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## Women in Management: Challenges and Gaps in Public Institutions in Ethiopia

Worku Mekonnen Tadesse<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The major purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges and gaps as related to executive women in public institutions in Ethiopia. A survey and analytical study approach was employed to investigate the case. The respondents were selected from all 23 ministerial head offices located in Addis Ababa. A sample of forty-nine executive women was identified to assess the challenges and gaps of women who hold managerial positions in their respective organizations with an availability sampling technique. Results indicate that the executive's family related issues did not impact women's career progress; however, the study also revealed that socio-cultural factors did have a significant impact on their career progress. In terms of organizational factors, the results showed that there are no as such discriminatory practices in terms of promotion and assignment of responsibility between men and women. However, it was found that there are policies and regulations that still disfavor women's progress moving up the organizational ladder. Also, women have more demands placed on them in order to reach executive positions than do men. The study suggests that a more enabling environment is needed to for women executives. Community programs, policies and regulations need to accommodate related factors on gender differences in the work place.

*Keywords:* Women Managers in Ethiopia, Management, Women in Public Institutions

### Introduction and Background to the Study

Ethiopia, with a total area of 1,103,609 square meters, is located in the horn of Africa; its plateau covers 2/3 of the country. According to the recent census report of CSA (2007), the total population of the country—the second most populated in Africa—is about 73,750,932 million, of which 37,217,130 are male and 36,533,802 are women. The total population in the next census survey of 2017 is projected to be 94,351,001, of which 47,364,009 will be men and 46,986,992 will be women (CSA 2013). Ethiopia has nine regional administrations and two city regions. There are 23 ministerial offices including the director general in the Country.

Many surveys reveal that women's participation in the workplace is lower than that of men. For example, the recent CSA (2013) report reveals that out of the total 42,403,879-employed population, only 19,517,232 are women. When we consider the total number of managers in the country by occupation (231,211), only 61,308 (26.5%) are women and of the total reported (563,231) only 181,668 (32.3%) are women. In terms of technicians and associate professionals, out of (804,750), only 264,416 (32.3%) are women. Surprisingly, the number of women employees outweighs the number of male employees in lower levels of occupations. Out of the total clerical and support workers in the country (221,028), 143,331 (65%) are women employees. Out of the total service and sales workers (3,670,391), 2,394,614 (65%) of them are women workers.

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This study, therefore, provides insights into the reasons for the lower representation of women in higher managerial positions in Ethiopian Public Institutions. By exploring the status of women managers, the study reveals the challenges that women face in organizational settings and also uncovers the reasons for the disparity in terms of representation in higher managerial levels in public institutions in Ethiopia.

### The Problem and Questions

Political and legal changes have created opportunities to increase the representation of women professionals in many sectors across the country. Nevertheless, the pace of change in relation to women professional has often been slow and progress has generally been uneven in all public and private institutions in Ethiopia. The relative failure of women to move into the ranks of managerial positions, in both private and public sectors in Ethiopia, has not been documented at all and no systematic study has been done thus far. Therefore, there is a dire need to investigate the problem, and this study seeks to answer the following basic questions: What are the obstacles that impede women's progress in managerial positions? What is the perception of woman managers as they proceed in their career paths?

### Research Methodology

The study employed a survey methodology, considering quantitative data, as the central data source, to investigate the status of executive women in management of public institutions. Samples were selected based on the availability of women executives in managerial positions in governmental public intuitions. Accordingly, 55 structured questionnaires targeting executives were distributed. 49 (89%) were completed and returned.

### Results and Discussion

#### *Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents-Executive Women*

The respondents were drawn from the Head Office of Public Ministries in Ethiopia. All were women holding executive positions in public ministerial offices. Accordingly, 49 women executives were identified. The educational status of the respondents and their spouse are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Educational Level of the Respondents and their Spouses**

Level	Educational Status	
	Target Group	Spouse
High School	-	1 (2%)
TVET	-	20 (41%)
Bachelor's	27 (55%)	15 (31%)
Masters	21 (43%)	2 (4%)
Doctorial	-	2 (4%)
Others	1 (2%)	-
Missing	-	9 (18%)
N	49	49

Source: Questionnaire

As shown in Table 1, almost all of the women executives have obtained either a Bachelor's or Master's degree. The majority (55%) holds a Bachelor's degree. On the other hand, the educational levels of their spouses range from high school to the doctoral level. Significant numbers, i.e. 41%, of their spouses are Bachelor's degree holders.

### Challenges: Women in Management

Challenges may affect or hinder women's progress in reaching executive positions. These challenges may be tangible or intangible, actual or perceived. Accordingly, the factors that may have an impact on women's success as executives include: family, socio-cultural factors, organizational and personal related issues. The respondents were requested to rate each item using ix-rating scale points, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Table 2 shows the respondents' reflection on their family affairs.

**Table 2: Respondents' Reflections on their Family Affairs**

S. No.	Items	Mean	Std.
1	It has been difficult for me to effectively reconcile work and the family life.	3.14	1.50
2	As women, we are socialized to give more emphasis to family affairs.	4.59	1.36
3	Women's self-realization occurs mostly at work.	4.00	1.35
4	I feel guilty leaving my small children at home.	3.56	1.40
5	Women postpone marriage and childbearing for executive careers.	3.28	1.53
6	The self-realization of women is essentially in the family.	3.84	1.74
7	In order to develop my professional career, there are high family costs.	4.60	1.21

Source: Questionnaire

To assess the impact of family affairs on their performance, the respondents were asked to rate the seven items from the questionnaire. Based on the result of standard deviation, the distribution of the responses for the section was normal, except item number 6. The mean average for the item that states, "It has been difficult for me to effectively reconcile work and family life" was found to be 3.14 with a standard deviation of 1.50. This shows that they somewhat disagree with the statement, implying that the women executives somehow are able to balance their work and family affairs. These findings differ from similar studies that were conducted in the context of other countries by Rosser (2004), Maskell-Pretz and Hopkins (1997) and Miller (2004). Their study revealed that women face challenges in balancing career and family and it is the most significant barrier for women's attempt to advance.

In item number two, of the same Table, the respondents were requested to rate a statement that states, "As women, we are socialized to give more emphasis for family affairs." The mean average rating of the item was found to be 4.59 with a standard deviation of 1.36. This implies that they agree with the statement and they do give more emphasis on family affairs than their career, which also seems to contradict the first response. This finding also implies that women are

socialized to place greater emphasis on their families than their career advancement. Studies by Ridgeway (2001) and Orser and Leck, (2010) support these findings.

The respondents were requested to rate two items (item no.3 and no.6) to assess their view on their own capacity for self-realization. In item no. 3, they were requested to rate the item that states, "Self-realization of women occurs mostly at work." The mean average of the item was 4.00 with a standard deviation of 1.35. This shows that self-realization does indeed occur mostly at work. In item no. 6, they were then requested to rate the statement, "Self-realization of women is essentially in the family." The mean average of the item was 3.84 with a standard deviation of 1.74. The average response was close to the mean of item no. 3 (4:00 and 3:84). The two averages suggest that the women executives are trying to balance their work and family. These findings appear different from similar studies conducted in the context of other countries: Ismail and Ibrahim, (2008) shows that Malaysian executive women in multinational oil companies should not sacrifice their family roles in order to be successful in their careers.

The mean average rating for the item that states, "I feel guilty leaving my small children at home." was found to be 3.56 with the standard deviation of 1.40. It shows they disagree somewhat with the statement. It is likely that the women executive respondents may arrange alternatives in handling their children during their absence from their homes. It also seems that they tried to balance their tasks at their office and their responsibilities as a mother.

Their views on marriage were assessed by asking them to rate the statement, "Women postpone marriage and childbearing for executive careers". The average mean for the statement was 3.28 with the standard deviation of 1.53. This shows that they somewhat disagreed with the statement. It implies that they do not defer or sacrifice their marriages for their careers. In order to assess how much support they would be provided from their family members, they were requested to rate the item that states, "In order to develop my professional career there are high family costs." The mean average of the statement was 4.60 with a standard deviation of 1.21, implying that they somewhat agree to the statement. This indicates that their family members are providing their support in order for the women to execute their careers. The overall response (grand group mean 3.86) shown in Table 3 suggests that the women executive respondents considered for the study somehow are balancing their work and their family affairs. Their views on the effects of socio-cultural norms on their job are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Respondents' Reflections as Related to Socio-Cultural Norms**

S. No.	Items	Mean	Std.
1	Various socio-cultural norms in our society still hinder the advancement of women in their careers.	5.08	.91
2	Gender biased laws, regulations and policies persist in our society.	3.98	1.20
3	Most of our community issues lack sensitivity to gender differences.	4.83	1.0
4	Most of our community programs do not support women's empowerment.	3.96	1.20
5	Our cultural practices hinder gender equality.	5.23	.86
6	There is resistance among women themselves against women's empowerment programs.	4.49	1.30

Source: Questionnaire

In order to investigate the impact of Ethiopia's existing gender-related laws and policies, the women were requested to rate the statement, "Gender biased laws, regulations and policies persist in our society." The mean average of the statement was 3.98 with a standard deviation of 1.20. This shows that they somewhat disagreed with the statement. However, a significant number of respondents replied that they somewhat agree with the statement and the mean average is also very close to agreeing with the statement (3.98 and 4.00). Hence, the women perceive that there are laws and regulations that still disfavor executive women. Though there have been many efforts by the governing body to ratify laws related to women's employment, such as affirmative action, maternity leave, and promoting equal employment opportunities (see proclamation no. 377/2003 and 515/2007), still, the finding of this section suggests that women believe that there are laws and regulations that still disfavor executive women at their respective organizations.

In item 3 of Table 4, the respondents were requested to rate the statement, "Most of our community issues lack sensitivity to gender differences." The mean average of the statement was 4.83 with a standard deviation of 1.0. This shows that they agree that most community issues lack sensitivity to gender differences and do not address women's challenges to workplace advancement.

In order to assess the support that may be given by the community, respondents were requested to rate the statement, "Most of our community programs do not support women's empowerment." The mean average of the item was 3.96 with a standard deviation of 1.20. Furthermore, based on percentage results, one can observe that thirty-five (70%) of them confirmed that the community programs do not support women's empowerment, by indicating their slight agreement, agreement and strong agreement. This means that most of the community programs are not favoring women's empowerment.

A higher rating (mean 5.23 with a standard deviation of .83) was obtained for the statement, "Our cultural practices hinder gender equality." This finding is consistent with similar studies conducted in the context of other countries. For example, a study conducted in the United States shows that, "Contemporary stereotypes describe women as communal and men as more a genetic and instrumental" (Eagly, Wood and Dickman 2000) and that "gender beliefs have a hierarchical dimension of status inequality. Men are viewed as more status worthy and competent overall and more competent at the things that 'count most' e.g. instrumental". Conway et al also found the perception that, "women are less competent in general but "nicer" and better at communal tasks even though these tasks themselves are less valued" (Conway, Pizzaniylis and Mount 1996; Fiske et-al 2002).

In order to assess women's perceptions of women's own support for empowerment, they were asked to rate the statement, "There is resistance among women themselves against women's empowerment programs." Surprisingly, the mean score of the item was 4.49 with a standard deviation of 1:30, indicating that, apart from external factors, there is indeed the perception of resistance from women themselves affecting the availability of women's empowerment programs.

Based on these findings and analysis, it can be deduced that the socio-cultural norms had a negative impact on women executives' career development. This finding reflects Tesfaye's (1997) finding that "stereotypic assignment of roles along gender lines seems to be deeply rooted in the Ethiopian culture." Respondents' views on executive development practices of their respected organizations are depicted in Table 4 below.

**Table 4: Respondents' Reflections on Executive Development Practices**

S.N	Items	Mean	Std.
1	Equal opportunities exist for the development of women and men in my organization.	4.14	1.41
2	In order to develop my career, it is essential to have a flexible schedule.	4.77	1.08
3	There is discrimination in the development of careers between men and women in my organization.	3.0	1.46
4	I do not aspire to reach the most important executive positions.	2.58	1.67
5	Gaining professional success that is equivalent to that of men requires a special effort.	4.30	1.66
7	My organization gives women the support they need to be able to reconcile their work and family responsibilities.	3.24	1.54
8	Women are not assigned to posts where they have the opportunity to advance their careers.	3.40	1.37
9	The professional development of a man is faster than a woman.	2.91	1.64

Source: Questionnaire

One of the factors that may affect women's career advancement is an organization related barrier. Harvey and Brown (1996) define "organizational culture as a system of shared meanings, values, beliefs, practices, group norms of the members to produce behavioral norms with regard to the working conditions of the organization. A supportive culture can improve morale and motivate people to reduce stress and absences" (Wise and Bond, 2003). Respondents were asked to rate the statement, "Equal opportunities exist for the development of women and men in my organization" to determine if there are any discriminatory practices based on the gender of the executives. The mean average of the item was found to be 4.14 with a standard deviation of 1.41. This indicates that the respondents loosely agreed with the statement. Additionally, they were requested to rate an item that states, "There is discrimination in the development of careers between men and women in my organization". The mean average of the item was found to be 3.0 with a standard deviation of 1.46, implying discriminatory practices are not much observed among the executives as related to their career advancement practices. The finding in this part is different from similar studies conducted in Malaysia by Ismail and Ibrahim (2008) that revealed, "overall more women perceived the organization's culture was discriminating and that the organization should be specifically addressing this in order to retain and promote women". Another study, conducted by Dean Elmuti and others (2003) in corporate America, also shows the "glass ceiling effect" and they pointed out that they attempted to delineate the unseen artificial barriers that bar women from top executive jobs. They stated that these barriers are usually created by individual or organizational prejudices.

In item 4 of Table 5, respondents were requested to rate the item, "I do not aspire to reach the most important executive positions." The mean of the item was 2.58 with a standard deviation of 1.67. The item aimed to determine their ambitions to obtain further executive positions. The mean average shows they disagreed. In other words, they are ambitious enough to hold executive positions. To assess if there are additional requirements for their success than those of men for professional success, they were asked to rate the statement, "Gaining professional success that is equivalent to that of men requires a special effort." The mean average of the item was found to be 4.30 with a standard deviation of 1.66, implying that they somewhat agreed with the statement,

and that additional efforts are required, than those of men, by their organizations to attain the status of women executives. Similar studies conducted in the context of other countries also support this finding. For example, “women face a double disadvantage: if they display agency, they are penalized for gender non-conformity, and if they display communal attributes, they are judged as not agented enough” (Korabik, 1990). In order to assess the degree of support given by their organization to advance their careers, they were requested to rate the item that states, “My organization gives women the support they need to be able to reconcile their work and family responsibility.” The mean average of the item was found to be 3.24 with a standard deviation of 1.54. This shows that their respective organizations do not give necessary support to reconcile their work and their family responsibilities. In order to figure out the kind of support that they desire to advance their career, an item that states, “In order to develop my career it is essential to have a flexible schedule.” The mean average of the item was found to be 4.77 with a standard deviation of 1.08. This shows that they need a flexible work schedule to reconcile their work and family responsibilities. This finding supports the discussion on the degree of support that may be given by their organizations. A similar study conducted by Strachan, Burgess and Henderson (2007) in Australia revealed that formal EEO programs are limited in their ability to promote work and family-friendly arrangements in the workplace. Eamonn and Murtagh (2005), in their study of Ireland, indicated that many of senior men follow the “breadwinner” model by delegating family and caring activities to their wives.

The mean average for the item that states, “Women are not assigned to posts where they have the opportunity to advance their careers” was found to be 3.40 with a standard deviation of 1.37, showing they somewhat disagree with the statement. It means that women are equally assigned to posts where they can get an opportunity to advance their careers. In item 9, they were requested to rate an item stating, “The professional development of a man is faster than a woman.” The mean average was found to be 2.91 with a standard deviation of 1.64. This shows that their organizations are providing equal opportunities with men to advance their careers. The overall discussion, based on Table 5, shows that organizational related issues have a lesser impact on women executive’s career advancement than socio-cultural factors. In order to identify if there are any peculiar management style attributed for women differing from those of men, the respondents were requested to rate the items that are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Respondents’ Reflections on Management Style of Women**

S.No.	Items	Mean	Std.
1	The way in which women have been socialized has influenced their way of managing which is different from that of men.	4.30	1.38
2	“Good Executive” women manage in similar ways as men.	5.36	2.89
3	Women have less capacity for managerial positions than men.	1.41	1.00
4	Women have less interest in managerial positions than men.	2.64	1.52
5	Women have less preparation for managerial positions than men.	2.63	1.37
6	Women have less experience in managerial position than men.	2.93	1.67
7	Women are trained less for managerial positions than men.	3.59	1.57
8	The management approach of executive women is different from that of men.	3.61	1.45

Source: Questionnaire



In the first item of Table 5, the respondents were requested to rate the item that states, “The way in which women have been socialized has influenced their style of management which is different from than that of men.” The mean average of the item was found to be 4.30 with a standard deviation of 1.38. This shows their somewhat agreement to the statement implying that they are socialized differently than men. In other words, it suggests that they might develop a different management style than that of men based on how they were socialized. In order to assess if there is any difference in their management style, they were requested to rate an item that states, “‘Good Executive’ women manage in similar ways as men do.” The mean average of the item was found to be 5.36 with a standard deviation of 2.89. The standard deviation figure is highly skewed, showing that almost all of them agree strongly implying that there is no difference between men and women as related to management style.

For item 3, “Women have less capacity for managerial positions than men”, the mean average was 1.41 with a standard deviation of 1.00. This shows their strong disagreement with the statement implying there are no perceived capacity differences between men and women in terms of managing the organizations. Similarly, in item 4, “Women have less interest in managerial positions than men,” the mean average was 2.64 with a standard deviation of 1.52, showing they somewhat disagree with the statement. This implies that women had an equal interest in being managers, as do men.

In order to figure out their degree preparation for managerial work, they were requested to rate an item that states, “Women have less preparation for managerial positions than men.” The mean average of the item was found to be 2.63 with a standard deviation of 1.37. This shows their disagreement with the statement implying that they are equally prepared for managerial jobs like men. The mean average of the item that states, “Women have less experience for managerial position than men” was found to be 2.93 with a standard deviation of 1.67. The mean average shows that the respondents disagreed with the statement described. This implies that they do not consider they have less experience than that of men to hold managerial positions. In order to investigate their degree preparation in terms of training, they were requested to rate an item that states, “Women are trained less for managerial position than men.” The mean average of the item found to be 3.59 with a standard deviation of 1.57. The mean average of the item shows they disagree somewhat with the statement, indicating they have some opportunities for obtaining managerial positions.

In order to investigate if there is any difference between men and women, in terms of their approach of management, they were asked to rate an item that states, “The executive women’s management approach is different from men.” The mean average of the item was found to be 3.61 with a standard deviation of 1.45, showing disagreement. The overall ratings indicate that women believe they have equal preparation, capacity and no significant differences in management style. The findings of this section differ from similar studies. For instance, Nagy and Vicsek (2007) show that there is a perception in Hungary of “negative features of women executives (they specified that women executives are less decisive, they are influenced by irrational factors when making decisions, they are not open to argument, they are less flexible)”. Respondents’ views on inter-organizational relationships were depicted in Table 6.

**Table 6: Respondents' Reflections on Superior, Peer and Subordinate Relationships**

S. No.	Items	Mean	Std.
1	The work of women is less valued than the work of men.	3.22	1.70
2	I expect my boss to guide me in my decisions.	2.43	1.45
3	I have to demonstrate constantly that I am able to execute my duties.	4.44	1.56
4	Sometimes the expectations of my bosses or my peers do not refer exclusively to the workplace.	3.33	1.36
5	I feel that women are in a subordinate position in dealing with their peers.	2.95	1.38

Source: Questionnaire

As shown in the first item of Table 6, the mean average for the first item was 3.22 with a standard deviation of 1.70, showing they disagree somewhat indicating women believe their work is indeed valued. In the second item of the same table, the mean average was 2.43 with a standard deviation of 1.45, implying that they do not need to be guided by their bosses in every decision that they make. For item 3, "I have to demonstrate constantly that I am able to execute my duties", the mean average ratings were 4.44 with a standard deviation of 1.56, perhaps indicating the importance of merit in advancement.

The mean average a rating of item 4 was 3.33 with a standard of deviation of 1.36, indicating they somewhat disagrees with the statement. This implies that their respective organizations' work demands pertain to the workplace, alone. Executives' role expectations were assessed in item 5 and the mean average, 2.95 with a standard deviation of 1.38, shows that the respondents disagree with the statement. They do not feel they are regarded as inferior in the course of decision-making within their respective organizations.

The overall ratings shown in Table 6 suggest that the women executives considered for the study had healthy working relationships with their superiors, peers and subordinates. This finding is similar to the study conducted by Nath (2000) in the context of India. Table 7 presents overall views on women executives by the respondents.

**Table 7: Overall Views towards Women Executives**

S.No.	Items	Mean	Std.
1	I have felt pressured in particular by being a woman.	2.47	1.28
2	Executive women are looked at with suspicion in the world of men.	3.90	1.34
3	Women feel fully part of and valued by this organization.	3.33	1.34
4	The fact of being a woman can bring advantages to work.	2.70	1.58
5	Woman's proposals are often not taken into account.	3.23	1.52
6	The men feel more entitled to lead the organization.	4.14	1.46

Source: Questionnaire

The mean average rating for item 1 was found to be 2.47 with a standard deviation of 1.28, showing disagreement with the statement. This implies that being women is not seen as a barrier to assuming executive positions in their respective organizations. In the second item, the mean average rating was 3.90 with a standard deviation of 1.34. This shows they disagreed somewhat with the statement implying a lack of suspicion by men of women. In the third item of Table 7, the average ratings were 3.33 with a standard deviation of 1.34, directly contradicting the previous item, and implying that women are not given enough opportunities to fully utilize their capacities and they are not highly valued in their respective organizations. The mean average ratings of item 4 was 2.70 with a standard deviation of 1.58, showing disagreement with the statement, implying no sex stereotyping at their respective organizations. This also contradicts the previous item. For the 5<sup>th</sup> item, the average rating was 3.23 with a standard deviation of 1.52. This implies that their proposals are taken into consideration in their respective organizations. Perhaps not surprisingly, given the above contradictions, for the final item, the mean average ratings were found to be 4.14 with a standard deviation of 1.46, showing they somewhat agreed with the statement. This implies that their respective male colleagues feel more entitled to lead the organizations. Though the responses given for this section seem contradictory, currently organizations are trying to address equal opportunities issues. However, due to the huge gap that already exists as a result of longstanding traditions, the women are unable to compete with men on an equal playing field, in terms of qualifications and experiences. As result, men have greater access to opportunities, such as executive managerial positions, which require advanced degrees.

## **Conclusion**

This study has considered the impact of family, socio-cultural impacts, and organizational related factors on the role of women in executive positions in Ethiopia. Accordingly, it can be concluded that family-related issues around women's roles, such as being mothers and householders, had minimal negative impact on their careers as executives. However, socio-cultural issues, such as outlook of the community and unfavorable cultural norms, have had a significant impact on their progress achieving higher executive positions. The perception was that community programs and related laws on gender differences ultimately impacted their progress to a higher managerial ladder. Based on the findings of the study, one can conclude that their respective organizations would not disfavor their progress based on gender differences; however, being women executives requires additional effort to prove their capacity in playing the role of manager. In terms of handling their managerial duties, based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that there is no significant perception of differences between men and women in terms of how they execute their tasks.

## **Suggestions**

Based on the major findings and the conclusions attained, the following suggestions are put forward:

1. The concerned governmental bodies, non-government organizations and media, in general, must work on molding socio-cultural issues such as cultural norms that gives lower status for women, so that the community would have proper awareness on gender related issues.

2. Capacity building programs must give a room and accommodate gender-related issues.
3. Organizations need to reexamine policies and regulations such as recruitment and promotion policies to further give chance to develop more women in executive positions.
4. Further research needs to be conducted in other hierarchical managerial organizations to gain a general picture of the challenges and performance of women in management in the Ethiopian context.

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