hanya shan daban wadda ta samun karfin gwiwa.

[Indeed, leadership can be a different path for me for empowerment that I didn't expect.]

She further expanded her point by offering the following:

Kunga nananga ina jagorancin mairie, da babuni nan sai kunga wani abu ya shigo ba'a san da mata ba. Amma yanzu da nike nananga duka abin da ya fito na mata ina nema musu hakkinsu. In sa a kirusu tunda in uwata na.

[You see her; I have a leadership position at the mayor's office. If I wasn't here,

something would have come in that was not known to women. However, now that I am

there, I fight for their rights and everything that has come out about women. I invite them since they are my fellow women.]

Another participant shared these comments:

Shi dai jagorancin na mace abu na mai mahimmanci soboda yau in kuka diba kuka gani kasar ga tamu mata sun fi yawwa. Kenan kar a barsu baya, jagoranci azan ba mata shi. Tunda in an kasa kashi biyu koko kashi uku mata na doka kashi biyu maza su doki kashi daya kenan sarkin yawwa ya fi sarkin karfi.

[Women's leadership is very important because today if you look at our country, we have more women. So, they shouldn't be left behind; leadership roles should be given to women. Since if there are two parts or three parts, the women should take two parts and the men should take one part. Therefore, the majority wins.]

Riya added to the rich conversation sharing her perceptions of empowerment by saying:

Da jagoranci ne ake samun karfin gwiwa ko ta wane hanya kana fata ka samu karfin gwiwa bisa abin da kasa kanka.

[It is through leadership that you gain empowerment, no matter how; you hope to gain empowerment in whatever you set yourself to do.]

Theme 3-Factors and Barriers of Leadership Participation

This section presents the findings, which aligned with Research Objective 3, about the challenges and struggles experienced by females in leadership roles. Secondly, the section presents results on how these challenges and struggles restrict females from being empowered. Lastly, the subtheme presented findings on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's

daily activities. It was important to include this perspective because the pandemic has socially affected the participants' lives and daily activities.

Research Objective 3: Understand the barriers that prevent women and girls from acquiring and participating in leadership positions.

Subtheme 9: Challenges/struggles in female leadership roles that restrict empowerment

Subtheme 10: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Subtheme 9- Challenges/struggles in female leadership roles that restrict empowerment

When participants were asked about the challenges and struggles in holding leadership roles that may restrict them from being empowered, some of them shared poignant testimony about their experiences.

Below is a direct quote from one of one of the participants during the focus group:

Matsalolin da muke kalubantaka wajen jagoranci gaskiya suna da yawa. Saboda ita mace in tana jagoranci ga wuri bata da mahimmanci. Yanzou in namiji ya zaka ga wuri ya ga maceta ga jagoranci sai shi gani bata kai wurin da za shi tambayeta wani abu ba. Kenan akwai matsala. Shi dai in anka ce jagoranchi, jagorancina ya kamata a ce da mace da namiji in ana jagoranci yakamata a ce a bi ka koda kana mace. Tunda kaina ga jagoranci a baka matsayinka wanda Allah ya baka. To amma yanzu sai ka ga in dai mace ta ga jagoranci ba'a bata mahinmancin jagorancin nan. Ko ta iya in aka zaka aka isketa ba'a bata daraja tunda ita dia maceta, amma in namiji ne ga jagoranci in an iske shi duk abin

da ya fadi hakanan na tunda namijina ya iya fadi a jiya. Kenan shi kuma wannan gaskiya bai kamata ba.

[Honestly, the problems we faced in holding leadership roles are numerous. Because when a woman is a leader somewhere, she is not valued. When a man comes to a place where he sees a woman leader, he sees that she has not reached a place where he can ask her something. Then that is a problem. Leadership is leadership; it should not be a male or female thing. Even if the leader is a woman, people should follow her. If you are a leader, you should be given the position God has given you. However, now you see, as long as a woman is a leader, she does not receive much importance. Even if she is good at what she does, people will not respect her because she is a woman, but if it is a male leader, everything he says will be executed since he is a man, and whatever he says will be executed. Honestly, that should not be the case.]

Another participant added:

Akwai abin da zani karawa. Kun san shi jagoranci in aka ce na macena, nan an muna hakanan, aka kawo gomnan jaha mace. Sai an ka nuna ba a son ta tunda maceta. Daga shan sama dan Allah in mace ta samu wani abu a dibeta a bata matsayin. An ce a hiddo kota na mata kuma in aka hiddo a yi ta jayaya. Shi ya sa wata ko ta na son bida sai ta kiya. Ta aza dossier ma ba ta azawa.

[There is something I would like to add, you know if it is a female leader, it has been illustrated here when a female governor has been brought. The people showed that she was not wanted because she was a woman. From the top level, please, in the name of God, if a woman gets something, please give it to her because she deserves it. It is said to bring women's quota, and there are always back-and-forth battles when it is found. That's

why some women, even if they want to lead, will refuse to go ahead. They wouldn't even apply.]

These challenges and struggles that woman experienced, as noted by another of the participants, are very disheartening. She shared her personal story with the group by saying:

Ni akwai wani lokaci in na ga bambanciya ana kawowa bambanciya tsakanin mata da mazaje abin ma sai ya yi decourager na. Kuma daga baya sai in samu kuzari in ce zan bisu tunda na zo saboda mata. Zan bi su har karshe tunda na zo saboda mata zan yi hakuri saboda mata baka decourager.

[There are times when I see inequalities between women and men; it even discourages me. And later, I will have the energy to stay since I came because of women. I will follow them to the end since I came because of women; I will be patient because of women and not be discouraged.]

Another important point shared by Kady was that although women are the majority, males always dominate with their presence. She stated:

Kuma sai ka duba ka gani yanzu in mace goma a cikin wuri namiji guda a cikin wurin nan sai ya zama na sha daya sai a doka duka yawni a ba namijin. Nan shi kuma matan sun fi yawa. Mi ya sa, hakanan? Bai kamata ba. Sarkin yawwa ya fi karfi, a bamu incin mu saboda Allah.

[And then see now if there are 10 women at a place and then comes one man to become the 11th at a place, all of the responsibility will be given to that man. Although the women are the majority. Why should that be the case? It shouldn't. The majority is more powerful; we should be given our rights because of God.]

Another participant, Fati, highlighted that while women are not well represented, most of the challenges that come up within the community concern them directly. She said:

Kuma yanzu matsaloli dayawa na mata ne, ba a iya cewa maza ne za su nemo mafuta.

[And now many problems are related to women; it cannot be that men are the ones finding them solutions.]

Kady further supports this by stating:

In wani abu ya samu yau cikin garin ga misali an ce yau yinwa ta. Maza duk tafiyarsu za su yi wurin bida su barmu da yara. Muna za mu dokar yawnin yaran nan. Muna za mu shugabancin gidan nan in sun tafi. Kenan mace ke ta anka barma babban nawayin dan keta za ki kula da gidan nan.

[If something happens today in the area, for example, starvation, all the men will leave us with the children to go on an exodus. We are going to take over the responsibilities of the children. We will be the ones leading the house once they leave. We, women, are left with big responsibilities. So, the woman will be the one taking care of this house.]

All the points addressed by participants present the challenges they have experienced or see other women experienced within their communities. These challenges, added to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, add different layers of struggles never experienced before.

Subtheme1 10-Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has disruptively transformed and impacted everyone's lives socially and economically. As stated earlier in the chapter, the research was conducted in the

midst of the pandemic. Therefore, since this section attempted to unpack women's struggles and challenges, it was necessary to present how the pandemic affected rural women, and most importantly how this health crisis affected their views on leadership.

Biba from Birni N'Konni said:

Cutar annobar ta kawo matsaloli da yawa saboda yawancin ayyukanmu sun daina. Ko da wasu ayyukan da kuke son aiwatarwa; za a ce maka ba zai yiwu ba saboda halin da ake ciki. Misali, har ma mun kasance muna zuwa horo na makonni, amma tare da annobar cutar, yawancin abubuwa suna nan a tsare. Zan ba ku misali na, irin na mata masu sana'a. Sau da yawa nakan je Kano in saya kayan na saidawa. Tun da ba a ba mu damar yin balaguro da shutar ga ta COVID-19, har yanzu dole ne mu nemo hanyar tafiya. Don haka muna tafiya ta cikin daji ta hanyar daukar kabu kabu. Abin takaici, idan jami'an douane suka kama mu, za a yi wa direban kashi tsiya, kuma za a tilasta mana mu koma.

[The COVID-19 disease has brought a lot of problems because many of our activities have stopped. Even some activities you want to undertake, you will be told that it is not possible because of the current situation. For example, we even used to go for training for weeks, but with the pandemic most things are on hold. I will give you my example, similar to women practicing commerce. I often go to Kano to buy the items for reselling. Since we are not allowed to travel during the pandemic, we still have to find a way to travel. So, we travel through the bushes by hiring a taxi moto driver. Unfortunately, if the customs officers catch us, the taxi driver will be beaten, and we will all be forced to return.]

Another participant, Riya, mentioned:

Lale cutar annobar ya yi tasiri sosai a cikin ayyukanmu na jagoranci. Misali, hukuma ta hana tarukan da ke tasiri ayyukan kungiyar mu na mata. Bugu da kari, ba a ba mu damar gudanar da kananan sana'o'inmu na kasuwanci ba saboda an rufe dukkan iyakokin.

Hakan ba shi da sauki.

[COVID-19 has impacted us a lot in our leadership functions. For instance, the authority has forbidden gatherings, which impacts our women's group activities. In addition, we are not allowed the practice of our small business of commerce because all the borders are closed. That is not easy.]

Matou seconded Riya's point:

Walahi, wannan annoba ta kawo kalubale da yawa. An hana kungiyoyin mata da kungiyoyi su yi taro kwata-kwata. Wadannan sun katse mu'amalar matan, kuma da yawa sun ji sun kebe da juna, ba bu karfafawa.

[Walahi, this pandemic brought a lot of challenges; women's groups and associations were not allowed to meet at all. These interrupted the women's interactions, and many felt disempowered and isolated from each other.]

Kady also revealed:

Wannan lamarin ba a taba ganin irinsa ba a gare mu; manya tsohi , balle a ce samari.

Muna addu'ar Allah ya kare mu baki daya ya kawo karshen wannan lamari.

[We never saw such a thing before. This situation is unprecedented to us, the older generation, let alone the younger generation. We constantly pray Allah to protect us all to bring this to an end.]

Larey also put forward:

Sai a ce ko da an yi aure ko suna, ba a barin mutane su taru. Mutane kadan an kama izini su hadu kuma yan guida na. Hukumar ta yi tsauri sosai game da hakan. Ba mu saba da wannan ba, kuma yana da wuya 'yan uwa su jimre da wannan sabon salon rayuwa.

[Imagine that even if there is a wedding or naming ceremony, people are not allowed to gather. A minimal number of people are allowed to be present, and that is the family members. The authority was very strict about that. We are not used to this, and it was difficult for the community members to cope with this new lifestyle.]

These participants described how the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted their lifestyles, activities, and overall interactions within the community. For them, as rural dwellers, it was so hard to cope knowing that the social community involvement is very strong.

Theme 4- Resources and support systems to leadership participation

I present in this last section the findings on theme 4 about the resources and support systems to leadership participation which correspond to subtheme 11 below. This section also answers Research Objective 4.

Research Objective 4: Understand the support systems and resources that women and girls need to participate in leadership roles.

Subtheme 11: Supports for engaging in the community

Subtheme 11: Supports for engaging in the community

In this section, participants, primarily the ones who hold leadership roles, shared insight about the support they want to see from the community to have more women in leadership roles.

Most participants use this opportunity to share their views on the resources and support system they need and for the younger generations to take on leadership roles.

One participant said:

Bisa kan jagorancin yan mata da na mata muna son dai a kama muna bisa ga waye ma mata uwaye kai. Har yau dai da mazansu a zan bari yarinya diya mace ta zan zuwa lakkwal a bar muta saurin arme dan kodan kudi. Gaskiya muna son ku kama muna bisa kan wannan waye kan.

[According to women's and girls' leadership, we need more support in term of bringing more awareness in educating women (mothers) and the husbands (fathers) to leave their girls in school. To stop marrying the girls early because of money and to let them remain in school. We honestly need your support in that regard.]

Another participant confirmed this idea with the following:

Kuma ya kamata uwaye a ba yara mahimmanci. Kamar yadda na ce muku ba a ba yara mata mahimmanci. Misali Sai ka ga ana cewa shin yaushe na aka haifi wane, har ya zo yana shugabanci. Yara suna manyan gobe sai da su na aka wani abu. A zan waye ma yara kai. Tunda ni yanzu abin da zan iya fadi cikin wari na, ba zan gaya ma ba yar shekara goma sha biyar ko ashirin.

[It is also important for parents to give importance to children. As I told you, young girls are not given much importance. For instance, you will see being said that when someone was born, until he/she came to be a leader? Children are the future leaders and their presence is important in order to get something accomplished. It is important to bring awareness to the youth. I for instance, I can not tell a younger person 10 to 15 what I can say to someone of my age.]

Matou corroborated Riya's previous point by noting:

Ga yarinyar ga ta gaza magana cikinmu ? da matasa na sai tayi yadda take so. Gaskiya a kara masu karfin gwiwa sosai. Kuma a kara musu formation a waye musu kai. Dan akwai kauyen da kamar waggata zuwa in ta zo sai a ce yar iska ce.

[For instance, look at this girl (referring to the adolescent girl in the group); she cannot speak. If there were youth, she could have done as she wanted. In some villages, young girls like her could not come to this interview session; if she did, she would be considered a bad girl. Honestly, youth need more training, and there is also a need to bring more awareness to them.]

Overall, the points mentioned by the participants provide examples of the resources and support systems needed in order to see more women and youth becoming engaged in the community and aspiring to leadership roles.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the findings of participants in regard to all the research questions and objectives. In the first part, I discussed the in-depth interview process and the profiles of all participants. In the presentation of the findings, I used a detailed structure in which each theme and subtheme have been organized and discussed according to the research objectives. This chapter also reveals different perceptions of participants, and direct quotes are presented to bring the participants' true voices to contextualize their responses. In the following chapter, I discuss the findings.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

In this section, I discuss and interpret the key results presented in Chapter 4. I unpack the study results by following the same structure as in the previous chapter. First, I summarize my own interpretation of the findings that are directly related and central to answering the research objectives. Next, I discuss the findings based on the information presented in the literature review of Chapter 2. In doing so, I discuss how the literature aligns with or differs from the current findings. An integral part of this process is my incorporation of the voices of women and adolescents, which are not only insightful but also a pivotal purpose of the study. Last, I discuss the study's limitations and opportunities for future research.

As a reminder, this research is a qualitative case study with the fundamental research purpose of exploring Karkara women's and girls' perceptions of leadership positions plus the role of leadership in empowering women. Therefore, the study aims to address the following four research objectives:

5. Understand Karkara women's and adolescent girls' perceptions of leadership and willingness to participate in leadership positions, focusing on leadership in the community and in women's groups or associations.
6. Explore the factors and opportunities that can empower and influence other women and girls to take leadership positions, as well as the factors that leverage or contribute to their participation.

7. Understand the barriers that prevent women and girls from acquiring and participating in leadership positions.
8. Understand the support systems and resources that women and girls need to participate in leadership roles.

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

In this section, I discuss my interpretation of the data. I made meaning of the data both as an insider (who grew up and evolved in the culture) and as an outsider (who went into the field for the first time to conduct research and investigate a particular phenomenon). I discuss the themes that overall answer the research objectives.

In term of leadership views and past or present leadership roles, the results from the face-to-face and focus group discussions indicate that all participants find leadership is contributory. Participant responses are based on the actions of leading others through leadership roles/positions within the community, women's groups/associations, local organizations, or their own household. The insightful views shared by all participants on leadership overall provided rich context to answer Research Objective 1.

For instance, Natou in the findings section said:

Jagorancin mata muna yin shi kuma wallahi alhamdulillah saboda wanga aiki sarafawa da muke yi shine mata suna zowa inda nika suna aikin kowa abin da ya iya na hannunshi na yake yi. Har ya kai ma in muka yi abu muka saidashi muka ga cikin mu akwai wadda adda cikas. Kamar wadda take son agaji ko wani abu ya faru gareta, sai mu zo cikin asusu nan a bata ramce.

[Women's leadership is what we are doing, and praise be to God, because of the work we are doing, women come to my place and do transformations activities, and each of them does what they can. It even went as far as when we did something and sold it, and we realized that among us, one had issues, challenges, or needed help and support. We come together and find out what happened to her and take the money from our account (Asusu) to lend to her.]

Her argument reveals the economic and material outcome that can emerge from the idea of holding *leadership* within her community, where poverty and the fear of sinking into it are major concerns for women and their families. I was meticulously paying attention to Natou's word choice and her use of the expression *aiki sarafawa*, meaning the "transformation work," which broadly refers to leadership. Her arguments are far from showing her desire or need to have influence or even any power/title in a leadership role. However, in reality, the interpretation that emerges is that she and the women she worked with seem to embrace leadership as a way to empower themselves and escape from poverty.

What I found fascinating about Riya, another participant, was her confidence and the appeal she makes to women, highlighting the promising feature of leadership. She spoke profoundly about how masterful it is to see that when a woman realizes what leadership brings and can bring to her life, she encourages and invites others to get involved. Further, the idea that emerges is that of awareness and awakening. It is essential to realize that putting "yourself" as a human being forward to "wake up" is necessary, because no one would do it in our place. From the two—awareness and awakening—the determination to fight and make a better life will emerge. Therefore, what I interpret and underline from Riya's words, even if it seems subtle, is

the idea of “hope.” Hope around leadership is what will undeniably be enlightening and empowering and will bring about a better life. Riya’s supporting excerpt is so meditative.

Mu dai saboda Allah mun ji daɗin jagoranci kungiyar mata, kenan muna jan hankalin mata bisa zaman nan na banza da suke yi ba ya da anfani. Su yi kofari su shiga kungiyoyi na kanunsu saboda azan yi da su dan in baka cikin kungiya ba’ a yi da kai. Kuma shi jagoranci dai babban abune in ka aza ma kanka. Ko ina dai kai na ga azama kanka shi, ko waje ko cikin gida. Babu mai aza maka shi.

[Praise be to God; we are happy to lead the women’s group. That’s why we are raising awareness and seeking women’s attention to the idleness they are doing. They try to join their own groups so they can be involved in what is happening; otherwise, they will be excluded. Moreover, leadership is a great thing; you can put it on yourself. No matter where you are, you are the one who sets yourself up for it, whether it is outside or inside the house. No one puts the burden on you!]

What I found unique about the views of Kady and Larey is that they both brought up the idea of gender when it comes to leadership. Their arguments suggest that women must understand that men have the place they have today because they have taken a step ahead in leadership compared to women. For instance, Kady and Larey both understood that notoriety counted as well as the ability to be a good speaker. Even better, they both highlighted that education was an important pillar that should not be neglected by women who aspired to leadership positions. Larey, for example, as a *Maman Lumière*, gives light to “mothers,” and she and other participants who do the same see their work as that of leaders who guide and accompany others. My interpretation will go a little further for Kady. Having already occupied a

leadership position, she seems to enjoy her work. This may suggest that if other women embraced community leadership roles, a lot would change in years.

Toua's words are rich in the depth of the terms covered and the complexity of the ideas she brought to light. Two universes are put forward, each with the solution to the quest for leadership. In other words, whether we are from the generation that has the chance to go to school or not, there will always be a way to achieve leadership. There is a famous saying that "all roads lead to Rome." Well, for Toua, all roads can lead to leadership. According to her, one can engage in activities that do not necessarily require the ability to read and write. For instance, that can be done through any hands-on activity.

Toua's words, in parallel, encompass other reflections. She was able to juxtapose two contexts. First, she shows, through her words, that we can deflect the blocking of literacy, which is often described by many as the ultimate condition towards emancipation, to achieve the common goal that would be leadership. Second, Toua did not fail to stress the importance of education, thus yearning for her children to attend school.

Toua's argument let me interpret that leadership is even more complex than what appears on the surface. As she pointed out, this complexity relies on financial independence, not burying herself in shame. Toua advances the idea of imitating others by engaging in an income-generative activity. However, she may omit or forget that for others, it is even more difficult because they have zero funds to begin with.

When it comes to "opinions about taking a leadership role," women shared valid mixed opinions that can cause one to meditate deeply. For example, Riya made this argument:

Mu na Jagoranshi mata da yan mata dan saboda ci gaban mata, kuma mu samu incinmu.

Da maganin zaman banza ba yada anfani dan shina ya sa muka nemi shugabanci.

[We are leading women and girls for the sake of women's development, and we want to have our freedom. It is also a solution to idleness, which has no benefits; that is why we take leadership roles.]

Her opinion let me interpret that leadership is the ability to lead other individuals or organizations in order to achieve a specific goal, which here creates the foundation for the development of women in general.

On the other hand, Zeyna put forward this argument:

To wallali muna so mu gani Jagoranshi mata da yan mata. Ama dey mu yanzu muna biye da uwayen mu muna so mu bi bayansu haka kamin mu kai ga namu lokaci”

[Well, of course we want to see women and girls leading the way. But now we are following our mothers and we want to follow them until we reach our own time.]

I interpret Zeyna to mean that competencies and long-term skills are often paramount before committing to leadership. That said, the succession will be well assured after a period of training by the elders and mothers. For other participants, like Hady, family responsibilities constitute a challenge to committing to leadership roles because those responsibilities require much commitment. Here I interpret and emphasize that even if Hady thinks her participation in women's groups will create some income to provide for her family's needs as a widow and mother of 10 children, the benefits she will gain in the long term can be immeasurable. What Hady does as a brave mother and widow within her household, with all the responsibilities she carries, plus her work contributions with the women's group, is what I also call authentic leadership.

Related to the three teenage girls interviewed, Abou, Rahi, and Ami, ages 18, 19 and 20, respectively, some may think that their contribution will not be valid given their age in a society

where age and respect for elders are important. Consequently, their shyness and reserve can also emanate from the presence of the elders in front of whom they could not fully express themselves, out of respect; otherwise, they would be labeled as uneducated, shameless, or even cheeky girls. As they noted, these adolescent girls are listened to and consulted within their household and circle of friends. Furthermore, as I presented in the results (Chapter 4), the intervention of elders to push young people to share their opinions is commendable. I also interpret that even if the elders are often conservative, they try to tease the young people so that they can express themselves in turn as needed.

As to the “leadership opportunities for empowerment,” findings show that leadership can definitely be a vector to empowerment. For instance, the statements of Larey and Safia in regard to leadership benefits for empowerment highlight the beneficial character that leadership brings. They seem to have understood that female leadership could be very promising because of all the advantages it could hold. As to participants who shared their views about female leaders, my interpretation involves different aspects. First it brings out the importance of communication, socialization, and social cohesion. When women detach themselves from isolationism, they learn more, become more informed, and aspire to better things. For example, in contemporary times, a woman with access to television or radio would be more inspired to become a leader than a woman isolated from all these resources, technology, or other connections to the outside world. This, therefore, shows that being socially active is a first step toward the aspiration to become a leader. The important point here is not to be disconnected from the world and your community.

I interpret participants' perception of empowerment with the notion of self-dependence. Biba's arguments, for example, imply that emancipation is synonymous with independence; her comments focused on the liberating nature of leadership. This can also imply financial or

economic freedom, as well as agency. She emphasized that her status as a divorced woman represented an asset for her goals. This highlights the limiting character that marriage could have on women within the Nigerian society. Further, this raises the question of freedom, in all its forms, as a necessity before being able to aspire to any empowerment.

Also, these women do not miss the opportunity to express the material limitations they have and the support they need.

Discussion of Findings in Connection with the Literature

This section discusses how the findings connect to the review of literature presented in Chapter 2. Although numerous scholars have investigated the importance of examining female leadership and identity within the African context by using primarily an African theoretical framework (Steady, 2005; Mamani, 1985; Alidou, 2005; Oyewumi, 1997; Alou, 2009), there are still gaps in our knowledge of how rural women and adolescent girls perceive leadership. This study addresses the timely and empirical gap in the literature by focusing mainly on Niger Karkara women's and adolescent girls' perceptions of leadership and how their participation can empower them.

Nonetheless, in providing a general definition of leadership, the literature review aligns and verifies the presented findings that leadership can be defined as a process in which a person influences a group of individuals in order to accomplish a common goal (Northouse, 2019). Findings show that participants' influence in leadership is exhibited in different ways, such as their involvement in women's groups or associations, and can create a source of revenue, combat child marriage, and keep youth in school so they can accomplish what they desire in the future. I

was surprised by the findings of some of the participants' leadership processes of influencing others since I did not come across them within the literature. However, literature has confirmed that women are at the forefront in most women's groups and associations (Alidou, 2005).

Participants who shared their perspectives referred to leaders of women's associations or groups as their "mothers" or "elders" who guide, enlighten, and provide them with necessary support and training. These women also support and contribute to the community, the women's groups, and the associations they belong to as much as possible. Their perceptions of leadership support Steady's theory (2011) of "mothering the nation"—an Afro-centric perspective from which motherhood empowers and does not subordinate. Steady's theory goes even further than what other participants highlighted, since even within their households, they are always consulted by their spouses, who seek guidance. This is also leadership, as affirmed by participants that leadership can come in a different form.

This unique identity of African women within their community and household is articulated within the literature by scholars such as Alidou, 2005; Oyewumi, 1997; and Steady, 2011. For instance, Alidou (2005) shows a feature of a woman's identity through motherhood (knowing that the woman she referred to has biologically not given birth to a child) as a title given to a woman who is a caregiver, a guide, and a teacher and through whom is created a bonding relationship between her and others. The idea of *Uwar Guida* also underlines the invisible or often-neglected leadership roles of women within societies and particularly the Nigerian women within their households. I was not surprised to see how these women connect leadership with the idea of caring for others, because that is what I have experienced previously with the idea of *Uwar Guida*, watching our grandmothers, mothers, and aunties caring for others

throughout generations. Women were the secret decision-makers and played influential roles within their households.

In addition, as noted in the literature, Niger—like most African cultures—is a traditionally patriarchal culture, which puts women at the margin and gives men more power and authority (Alidou, 2005; Adichie, 2012; Steady, 2011). In addition, the predominant religion (Islam) also gives a man authority over his wife’s decisions. The findings of this study supported this: Some participants confirmed that their husbands do not allow them to be involved in the community (without them providing details), which may eventually close prospective doors for them to take on leadership roles.

The findings in relation to the leadership opportunities for empowerment showed that participants perceive empowerment in various ways. First, participants perceive it as a way to be self-sufficient financially and economically for themselves and their offspring. Second, participants also perceive empowerment as the ability to have resources and training that can allow them to participate in different income-generating activities to alleviate poverty and dependency. Empowerment for the participants also means having the opportunity to be involved with women’s associations or groups and for their offspring to stay healthy and stay in school.

The participants’ views and observations align with the arguments presented in the literature. Scholars have contended that empowerment comes with different opportunities. Kabeer (1999) argues that these opportunities can have resources, agency, and achievements. Narayan (2005) argues that the opportunity for empowerment may refer to the freedom of choice and action over resources and decisions that influence one’s life. The findings also aligned with Keller and Mbewe’s (1991) argument that empowerment can refer to “a process whereby women can organize themselves to increase their self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make

choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their subordination.” Asaolu et al. (2018) examine women’s empowerment by promoting sustainable health, human development, nourishment, and socioeconomic standing of women and their offspring. Moghadam and Senftova (2005) also discuss women’s empowerment as an opportunity to achieve skills, access to legal rights, and involvement in society’s social, economic, political, and cultural aspects. However, most participants who highlighted the health aspect of empowerment focused only on the children, i.e., the importance of breastfeeding and educating mothers on how to prepare accompanying food for the child. I can corroborate from the findings and the prognostication of the literature that defining empowerment within a particular context is indeed complex and even more challenging from a holistic standpoint. Although most did not go in depth, participants explained that holding leadership roles, which is mainly for the development of people, can provide a sense of fulfilment and happiness in fighting for women’s rights, which empowers them and others. One participant, Riya, noted:

Da jagoranci ne ake samun ƙarfin gwiwa ko ta wane hanya kana fata ka samu ƙarfin gwiwa bisa abin da kasa kanka.

[It is through leadership that you gain empowerment, no matter how; you hope to gain empowerment in whatever you set yourself to do. Some barriers can be obstacles for women in trying to accomplish these goals.]

The participants’ comments also were consistent with the literature that suggests the barriers that prevent women and girls from participating in leadership positions include gender inequalities, bias, or stereotypes; lack of training and support; and the non-enforcement of laws and texts.

Colonization in Niger, as noted in the literature, contributed significantly to the inequality, in that only boys were allowed in school for over a decade (Alidou, 2005). However,

during the precolonial area, as argued by Mamani (1985), Oyewumi (1997), and Steady (2011), in African countries, women have long been leaders and impacted their communities. Although not explicitly mentioned by participants, what coloniality has created, in addition to the social, cultural, and patriarchal realities in Niger, is the preservation of inequalities in which women in leadership roles are almost not welcome. One of the participants said:

Akwai abin da zani karawa. Kun san shi jagoranci in aka ce na macena, nan an muna hakanan, aka kawo gomnan jaha mace. Sai an ka nuna ba a son ta tunda maceta. Daga shan sama dan Allah in mace ta samu wani abu a dibeta a bata matsayin. An ce a hiddo kota na mata kuma in aka hiddo a yi ta jayaya. Shi ya sa wata ko ta na son bida sai ta kiya. Ta aza dossier ma ba ta azawa.

[There is something I would like to add, you know if it a female leader, it has been illustrated here when a female governor has been brought. The people showed that she was not wanted because she was a woman. From the top level, please, in the name of God, if a woman gets something, please give it to her because she deserves it. It is said to bring women's quota, and there are always back-and-forth battles when it is found. That's why a woman, even if she wants to lead, will refuse to go ahead. She wouldn't even apply.]

Another participant also added to the barriers that hold women from taking leadership roles by stating:

Matsalolin da muke kalubantaka wajen jagoranci gaskiya suna da yawa. Saboda ita mace in tana jagoranci ga wuri bata da mahimmanci. Yanzou in namiji ya zaka ga wuri ya ga maceta ga jagoranci sai shi gani bata kai wurin da za shi tambayeta wani abu ba. Kenan akwai matsala. Shi dai in anka ce jagoranchi, jagorancina ya kamata a ce da mace da

namiji in ana jagoranci yakamata a ce a bi ka koda kana mace. Tunda kaina ga jagoranci a baka matsayinka wanda Allah ya baka. To amma yanzu sai ka ga in dai mace ta ga jagoranci ba'a bata mahinmancin jagorancin nan. Ko ta iya in aka zaka aka isketa ba'a bata daraja tunda ita dia maceta, amma in namiji ne ga jagoranci in an iske shi duk abinda ya fadi hakanan na tunda namijina ya iya fadi a jiya. Kenan shi kuma wannan gaskiya bai kamata ba.

[Honestly, the problems we faced in holding leadership roles are numerous. Because when a woman is a leader somewhere, she is not valued. When a man comes to a place where he sees a woman leader, he sees that she has not reached a place where he can ask her something. Then that is a problem. Leadership is leadership; it should not be a male or female thing. Even if the leader is a woman, people should follow her. If you are a leader, you should be given the position God has given you. However, now you see, as long as a woman is a leader, she does not receive much importance. Even if she is good at what she does, people will not respect her because she is a woman, but if it is a man leader, everything he says will be executed since he is a man, and whatever he says will be executed. Honestly, that should not be the case.

The literature on Crenshaw intersectionality (1991) also supports some of the struggles and barriers participants evoked. Not all of the experiences of Karkara women and adolescent girls are the same, as noted by the participants. They said that they might be positioned within an intersection of further social injustice because of their gender and location. They see themselves needing more support than the ones in urban areas in order to be able to flourish and to accomplish projects like other women across other frontiers. The same goes for their children, for whom participants expressed the wish for a better life, such as being in school and raising

more awareness to stop getting married early, as child marriage is more prevalent in rural areas. However, the Karkara women's intersectionality, as the participants described it, is more linked with their gender, social role, patriarchy, sociocultural, traditional, and religious factors. These associated factors created more challenges for their overall development or raised awareness that the struggles of people within urban vs. rural areas cannot be necessarily the same within a given time and space.

The findings also support the social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2019; Eagly et al., 2000) presented in the literature review. Within Niger and particularly in rural areas, society expects women and girls to stay home. For many, as noted by participants, some people (mostly men) believe that women are supposed to stay home and care for the family and, therefore, cannot hold leadership roles or lead men. As a result of the societally assigned roles and stereotypes, and being often discredited, the findings demonstrated that many women are reticent to follow in other women's footsteps, resulting in fewer women aspiring for leadership roles.

Findings regarding the resources and support systems for leadership participant also supported the literature presented. Participants declared the need for "help," which they refer to as *Taimako* or *Tallafi* in Hausa. They stressed the need for help from the government and organizations to assist them in becoming empowered financially. They also raised the need to bring awareness and educate parents to leave youth in school and stop child marriage. The literature also supports that program such as CARE with the Mata Masu Dubara (MMD) tontine¹⁷ have helped many women become financially independent (Grant, 2002; Tabbo & Amadou, 2017; Arnould, 1989).

¹⁷ A loan or common fund between a group of people

Women and Adolescent Voices

It is imperative for me to underline the powerful voices of the women I interviewed (whose voices echo those of many others) because almost all of them had a direct and indirect “kira or kuka,” meaning call or cry in Hausa, “cri de coeur” in French, and “cry from the heart” in English. Their cry from the heart is centered on different points to show us what marginality looks like within their lived experiences. Their voices help inform not only the theories evoked in the study but also the bravery of these women and their degree of fighters, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. They really need to be applauded and supported given the socio-cultural context in which they live.

The first point noted by participants points to the government, donors, and all goodwill to help them to be autonomous and independent. These women stressed that they need help by saying, "Muna son agaji, tallafi," meaning “we need help and support.” They specified that in the foreground, they solicit financial assistance to either start an income-generating activity or support the small business they have already started but in which they are struggling. They said in Hausa, “Muna son agaji, tallafi dan mu samu yancin kanumu,” meaning “we want help and support so we can be independent.”

They mentioned the importance of recognizing that the main barrier to their autonomy is their lack of financial independence and/or their poverty. Many said in unison that they cannot be autonomous and empowered without an income-generating activity, nor can they take a leadership role if they cannot financially meet their basic needs first. For example, some participants mentioned that because of their small business, they do not have to reach out to others, beg, or sometimes feel humiliated when asking for help. They highlight that financial independence is fundamental to having autonomy and being empowered. However, it should also

be noted that these women are real fighters, based on what they have been able to accomplish. Many of the participants are widows, and they are the ones who fully care for their children and grandchildren. They generate some income by engaging in women's groups, associations, or cooperatives. They are also on the front line in activities that concern the community.

The second point that emerges from the women's voices is centered on the fact that these women want to be heard at all levels, to have their views considered, and above all, to be given what they have a right to. They pointed out that we are in a new era and that women can do almost any work a man can do. As a result, they require that when a woman has the potential and the capacity to exercise a given function, she should be permitted to do so. For instance, if a woman has been elected or selected to be a head of an institution, this right should be granted to her. When others think otherwise, it disempowers and marginalizes women. Women said they are tired of being solicited only during the election, then forgotten immediately afterward. Here it should be noted that despite most of these women being uneducated, they have an expanded notion of how things work in the sector in which they are engaged. For example, women's groups, associations, or cooperatives are very well structured with rules and regulations that all women must respect and cooperate with. Alternatively, participants used the occasion of my interviewing them to request help verbally. They said they are asking the government and other organizations to acquire more training, especially for adolescent girls. They say the training will edify more women and adolescent girls to carry out different and innovative activities.

Third, these women showed gratitude and felt that they were valued to the extent that someone would travel kilometers just to hear what they have to say. They were even more pleased that I was not collecting data for an organization but instead for my own personal research. This allowed them to be even more open and honest in their responses and to feel that

they were having a sincere conversation with a sister who cares about their well-being. To this end, they used the opportunity to ask for direct help from me as a patriot who had the privilege of continuing their studies abroad. They ask me to carry their message beyond the Nigerien border because they said, “you never know where the help can come from—it may come from anywhere.” Indeed, I feel the obligation to spread and convey their messages and, more importantly, in the near future to bring my modest contribution to their well-being, God willing. In addition, they wish to see similar research that will further bring to light the reality of rural dwellers.

It is also important to share women's voices amid the COVID-19 pandemic and convey how the government lockdown decision impacted their businesses and other activities. Many women noted that they had to take leadership and risk crossing the border to maintain their business in order to provide for their families. They indicated that the lockdown had impacted their economic empowerment, an essential factor in their autonomy. For instance, they noted that the lockdown meant that they could not attend their regular training, which is fundamental for gaining professional skills in the different activities they perform.

Limitations of the study

As is true for every study, this project has some limitations, which I discuss in this segment. Future research needs to recognize these limitations listed below to improve on their work:

- One of the limitations is the limited sample size (n=17 with n=2 pilot participants).

Although the research reached saturation earlier than expected, the population sample

may be small and cannot be generalized to the whole population. Therefore, future studies could consider increasing the sample size.

- The profile or sampling methodology of the participants is also a limitation. While many could provide their insights during the interview sessions, others, particularly the adolescent girls, could not comprehend how to answer the questions. As a result, the chances of having a more diverse set of information from different age groups are reduced.
- Some participants lacked knowledge of the meaning of the term “leadership.” which required me to explain the word and provide additional information as to what the question was asking. Consequently, this may affect participant responses.
- There is insufficient research to support some of the field findings and put them into practice in a way that is more applicable to real world.
- Combing younger participants and older participants in the same focus group may have affected the results. The adolescent girls, in particular, likely did not talk as much as they would if they were among their age-group peers.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion, Future Research, Recommendations, and Implications for practices

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I conclude the overall study by summarizing key findings concerning the research aims and objectives. This chapter also proposes the research implications in the field and recommendations for future study.

My goal was to investigate how Karkara women and girls perceive leadership positions and the role of leadership in empowering them. The study was grounded on four research objectives:

- 1- Understand Karkara women's and adolescent girls' perceptions of leadership and willingness to participate in leadership positions within their given context, focusing on leadership in the community and women's groups or associations.
- 2- Explore the factors and opportunities that can empower and influence other women and girls to take leadership positions, as well as the factors that leverage or contribute to their participation.
- 3- Understand the barriers that prevent women and girls from acquiring and participating in leadership positions.
- 4- Understand the support systems and resources women and girls need to participate in leadership roles.

As a qualitative research case study, the study used a discourse analysis approach to help capture the essence of how participants within a given context express and share their thoughts throughout their interviews.

A summary of the results indicates that Karkara women and girls perceive leadership to be very instrumental in their life and interactions with others, and that most participants believe leadership is also a path to empowerment for them, their children, and future generations. Findings show that participants perceive leadership from a number of different angles. They argue that influential impacts occur when a female holds a leadership role within a community. Participants perceive the social aspect of leadership by recognizing that being part of a dynamic community has triggered their interest in aiming for a leadership role. They are further inspired by female leaders whom they witness serving the community and overall working for the development of other women. Participants also showed the benefits and value of education through their remarks by recognizing its importance for future generations.

If there is one point on which all the women agreed, it is the economic requirement that leadership entails. It is undeniable that among the objectives of leadership is its potential for empowerment. However, for many participants, it is irrefutable that training and a minimum economic and material capacity are also necessary before they embark on the quest for leadership. In other words, one has to plant a fruit seed to harvest several fruits, and for these women, to become independent, they would have to invest for that. Also, it is essential to understand that some of these participants live below the poverty line. Consequently, they worry more about what they will eat or having their basic needs met before thinking about taking other responsibilities outside their household. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that for the women who did not get the chance to be schooled, their ultimate goal is to engage income-generating activities or remunerating jobs through which they will provide for their family.

Future Research

This study will help remedy the dearth of literature on gender, women leadership, and empowerment within the rural context (which may also be applicable within urban context) and fill the gap in rural women's and adolescent girls' leadership and empowerment perceptions. The study offered the opportunity for rural participants to express themselves in an authentic way and to have their views taken into consideration in the field of research. Therefore, the study will humbly contribute to the area of women and gender studies by giving researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers multiple perspectives on women's policy implementations by considering new and tangible perspectives impacting rural women's lives.

This study can be an additional resource for students and scholars across borders and diasporas to gain knowledge of this particular research topic. The framework created might serve as a guide for further research on leadership and empowerment.

This research will also significantly impact mindsets related to women and girls within particular the African contexts and spaces. The study expands the lens of leadership by providing an African centered perspective that is central to this study.

Recommendations

Although this study could answer the research purpose and objectives, it also raised new questions and opened doors for exploring other study opportunities regarding location and male support. A possible recommendation for future research on this theme is to expand the scope of the investigation by considering other regions across Niger. Since this study focused on three different sites within a specific region, a future study might build on this research by

investigating, comparing, and contrasting perspectives across different sites, languages, and cultures. Another potential area of future research is to explore how spouses do or don't contribute to their wives' aspirations for leadership roles. Some participants mentioned that their spouses were understanding, while others noted that their spouses do not allow them to be involved in the community. These observations aroused my curiosity, yet time did not permit further exploration of this phenomenon. Therefore, future research could explore how males support, change, or shift the paradigm for female aspirations and contribute to leadership roles that could empower them and future generations. Future study could also do a comparison between rural and urban perceptions to understand the differences and capitalize on the existing gap in the literature.

Implications for Practices

I had the privilege to interact and discuss directly with participants, which allowed me to obtain findings that answer the study's research objectives. Based on the conversations and interactions with my participants, I developed a number of practices beneficial to organizations working on gender issues in community development within the rural Sahel (as well as the urban areas, to some extent). In addition, the study's findings have practical implications for community leaders, educators, and national and international policymakers. The findings can also be a framework for engaging women and adolescent girls in society. Below is a list of some practical implications:

- First of all, it is important to highlight when the study was conducted; there was a global pandemic, COVID-19, that impacted everyone's lifestyle, particularly the remote rural

population of the investigated sites. In addition to the pandemic, national insecurity prevailed with armed bandits who terrorized the people within the tri-border areas of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. This insecurity added to the already weak road infrastructures, making access to some populations difficult. As a result of these circumstances, this study adds timely significance to the scarcity of scholarship on gender during this unprecedented time. These factors add to the complexity of conducting field research. Therefore, the findings make this one of the pioneering studies that will allow people to understand some of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and adolescent girls in rural Sahel areas. The study will also add valuable in-depth data on the Sahel regions, the profile of the population, and the cultural, social, and traditional challenges the people face.

- At the national and international levels, the study may provide new perspectives and knowledge and inspire policymakers to implement particular policies. It will also open the opportunity for revisions, interventions, and actions in addressing the needs, demands, and aspirations of Karkara women in Niger and in the Sahel in general. As revealed in the findings, the absence of female voices and representation in decision-making and policy implementation is striking. The study allows these female voices to be heard and calls for policymakers to be more inclusive. It also can open the debate to reexamine the women's quota within all decision-making bodies in Niger. More importantly, in issues that directly affect Karkara women's lives, women should make the decisions that best work for them, not ones that are often dictated to or imposed on them.
- The findings confirm that, although women are faced with many challenges, such as gender inequalities and social and cultural norms, they are also courageous and resilient,

and they take leadership roles within their households and community. These women have also shown bravery during a crisis period related to national insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic by remaining strong and united through associations, women's groups, cooperatives, and community engagement. For example, many women were able to have autonomy and agency through the financial support instituted within their association or groups. Women will come together and lend the association or group money to selected members who are facing challenges. Thus, these women actively participate in positive change within their community.

However, as noted, more training is needed to prepare the present and future generation of female leaders. Therefore, the study findings can provide a framework for government programs, organizations, and policymakers to work in synergy in order to have a suitable connection with the population. For instance, programs geared toward women's and adolescent girls' leadership training will leverage not only trained women but also allow them to have autonomy and be empowered.

- Educators, researchers, and those in academia can use the findings to gain more knowledge and understanding of the pervasive issues of gender inequities within the Sahel rural areas. The study can aid them in understanding and valuing the authentic voices of rural participants who are often undervalued, unstudied, and unheard. The ultimate hope is that educators, researchers, and other academics will disseminate this information to others, such as students, policy makers, administrators, and government officials; this will encourage people to think differently or at least have broader perspectives when thinking about these issues.

- A point worth noting is the shortage of digitized theses and dissertations within the global south, meaning that these documents must be accessed as hard copies through archives. This constitutes a significant concern, particularly for researchers and scholars who are conducting field research in the global south and trying to access important documentation, especially those written by global south scholars. Therefore, the opportunity to digitize this study and allow the public to access it will enable researchers, educators, students, and others to gain ground knowledge. It will also allow other researchers to expand on the investigated topic.
- Another key implication of the study is to create a channel through which these women and adolescent girls can express themselves authentically. Findings showed that through this channel women and girls can freely express their issues, concerns, and capabilities. Thus, the study may strengthen participants' self-esteem, as evidenced by the female leaders who expressed their happiness at being recognized and selected and, above all, given the ability to express themselves authentically and democratically. Hence, the study provides raw and reliable information that can be used locally and internationally in policy implementation.
- Future Ph.D. students wishing to follow suit on the same or related subjects can use the study to expand on the investigated research. They will be able to understand what has been previously done and design a proposed study framework built on field research. They will have a clear, specific idea of the limitations and drawbacks of conducting research of this kind and reflect on innovative ideas to overcome some of these limitations.

- An important implication for practices, mainly toward the younger and future generations, is to learn from the experiences of these participants, which offer a practical roadmap to further help them in their quest for autonomy, empowerment, and leadership. Men still have the final decisions within households; however, the study offers room to improve equity and inclusion and allow more equality of chances between males and females. Further, through this research, an awareness program can be developed, one aimed at raising awareness about a mindset change and superstitions centered on the importance of a fair and inclusive society—a society where women and men work in synergy for sustainable development of their community and nation.
- Finally, this study could serve as a basis for national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other partners for the development of Niger in general and women's leadership in particular. The most important thing would be to involve these brave and valiant women in all stages for the intervention's success because, as the saying goes, "All that you do without me is against me."

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APPENDIX A

Correspondence Permission to use “ Mata” song



Halima Therese Gbaguidi A <halimagbaguidi@gmail.com>

Autorisation de citer la chanson "Mata" dans ma thèse

Halima Therese Gbaguidi <halimagbaguidi@gmail.com> Fri, Feb 17, 2023, at 23:58pm

To: Aichatou Ali Soumaila dan_kwali_aicha@yahoo.fr

Bonjour chère Aïchatou,

J'espère que vous allez bien. Je m'appelle Halima Thérèse Gbaguidi A. J'ai récemment soutenu ma thèse intitulée « Exploring Karkara Women's And Adolescent Girls' Perceptions Toward Leadership Positions As A Vector Of Empowerment: A Case Study In The Sahel Niger » à l'université de Penn State dans l'Etat de Pennsylvanie aux États Unis.

Dans ce cadre, j'ai trouvé votre chanson intitulée « Maata » très inspirante car regorgeant les caractéristiques réelles des femmes et leur importance dans la communauté tant en milieu urbain que rural.

À cet effet, je sollicite votre accord afin de l'intégrer dans ma référence bibliographique en hommage aux femmes.

Dans l'attente de votre réaction, recevez mes meilleures salutations.

--

Halima Therese Gbaguidi Adolphe
PhD in Education, Development, and Community Engagement
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802

Aichatou ALI SOUMAILA <dan_kwali_aicha@yahoo.fr> Tue, Feb 21, 2023, at 2:57am

To: Halima Therese Gbaguidi <halimagbaguidi@gmail.com>

Bonjour Mme Halima,

Vous avez l'autorisation du groupe pour pouvoir utiliser la chanson "Mata" dans le cadre de vos travaux. Merci pour la considération !

Aichatou Ali Soumaila
Administratrice du groupe sogha

Halima Therese Gbaguidi <halimagbaguidi@gmail.com> Tue, Feb 21, 2023, at 23:54pm
To: Aichatou Ali Soumaila dan_kwali_aicha@yahoo.fr

Merci infiniment chère Aichatou!

Cordialement,

--

Halima Therese Gbaguidi Adolphe
PhD in Education, Development, and Community Engagement
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802

Aichatou ALI SOUMAILA <dan_kwali_aicha@yahoo.fr> Wed, Feb 22, 2023, at 1:49am
To: Halima Therese Gbaguidi <halimagbaguidi@gmail.com>

Bonjour Mme Halima,

C'est un réel plaisir !

Take care.

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Interview Questions in Hausa

- 1- Za ku iya fara da ba ni labarin bissa kanku? Kouna aiki? Kounyi ecole ko makaranta? Kouna da aure? Chekaroun kou nawa?
- 2- Menene ra'ayinku game da jagorrracchi (shugabancin) mata da yan mata karkara?
- 3- kunyi kokarin samun jagoranci (shugabanci) a cikin yankin ku?
- 4- Shin kuna yin wahayi abokan ku mata da ke riƙe matsayin jagoranci?
- 5- Kuna tunanin daukar matsayin jagoranci?
- 6- Wadanne kadarori kuke tsammanin (Imani) za ku samu ta hanyar riƙe mukamin jagoranci?
- 7- Kuna ganin jagoranci da karfafawa suna tafiya tare? Me yasa kuma menene?
- 8- Shin kun yarda cewa za'a bazu karfafawa in kuka mamaye aikin jagoranci? Me yasa ko me zey hana?
- 9- Wadanne kalubale ne ke hana ku karfafawa (samun karfin gwiwa)?
- 10- Shin kuna ganin (tsammanin) jagoranci zai zama wata hanya ta samun karfin gwiwa?
- 11- A matsayin ku na mazauna yankunan karkara, menene ra'ayin ku game da karfafawa da jagoranci?
- 12- Kuna jin goyan baya ko karaya lokacin da kuke son shiga cikin yankin ku?

Below are the interview questions in English.

1. Can you start by telling me something about yourself, such as your occupation? Your educational background and marital status?
- 2- What are your thoughts about rural women and girl's leadership?

- 3- Have you tried to occupy any leadership position in your community?
- 4- Are you inspired by your fellow women or girls who are occupying or occupied any leadership position?
- 5- What are your opinions about taking a leadership position?
- 6- What are the assets you believe you will gain in holding a leadership position?
- 7- Do you think that leadership and empowerment go hand in hand? Why and What not?
- 8- Do you believe that you may be empowered when holding a leadership role? Why or why not?
- 9- What are the challenges that restrict you from being empowered?
- 10- Do you see leadership will be a way to become empowered?
- 11- As rural dwellers, what is your perceptions of empowerment and leadership?
- 12- Do you feel supported or discouraged when you want to engage in your community?

APPENDIX C

Focus group discussion questions

The focus group discussion aims to discuss leadership and leaders who were empowered and influenced the participants. It will last about 1 hour and provide more context for women and girls' perceptions of leadership roles and empowerment. The following questions below were asked during the discussion.

Focus group discussion questions in Hausa

1- Yi tunanin minti daya na jagorar mace a cikin yankin ko kungiyar mata.

a- Yaya aka bayyana ta a matsayin jagora a cikin yankin? Bayyana wasu daga cikin halayensa

b- Wane tasiri ta yi ga al'umma baki daya musamman mata da 'yan mata.

c- Kuna gaskanta cewa shugabancin ta yana bada ƙarfi?

d- Kuna ganin jagoran da kuka ambata ya yi tasiri a kan ku ko al'umma?

2- Raba labari game da riƙe matsayin jagoranci kamar a cikin al'umma, makaranta ko kungiyar mata, da sauransu.

a- Shin kun nemi matsayin gudanarwa? Me yasa ko me yasa?

b- Kuna ganin kanku a matsayin jagora- a matsayin mata a gidanki, ko kungiya ko al'umma?

c- Menene kalubale wajen zama jagora a cikin alumma (yanki) ku?

d- Faɗa min abin da kuke tunani game da mata a matsayin jagoranci.

3- Tambayoyi ga kowa game da basira, halaye da kimar jagorancin al'umma.

a- Ta yaya kuke son aiwatar da matsayin jagoranci a cikin alummar ku? Me yasa ko me yasa?

b- Me kuke son tchanzawa ko ganin canji lokacin da kuka zama jagora?

c- Kuna tsammanin jagoranci yana da mahimmanci ga masu zuwa (yaranku da jikokinku)?

- d- Menene ra'ayin ku game da mata a mukaman gudanarwa?
- e- Menene karfafawa ke nufi ko yaya yake kama mu ku?

4 - Menene kuma kuke tsammanin yana da mahimmanci don ku raba game da shugabancin mata?

Focus group discussion questions in English

1. Think for a minute about a female leader in the community or women's group.
 - a. How was she portrayed as a leader within the community? Describe some of her characteristics
 - b- What impact did she have on the community in general and women and girls in particular.
 - c- Do you believe that her leadership is empowering?
 - d- Do you feel the leader you mentioned influenced you or the community?
- 2- Share a story about holding any leadership roles such as in the community, school, or women's group, etc.
 - a- Have you sought a leadership position? Why or why not?
 - b- Do you consider yourself a leader- as a wife in your household, group, or community?
 - c- What were the challenges of becoming a leader within your community?
 - d- Tell me your thoughts about female in leadership roles.
- 3- Questions to everyone about a communal leadership skills, characteristics, and values.
 - a. How do you want to hold any leadership roles in your community? Why or why not?
 - b. What do you want to change or see changed when you become a leader?

- c. Do you think leadership is important to the future generation (your children and grandchildren)?
 - d. What is your perception of female holding leadership roles?
 - e. What empowerment means or look like to you?
- 4 - What else about female leadership do you think is essential for you to share?

APPENDIX D

IRB Exemption Determination



Office for Research Protections
 Human Research Protection Program
 Office of The Senior Vice President for Research
 The Pennsylvania State University
 205 The 330 Building
 University Park, PA 16802

814-865-1775
 irb-orp@psu.edu
 research.psu.edu/irb

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

Date: August 26, 2021
From: Amy Sellers, IRB Analyst
To: Halima Gbaguidi

Type of Submission:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Exploring rural women and girls' perceptions toward participating in leadership positions as a vector of empowerment in Niger
Principal Investigator:	Halima Gbaguidi
Study ID:	STUDY00017750
Submission ID:	STUDY00017750
Funding:	Not Applicable
Documents Approved:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus group discussion questions-Halima Therese Gbaguidi .docx (0.01), Category: Data Collection Instrument • Interview Questions_Halima Therese Gbaguidi.docx (0.02), Category: Other • Revised HRP-591-Halima Therese Gbaguidi (3).pdf (0.05), Category: IRB Protocol • Series of practices questions-Halima Therese Gbaguidi.docx (0.01), Category: Data Collection Instrument

The Office for Research Protections determined that the proposed activity, as described in the above-referenced submission, does not require formal IRB review because the research met the criteria for exempt research according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations.

Continuing Progress Reports are **not** required for exempt research. Record of this research determined to be exempt will be maintained for five years from the date of this notification. If your research will continue beyond five years, please contact the Office for Research Protections closer to the determination end date.

Changes to exempt research only need to be submitted to the Office for Research Protections in limited circumstances described in the below-referenced Investigator



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814-865-1775
irb-orp@psu.edu
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Manual. If changes are being considered and there are questions about whether IRB review is needed, please contact the Office for Research Protections.

Penn State researchers are required to follow the requirements listed in the [HRP-103](#) – Investigator Manual, which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within CATS IRB (<http://irb.psu.edu>).


This correspondence should be maintained with your records.

APPENDIX E

Approval Letter from the University of Tahoua Dean's office to Conduct Data Collection in the Tahoua region

LABORATOIRE DE RECHERCHE ET D'ANALYSE
 SUR LE DEVELOPPEMENT ECONOMIQUE ET SOCIAL

LARADES
 Recherches économiques

UNIVERSITE DE TAHOUA
 BP : 255 TAHOUA


Objet : Enquête sur le leadership féminin dans la région de Tahoua

Monsieur,

Je soussigné HAMADOU DAOUDA Youssoufou, Professeur titulaire, Directeur du Laboratoire de Recherche et d'Analyse sur le Développement Economique et Social (LARADES) de l'Université de Tahoua, atteste que le LARADES a accueilli Mme Halima Thérèse Gbaguidi dans le cadre de ses recherches sur le leadership féminin.

A ce titre, elle mènera des enquêtes de terrain dans les localités de Tabalak, Keita et Konni afin de s'entretenir avec les femmes de ces localités sur leurs perceptions du leadership.

Cette attestation lui est délivrée pour servir et valoir ce que de droit.

Fait à Tahoua, le 20 septembre 2021

Pr. HAMADOU DAOUDA Youssoufou



 Directeur du LARADES

APPENDIX F

Series of practices questions

The checklist below is meant to help observe participants during the interview sessions. It will provide the researcher more context in describing the profile and behavior of each participant with or without the presence other participants.

What is the level of confidence of the participant in answering the questions?

Very Confident-----Confident-----Moderately confident-----Not confident

What is the body language of women and girls?

Verry Good-----Good-----Poor-----Very poor

What is the social class, appearance of women and girls?

Upper class-----Middle class-----Lower Class

Who is allowed to speak without permission in such meeting?

Women-----Girls-----Both women and girls-----Neither woman nor girls

How women interact among themselves compared to other members (for example what will be their interactions if there are all females)

Freely-----Shy/Reserve-----Openly

Who occupies key leadership positions in the groups or within the community?

Women-----Men-----Girls-----Senior

Does the level of education, age, or social class matter in participants interactions?

Yes-----

Curriculum Vitae

Halima Therese Gbaguidi Adolphe

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Education, Development, and Community Engagement Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA	May 2023
M.S. Organizational Development and Leadership Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, PA	May 2017
B.S. Political Science Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, PA	Dec 2014
AA. International Studies Harrisburg Area Community College, Harrisburg, PA	Dec 2011

Language Skill: French (native speaker), English (fluent), Hausa, Zarma (native speaker)

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Research Assistant Dept of Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Department, Penn State	Sep 2021-Present
Research/Teaching Assistant Dept of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, & Education, Penn State	Aug 2019-Dec 2022
President of the Pan African Professional Alliance (Pan-APA) at Penn State	Apr 2020-May 2021
Vice President of the Agricultural & Extension Education Graduate Student Association (GSA)	Apr 2020-Aug 2021

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

- Virtual presentation as a guest speaker on "Rural Women and Girls' Empowerment in Niger". Virtual webinar organized by the Pillar Foundation. November 8, 2022.
 - Virtual presentation on "Rural Women Participating in Leadership Positions and Training as a Vector of Empowerment in Niger". The 23rd annual global conference, *Reimagining Leadership Together* organized onsite and online in Geneva, Switzerland, by the International Leadership Association (ILA). October 23, 2021.
 - Seminar with students at the University of Tahoua on "women and girls' perceptions of leadership". University of Tahoua, Niger, September 23, 2021.
 - Virtual Conference on "La Place des Femmes dans l'Architecture Institutionnelles, Stratégique et Politique dans la Republique du Niger: Femmes Nigeriennes d'Excellence (FENIX)". Webinar organized by the Association of Women Scientists, Abdou Moumouni University and Center Reines Daura, Niamey, Niger Republic. December 14, 2020
 - Webster, N. & Gbaguidi, HT. (in review). Apathy, Engagement and Africa's Youth. Youth & Society.
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SELECTED ACADEMIC AWARDS AND HONORS

Africana Research Center Grant Awards (ARC), Penn State University	Jun 2021
African Feminist Initiative (AFI) Research and Grant Awards, Penn State University,	Apr 2021
Graduate Research Assistant Scholarship, Penn State University	Aug 2019-May 2022