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Understanding Support and Barriers for Women Leaders in Ethiopia

EMAH Social Development Consulting

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ESDC Research Team

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Acronyms

CSOs	Civil Societies
EFCCA	Environment Forest and Climate Change Authority
ESDC	EMAH Social Development Consulting
FGDs	Focus Group Discussion
GOE	Government of Ethiopia
GTP	Growth and Transformation Plan
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOH	Ministry of Health
SNNPR	Southern Nation Nationalities People Region

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Executive Summary

This report draws on a qualitative study conducted by EMAH Social Development Consulting on behalf of The David and Lucile Packard Foundation to help inform future support for women's leadership development in Ethiopia. The study was commissioned to examine reasons that women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions in both government and civil society organizations, despite efforts in recent years to address this gender gap through law and policy. Particularly, we explore the barriers and enabling factors that women experience in Ethiopia as they seek to advance in their chosen careers, and we examine how these factors affect women's motivation and ability to reach, retain, and succeed in positions of leadership.

Our investigation was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the **needs** of women leaders and women who are aspiring to reach leadership positions in Ethiopia, to be effective in their roles?
2. What **types of support and resources are available** to women leaders currently working in CSOs and the private and government sectors?
3. What **existing opportunities are available** to women leaders and women who are aspiring to reach leadership positions?
4. What **barriers** do women who aspire to leadership positions encounter? What barriers do women in leadership face? How can these barriers be addressed?
5. What are the **necessary conditions for the success** of women leaders in CSOs, government, and in the private sector?

Study informants: To ensure the study captured a diversity of experiences across Ethiopia, we conducted the assessment in a combination of rural and urban sites in Addis Ababa, Oromia, The Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR), Amhara, Sidama, Gambella, and Somali regional states. Study participants were also selected to ensure inclusion of perspectives from women in a wide range of employment sectors, leadership positions, and varied sociodemographic backgrounds. In total, we conducted 133 semi-structured interviews with women leaders from across federal and regional government positions (51), international and national non-governmental organizations (54), and the private sector (28). We focused on women who had already achieved leadership roles in their careers and who were thus able to reflect on the positive and negative determinants of their career journeys. An additional 32 focus group discussions involving 156 junior or mid-level managers were held to gauge how barriers and enabling conditions are currently experienced by aspiring women leaders.



Research framework: We adopted a socioecological framework to structure both data collection and analysis. The socioecological framework recognizes that individuals are embedded in multiple levels of social influence, meaning that an individual's motivations and actions are shaped by their involvement in family, peer, and community networks, which are themselves situated within local and national policy environments. Individual women may simultaneously experience multiple identities depending on a unique combination of characteristics including socioeconomic status, age, ethnic background, marital status, and religious affiliation. We thus integrated concepts drawn from theories of “intersectionality” within the socioecological framework to understand barriers and support for women in leadership in Ethiopia. Semi-structured topic guides for interviews and focus group discussions asked women to narrate their career journeys and to reflect on how their personal attributes, family circumstances, community norms, and broader sociocultural factors shaped their opportunities and challenges in seeking and succeeding in professional leadership.

We conducted thematic analyses separately for barriers and sources of support, identifying emerging themes at each level of the socioecological framework. We further examined the data for participants' suggestions about how to decrease barriers and increase support for aspiring women leaders. We then organized these items into categories of needs that could create a more enabling environment for women's leadership in contemporary Ethiopia.

Enabling Conditions for Women's Leadership

Our study found that there have been noteworthy positive transformations in terms of support, availability of resources, and opportunities for women to aspire towards and ascend to leadership positions in Ethiopia. There was widespread agreement among participants that the Ethiopian government has taken positive legislative steps for women's professional advancement, particularly by signifying its commitment to gender equality through appointing women to half of all ministerial posts in the previous cabinet.

Key findings related to enabling conditions for women's leadership include:

- Women's **personal drive and motivation**, as individual attributes, were often what participants credited with having led to their own success. Ethiopian women currently in leadership positions felt that their own tenacious personal ambitions helped them proactively seek leadership and overcome barriers in their paths.
- The most significant determinant named was **education**, which was seen to be the critical foundation on which women's ability to identify, pursue and achieve professional goals was built. Basic schooling, university and other specialized technical training were understood to

inculcate knowledge and skills, but also personal agency. The presence of a quality education was considered to help develop self confidence among girls and women and thus overcome internalized bias against women's capabilities.

- **Family support** was also a positive determinant. Current women leaders expressed gratitude for parental support and encouragement. Many participants described their journey to leadership beginning with a family that valued education highly, particularly fathers (who were more likely to make decisions about household resource allocation and children's education). Mothers were praised for helping with professional women's childcare or other household tasks to allow their daughters to pursue their careers. Having a supportive husband was also a frequently mentioned asset for women's advancement.
- Women also turned to their peers, looking up to professional women who had reached leadership positions before them. **Women as role models** were described as motivating and inspiring, although considered too rare in the present environment. Some women also described receiving emotional support from one another in the workplace. These examples contrasted with concerns about a lack of sisterhood and jealousy among women.
- **Shifting community norms** were seen to be occurring, even if slowly. Participants gave examples of local campaigns against early marriage and promotion of "education for all" as growing social movements that both heralded and reflected an increasing value of women's capacity and potential.
- There were also **positive gender stereotypes** mentioned, including the idea that women are more loyal, reliable, and less likely to become corrupt. While participants did not confirm whether these attributes were more likely to be held by women in reality, they felt that women could capitalize on such assumptions in gaining support for their career progression. Other participants highlighted that "leadership" could take different forms, and women should emphasize their perceived ability to consult and build coalitions as a positive leadership style over more hierarchical forms.
- As mentioned previously, **recent legislative and policy changes** were lauded. For example, the 1995 Federal Constitution states that men and women have equal rights in all matters including cultural, social, economic, and political spheres. It declares women's equal rights to acquire, administer, control, use, transfer and sell property, including equal treatment in the inheritance of property. Other national laws include The Revised Criminal Code of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2003), Revised Family Code Proclamation No. 213/2000, and Labor Proclamation No. 1156/2019. Despite the challenges in implementing these laws, study participants confirmed that the overall policy environment and the provisions of affirmative action have facilitated women's ascension into senior-level leadership positions.

Barriers to Women's Leadership

The women interviewed in this study described confronting significantly more barriers than facilitating factors when seeking career progression and senior positions. Interviewees emphasized that the overall

sociocultural environment of the country can be restrictive to women. They elaborated that these structures, from family-level influences to broader gendered community norms and expectations, greatly influence work culture and policy. They believed that the sociocultural environment in Ethiopia remains conservative and non-conducive to women's professional growth and achievement.

Our findings related to barriers confronted by women seeking or maintaining leadership include:

- Women are still expected to carry the bulk of responsibility for childcare and household management. Women with professional ambitions thus face a **double burden**, in which their personal and professional commitments compete for their time and energy. This leads women to feel overwhelmed with work, unable to find an adequate balance, and likely to give up their professional aspirations in favor of investing themselves in their roles as wife and mother.
- There is widespread **low self-esteem** among women compared to men regarding their suitability for senior positions, demonstrating how traditional gender stereotypes have often been internalized by women themselves. Women explained how their own self-doubt decreased their motivation and determination. They said this meant that many did not put themselves forward for leadership positions. Lack of confidence meant that women today continue to make career choices into “feminized” professions rather than moving into sectors considered more “masculine.” This was seen to be a “self-inflicted” barrier, related to women's mindsets being influenced by social expectation.
- Resource barriers also negatively affected women's achievement, particularly **lack of financial resources or lack of economic independence**. Young women relied on family support for any costs related to education or further skills development, while married women may not have resources that are more freely available. Also, married women may have other dependents whose needs require them to prioritize household responsibilities, and this can become a barrier to success at the workplace. Participants reported that without scholarship schemes or other external support, their ability to advance was constrained.
- Also at the family level, **risks to marital harmony** were cited as a barrier to women's participation in meaningful work. Community assumptions about married women's home responsibilities meant those with families may not be considered eligible for promotion. Within the household, women find they can threaten their ability to fulfill the expectations of a good wife and mother if they spend too much time on professional activities or if they do work that requires long hours or travel away from home. If work and home life come into conflict, women said they are likely to give up their leadership aspirations over risking family stability.
- **Lack of sisterhood** emerged as a reason that women do not support one another, but rather see one another as direct competition for scarce professional opportunities. Participants described how women might be jealous of each other in the workplace, view one another with suspicion, or themselves believe that men are better suited than fellow women to leadership positions.

- Many of the barriers discussed by participants relate to persistence of **unsupportive cultural norms and negative gender stereotypes**. In Ethiopia, as in many contexts, there remain widespread beliefs that a woman's role is one of homemaker while men head their households and have a right to public life. These unequal representations curtail women's career advancement, both by dissuading women from aspiring to positions of leadership and by making it less likely that they will be granted opportunities for leadership. **Religious stereotypes** could layer onto those of gender, for example, if some women are denied promotion due to discrimination based on religious affiliation (and assumptions of how women, particularly from certain religious groups, will perform).
- Barriers based on entrenched norms and stereotypes can become institutionalized in work cultures and policies. Although Ethiopian laws have become more progressive and gender-equitable in recent years, **implementation lags and gaps** mean that daily work practice does not always follow legal requirements. Participants gave examples of how qualified women were passed over for hire or promotion because existing workplace culture favored male networks. Organizational-level barriers were seen as a reflection of **institutionalized patriarchy**.
- A manifestation of patriarchal work culture, **sexual harassment and violence** were described as common occurrences which not only caused women distress, but also dissuaded them from pursuing career progression. Women gave numerous examples of experiencing unwanted touching, advances, or innuendos both at work and during their commutes on public transport. When sexual harassment came from managers or supervisors, women often felt particularly constrained and unable to seek professional advancement.



Needs of Women in Leadership

We specifically asked participants what they felt was required for women in Ethiopia to be able to realize their full potential as leaders across all sectors. Participants provided suggestions across all levels of the socioecological framework. They provided concrete recommendations to encourage women as individuals, and within their families and communities; but they also highlighted that sustainable change would require structural gender norm transformations.

Key findings related to supporting women in leadership include:

- Women value opportunities to obtain robust **technical expertise** in their field of interest. Both short- and long-term educational and skill-building trainings were mentioned, including continuous professional development in the form of regular seminars and networking opportunities, modelled on existing mechanisms such as the Association of Women in Business. The latter type of training should also encompass interpersonal skills women will require as leaders, such as communication and emotional empowerment
- The value placed on both a solid educational foundation and targeted skills development led participants to recommend policies and programs that would **reduce the gender**

attainment gap, perhaps through forms of affirmative action or scholarship schemes for women. A key part of improving women's access to education and training is **financial assistance** for women unable to afford the requisite skill building.

- **Changing traditional attitudes** was mentioned as important to increasing family and spousal support for future women leaders. Participants explained that gender disparities begin with the way children are raised in Ethiopia, where boys are treated differently from girls and often encouraged in specific careers and ambitions. Finding ways to accelerate cultural shifts in how young men and women are socialized and prepared for adulthood would remove some of the barriers to women's advancement.
- In response to a common observation that women do not always support one another, but when they do, they offer each other invaluable emotional support, **mentoring programs** were suggested as an effective way to create supportive networks. Mentorship was seen as important beyond the office environment, linking influential and successful women with each other and with aspiring future women leaders, so they can share experiences, information, and ideas.
- **Family-friendly policies and arrangements** such as safe spaces in the workplace, rooms for breastfeeding, better maternity leave arrangements, childcare facilities, and mechanisms for reporting and addressing sexual harassment were all organizational-level measures suggested for creating a supportive environment for women's professional aspirations.



Discussion

Our findings suggest that despite positive steps forward in Ethiopia toward gender equity in professional and political leadership, entrenched gender stereotypes and normative beliefs that undervalue women's capacities and potential contributions continue to pose significant barriers to women's aspirations and achievements. Women themselves internalize expectations that they should prioritize marriage, family, and household responsibilities over career progression, making it more difficult for them to challenge structural barriers to their education, entry into all sectors of the job market, and subsequent advancement into senior leadership roles. Even where women do become leaders in their fields, they often must contend with family discord, jealousy from female colleagues, a lack of respect and even harassment and discrimination from male colleagues within unsupportive organizational cultures.

On the other hand, if young women receive encouragement and assistance from their parents to complete and succeed in their education, if they can integrate their careers and family life, and particularly if they have support from their spouses, women can and do flourish in their careers. New policies demonstrate that the Government of Ethiopia is committed to advancing women even if the implementation of laws remains

weak. The increasing presence of women at senior levels of government, in civil society and the private sector offers role models and a broad, positive signal to women moving up the career ladder. When senior women reach out to each other and to junior professionals through informal and formal networks, they can create instrumental support networks that further facilitate women's leadership.

The current challenge lies in identifying measures that reduce or remove existing barriers while amplifying and extending potential enabling conditions. Study participants who are themselves leaders, or aspiring to be so, stated that a combination of approaches will be required to smooth the way for women to become leaders in the future: women need concrete opportunities such as financial support, technical and interpersonal skill building, and more women-friendly work environments. They also need cultural change and social transformation. Women can themselves be catalysts for change, strengthening peer support and social capital among professional women as an especially important step to break down barriers of female competition and internalized patriarchal attitudes.

The main recommendations that can be distilled from our findings are as follows, organized by levels of the socioecological framework:

Social Level	Recommendations
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowerment programs to improve self-esteem, confidence, and goal setting among girls and young women • Conflict resolution skills for women seeking to integrate personal and professional lives
Interpersonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's networking opportunities and mechanisms for sharing experiences and ideas (caucuses, mentorship programs, continuing professional development)
Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender dialogue and campaigns to change normative expectations of men and women's roles and women's potential outside the household
Structural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women-centered/family-friendly workplace policies and organizational measures to prevent and address harassment and discrimination



Introduction

There is a growing consensus that countries with a greater share of women in leadership perform better in human development.¹ Over the past decades, evidence has shown that women's equal participation in leadership has been top on the government of Ethiopia's [GOE] policy agenda. Ethiopia's commitment to enhance women's leadership role has been reflected through the ratification of international and regional instruments, as well as by introducing national policy and legislative provisions to increase women's equal participation in leadership and decision-making positions. Achieving gender equality in the public sphere was one of the major aims of the 1993 Women's Policy² and the 1995 Constitution.³ Subsequent policy program documents such as the National Action Plan on Gender Equality,⁴ and the Ethiopia Women's Development Change Package 2007 and 2011⁵ emphasized women's equal participation in leadership and decision-making positions.⁶ More specifically, Ethiopia's Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) I (2011-2015)⁷ and II (2016-2020)⁸ recognized equal participation of women in leadership as one of its pillars and offers two strategic objectives linked with women's participation in decision-making positions. It aims at increasing 50 percent of women's representation in the federal legislative branches, 40 percent in federal executive bodies, and 35 percent in the federal judicial system by 2020.

Increasing women's representation in public leadership in the legislative, judiciary, and executive branches of government is further augmented with affirmative actions. Affirmative actions incorporated into recent proclamations⁹ have been instrumental to enhancing women's representation in public leadership.¹⁰ After 2018, political reform in Ethiopia can be recognized as a landmark in the country's history that has begun to break the 'glass ceiling' when it comes to women's representation in public leadership. The appointment of a woman President, a woman Supreme Court judge, and a chairperson for the National Election Board of Ethiopia demonstrate that women can indeed reach the highest levels of leadership, breaking the invisible barriers that they have been facing as they progress in achieving the highest ranks in their chosen professions.

¹ McKinsey (2019). The power of parity. Advancing women's equality in Africa.

² PMO/Women's Affairs 91993). The national policy on Ethiopian women. PMO: Addis Ababa

³ Neggarit Gazetta (1995). Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia constitution. FDRE: Addis Ababa

⁴ Ministry of Women's Affairs (2006b). National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAP-GE). (2006/2010). Addis Ababa. Available at: <http://extwprlegs1.fao.org/docs/pdf/eth149708.pdf> (Accessed on 5th February 2020).

⁵ Ministry of Women Children and Youth (2011). Ethiopian women development and change package. MOWCY: Addis _

⁶ UNWOMEN and MOWCY (forthcoming). Status of women in leadership positions in the legislative, judiciary, and executive branches of the government of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

⁷ Ministry Of Finance and Economic Development. (2010). Growth and transformation plan I. Addis Ababa

⁸ National Planning Commission. (2010). Growth and transformation plan II. Addis Ababa

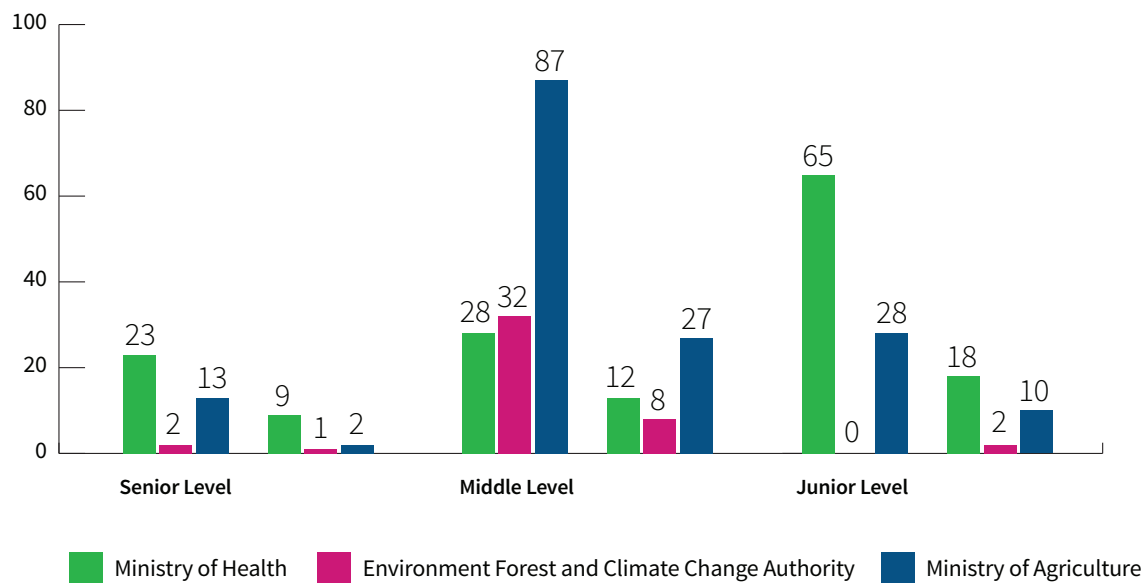
⁹ These include the Revised Higher Education Proclamation No. 1152/2019, Ethiopian Labor Proclamation No.1156/2019, and Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No. 515/2007.

¹⁰ National Planning Commission. (2010). Growth and transformation plan II. Addis Ababa

While the Ethiopian government's progress towards increasing women's representation in public leadership positions is commendable, it is not yet replicated at all levels and in all branches of government. Women continue to be underrepresented at different levels of governance structures. Evidence from a recent study on women's leadership in governance shows better representation is only observed thus far in the legislative branches of government¹¹ (i.e., federal, regional, zonal, and woreda levels). Looking at the different branches of government, women's representation in the legislative branch was lowest at the federal level (38%), but somewhat higher at the regional (41%), zonal (43%) and woreda (42%) levels. In the executive branch, the proportion of women in leadership positions was highest at the woreda level (27%), compared to 21% at the federal level, 19% at the regional level and 20% at the zonal level. In the judicial branch, the proportion of female judges is highest at the federal level at 43%; however, it is very low at the regional (12%), zonal (12%) and woreda (16%) levels.

Administrative data collected from the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), Ministry of Health (MOH), and Environment, Forest, and Climate Change Authority (EFCCA) shows that women are far from achieving equal representation in all leadership positions (see Figure 1). Specifically, the representation of women at the EFCCA is much lower in senior and middle level leadership positions compared to women's representation in the health sector. From qualitative data, this study found that agriculture, environment, forest, and climate-related jobs are perceived largely as men's domain because of the intensive field work the sectors require.

Figure 1: Percentage of women in senior, middle, and junior level positions at federal MOH, MOA, and EFCCA



Source: Administrative data collected by ESDC study team

Public leadership is also an issue outside government offices, such as in the private sector, civil society organizations or across networks that are working to create value involving actions and outcomes for the

¹¹ UN Women and MOWCY (forthcoming). Status of women in leadership positions in the legislative, judiciary, and executive branches of the government of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

public sphere.¹² In this study, we collected administrative data from CSOs including foreign, resident, and local organizations. Although not representative, mainly attributable to a low response rate, we found that women are significantly under-represented in the CSO sector, comprising just 29% of senior level leadership (See Table 1).

Table 1. Proportion of Women in Senior¹³ Leadership Positions in CSO Sector (n=62 organizations)

Type of CSOs	Total # of employees across organizations	Total # of women employees across organizations	% of Women
Foreign CSOs	140	40	29%
Local CSOs	107	33	31%
Consortiums/Associations	37	8	22%
Total	279	81	29%

Source: Administrative data collected by ESDC study team

Our study explored barriers and support for women in Ethiopia in relation to their representation in leadership roles. We assessed the needs of women leaders, and women aspiring to reach leadership positions in Ethiopia, that would help them to be effective in their roles. Our findings informed evidence-based recommendations to increase women's representation in leadership positions.

Research Questions

Our study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the needs of women leaders and women who are aspiring to reach leadership positions in Ethiopia to be effective in their roles?
2. What types of support/resources are available to women leaders currently working in CSOs and the private, and government sectors?
3. What existing opportunities are available to women leaders and women who are aspiring to reach leadership positions?
4. What barriers do women aspiring to leadership positions encounter? What barriers do women in leadership face? How can these barriers be addressed?
5. What are the necessary conditions for the success of women leaders in CSOs, government, and private sectors?

¹² Hartley, J. (2018). Ten propositions about public leadership. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, 14 (4), pp. 202-217.

¹³ Senior leadership in **government organizations** refers to: Prime Minister; Deputy Prime Minister; Members of the Cabinet of Ministers; State Ministers; Agency or Authorities Executive Directors; Commissioners of Commissions at the federal level; Presidents and Deputy Presidents of Regional States; Members of the Regional Cabinet; Bureau Heads and Vice Bureau Heads; Chief Executive Directors; Commissioners of regional agencies, authorities, and commissions; and similar positions at zonal and woreda levels; Whereas in **CSO and private sectors**, it represents Founders/Directors/ CEOs/Owners/

Conceptual Framework

Our study is guided by a conceptual framework that draws on socioecological and feminist intersectionality designs. The socioecological framework helps us to understand a person in their environment and to understand how different levels of the social environment can pose both barriers and support for certain behaviors and actions.^{14,15} This perspective further recognizes that individual knowledge, preferences, and motivations to assume and pursue leadership positions are situated within many levels of women's social, economic, and political influences. Successful women leaders have forged a pathway through multiple determinants from peers to family, community, local, and national policy levels. Moreover, an intersectionality approach to gender was used to understand barriers and support for women in leadership in Ethiopia. As a theoretical lens, intersectionality led us to a comprehensive understanding of how a woman's multiple identities—her socioeconomic status, age, ethnic background, marital status, and religious affiliation, for example—can be instrumental in determining the enabling conditions and barriers to leadership she operates within.¹⁶ We explored individual identity markers corresponding to each system (i.e., individual, peer and family, community, and society levels) within the socioecological framework to look critically at the way that living with multiple identities benefits or affects individual women's access to leadership positions. Reflecting on interviews with women leaders and key informants, this paper suggests ways in which women's representation in leadership can be understood and enhanced. It also informs knowledge by addressing the broad questions that are introduced above.

¹⁴ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, 32(7), 513-531. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.32.7.513>

¹⁵ Friedman, B.D. & Allen, K.N. (2010). *Systems Theory. Frameworks for Clinical Practice*

¹⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ethiopia/Ethnic-groups-and-languages>



Methodology: Design and Data Collection Methods, and Analysis

Study Design and Study Settings

Our study used qualitative research design to understand processes, behaviors, and conditions as perceived by the study participants as well as conditions and processes. We used a strategy conducive to build knowledge inductively through exploring study participants' experiences from their perspective.¹⁷ We collected data and in-depth information about barriers and support for women leaders in Ethiopia, as well as their needs. The assessment was conducted in Addis Ababa, Oromia, SNNPR, Amhara, Sidama, Gambella, and Somali regional states. The rationale for selecting these regions were their population size, developmental stages, and general livelihood. Oromia, SNNPR, and Amhara were included due to population size and Gambella was included for its level of development. Since obtaining data from federal ministries was vital for the study, Addis Ababa City Administration was included. The study sites within the regions were chosen to give depth and breadth to the study.

Data Collection Methods

We used both primary and secondary sources to document and analyze barriers and support as well as the needs of women leaders in Ethiopia towards their upward mobility and achieving their professional goals. Primary data was collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions, supplemented by secondary data from literature and document reviews. In addition, we collected administrative data from relevant CSOs working in the agriculture, livelihood, environment, climate change, and health sectors.

Literature and Document Review

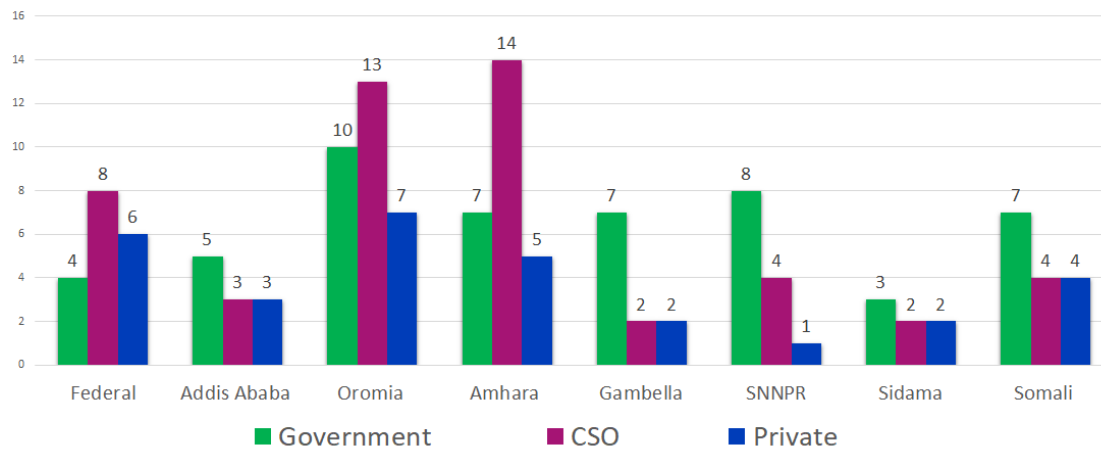
Our study undertook critical review of existing legislation and policies relevant to women's leadership to inform the assessment. Peer-reviewed journal articles, unpublished government, non-governmental, and UN reports on women leaders in Ethiopia were reviewed. Literature and document reviews informed the development of the overall research design and data collection tools. Findings from literature and document reviews as secondary data sources have been incorporated into this report and used, when appropriate, to draw conclusions.

¹⁷ Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). Basics of qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

In-depth individual interviews were conducted with relevant national and regional-level CSOs (i.e., foreign and local CSOs, as well as associations and consortiums), government offices, and private organizational leaders. A total of 133 key informant interviews were conducted (see Figure 2) of which 39.1% were from government, 39.8 % from CSOs, and 21.1% were from the private sector.

Figure 2: Number of study participants by region and type of organization



Focus Group Discussions

At the beginning of this study, we planned to collect data from middle¹⁸ and junior¹⁹ level women leaders to explore their pathways to leadership and what needs to be done to allow them to reach a leadership position. These middle and junior level leaders participated in focus group discussions representing government and CSOs at the federal level, in the Addis Ababa City administration and in all regional states. A total of 32 focus groups involving 156 total participants were conducted (see Table. 2).

¹⁸ Middle level leadership positions in **government offices** refers to Merit-based professionals working in various government bodies who occupy directorships or processor owner positions at the federal, regional, zonal, and woreda levels of government. In **CSO and Private sectors**, it refers to Program Coordinators/department heads with above five years' work experience.

¹⁹ Junior level leadership positions in government offices refers to Junior level professionals, including team leaders working in government at the federal, regional, zonal, and woreda levels. In **CSO and Private sectors**, it refers to Officers with 1-5 years of experience in the position.

Table 2. Number of focus group discussions and number of focus group participants by leadership category and region.

Type of Organization	Level of Leadership	Federal	Addis Ababa	Amhara	Oromia	SNNPR	Gambella	Somalis	Total
Government	Middle Level Women Leaders	2	1	1	3	2	1	1	11
# of participants		13	6	6	18	12	6	7	68
CSO	Middle Level	1	1		2	1		1	6
# of participants		6	12		10	6		6	40
Government	Junior Level	2				1		1	4
# of participants		12				5		7	24
CSO	Junior Level Women Leaders	1	1		1	1		1	11
# of participants		6	7		5			6	24
Total Focus Group Discussions		6	4	2	6	6	2	4	32
Total Focus Group Participants		37	25	6	33	23	6	26	156

Administrative Data

We collected administrative data from CSOs²⁰ (foreign, Local, charities, consortiums, associations) working on women's rights, livelihood, SRHR, agriculture, climate change and environmental protection at the federal and regional levels. The administrative data was used to examine sex-desegregated data that could show the number of CSO staff in senior, middle and low-level leadership, and in decision making positions. We used in-person contacts and communications via email and phone calls. We contacted a total of 200 CSOs; however, we were only able to secure data from 62.

Data Analysis

Data collected from in-depth interviews and focus group participants were analyzed using relevant qualitative techniques such as thematic and content analysis, with a specific focus on identifying data-driven perspectives of women leaders. Raw data was translated into English and delivered as verbatim transcription, to finally be imported into QSR NVivo 12 for analysis. Five members of the core research team read and re-read interview transcripts for quality assurance and their readings were later used in the iterative analysis process. A tentative coding framework was developed. After checking the level of intercoder agreement, the second iteration of analysis using the coding frameworks was conducted. Data were coded for each theme and category of participants, and they were used to identify common themes across all types of information gathered. Finally, interpretation was guided through the identified themes and categories using the socioecological framework to reflect that each individual is nested

²⁰ The 2019 FDRE Organizations of civil societies (i.e Proclamation No. 1113/2019) classify CSOs as follows: 1) "Local Organization" means a civil society organization formed under the laws of Ethiopia by Ethiopians, foreigner's resident in Ethiopia or both; 2) "Foreign organization" means a non-governmental organization formed under the laws of foreign countries and registered to operate in Ethiopia. 3) "Charity organization" means an organization established with the aim of working for the interest of general public or third party. 4) "Professional association" means an organization formed on the basis of a profession, and its objectives may include protecting the rights and interests of its members; promoting professional conduct, building the capacities of members or mobilize professional contributions of its membership to the community and the country; 5) "Consortium" means a grouping formed by two or more civil society organizations, and includes consortia of consortiums.

within a broader multi-level environment, in which each level can pose barriers and support certain behavior and action.²¹ This framework recognizes that behavior change can be achieved through activities that are embedded in four concentrations: Individual, Interpersonal (Family and Peer), Community, and Sociopolitical and Structural. The barriers and enabling conditions experienced and reported by participants at each level of the socio-ecological framework are presented and discussed.

We present our findings aligned with the constructs of the socioecological framework elements, regarding how behaviors and other structural factors that influence barriers and support to women leaders are related to the socioecological levels of influence. We triangulated data from sources to ensure credibility. We made constant comparison to allow diverse perspectives and experiences to be captured in relation to women's leadership, as well as to gain insight on the barriers and enabling conditions thereof.

Ethical Procedures

Throughout the study, the study team strictly adhered the following principles of ethical research.

- **Informed consent and voluntary participation:** All participants were asked to provide informed consent to participate and be audio recorded. Study participants were informed of the voluntary nature of participating in the study.
- **Confidentiality and anonymity:** Study participants were informed and guaranteed that no names or identifying information would be shared in the report.
- **No undue incentives:** No financial compensation was provided for in-depth interview participants. A transportation allowance was provided for focus group participants.

Limitations of the Study

Our findings highlight important factors that facilitate or hinder women's aspirations to ascend into leadership positions and become effective in their leadership roles. We identified major needs of aspirant women and women in leadership positions that can be addressed at personal, familial, socio-cultural, and organization levels. These findings must be interpreted with an understanding of the study's methodological limitations as well as the contextual challenges that limited data collection. Methodological limitations are related to its design and the inadequacy of administrative data to show the entire state of women's representation in leadership positions.

Design of the Study

Our study used qualitative methods. Qualitative research design offers an approach to build knowledge inductively through exploring study participants' experiences from their own perspectives²² and obtain a deeper understanding of the support and barriers experienced by women leaders in Ethiopia.²³ Qualitative methods are not without limitations. One of the limitations of the design is non-generalizability, which

²¹ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, 32(7), 513-531. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.32.7.513>

²² Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

²³ Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.

imposes restrictions as we develop broad inferences that can be applied nationwide.²⁴ On the other hand, our goal is not to generalize but rather to provide a rich, contextualized understanding of women's experience through the intensive study in this case. We tried to reflect the views and experiences of all study participants by constantly referencing the coded and transcribed data to compare responses. During our analysis, we distinguished between information that is relevant to all (or many) participants, in contrast to aspects of the experience that are unique to individual participants in the different regions and/or organizations. While we note that our study lacks statistical generalization, we believe that the analytical generalization and transferability of our findings are achieved by ensuring trustworthiness of the data that is presented. We developed conceptualizations of processes and women's experiences through in-depth investigation and higher-order constructs. Through rigorous inductive analysis, along with the use of confirmatory strategies mentioned above, we believe that our conclusions are credible and that we have arrived at insightful, inductive generalizations regarding the phenomena within our study.

Contextual Challenges

The study was launched in October 2021. After testing the data collection tools and revising them based on feedback from pilot testing, the actual data collection started in mid-October. We conducted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions for about two weeks, which were then interrupted by the State of Emergency issued by the government in the first week of November. This resulted from conflict that expanded to the central part of the country at that time. Obtaining administrative data from CSOs and governmental organizations became very difficult at that time. Although we contacted more than 200 CSOs via email, phone, and in person, we were only able to gather responses from 62 organizations.

²⁴ Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The counseling psychologist*, 35(2), 236-264.



Findings

Enabling Conditions

Our study found that positive transformations have been under way in terms of support, availability of resources, and opportunities for women to aspire towards and ascend to leadership positions in Ethiopia.

Individual Level

Individual level factors, also referred to as intrapersonal factors, are associated with individuals' characteristics, including knowledge, attitudes, behavior, and skills.

Self-confidence and commitment

Being committed, brave, curious, having the “right” attitude, and taking risks were cited as attributes that facilitate the process of leadership. Participants stated that self-image and self-esteem are vital to achieving leadership positions. Particularly, being brave and taking risks in pursuing leadership by rising to confront challenges were highlighted as key enabling conditions. Risks were seen to come with opportunities to learn and grow. Some of these risks included detachment from family, which participants explained as being frequently worth the opportunity to experience a new role and be part of important work. Narratives underscored curiosity, courage, commitment, personal attitude, and taking risks to pursuing opportunities, such as:

“When I want to take trainings, I Google and look for options and opportunities until I get what I need. I then apply for short term trainings in the different countries which led me to an opportunity to attend abroad. I am that kind of person who demands change and pursue as far as it can go to earn it.”

(A key informant from Bahirdar, Amhara)

“My personal commitment to start college education made me make the difficult decision of leaving my 3-year-old child behind in my family's care. I was so much committed to go in a way, also

(to) challenge the perception of the community that made early marriage happen to my life. I believe my personal behavior and interests contributed for my success.”

(A key informant from CSO, Addis Ababa)

Motivation is the other attribute that emerged as an important facilitator in our study. This was described as “moving forward” and seeking power, fulfilment, experiential education, and personal growth.

Education as a Critical Foundation

Achieving the relevant education or training standard was highlighted as one of the most important reasons that women are able to compete in the workplace and rise to leadership positions. “Short term” training or opportunities were cited as helping women reach their potential or helping them to develop the necessary personal attributes (e.g., confidence) and skills (e.g., communication) once they were established on the career ladder. Basic schooling and university education to obtain the necessary qualifications in a woman’s chosen field were seen as prerequisites. Some participants described being able to attend flexible learning opportunities such as night and weekend courses, which allowed them to combine education with their family responsibilities or to prioritize work commitments. Some jobs were needed to support themselves and others, rather than as part of their careers.

The following narratives demonstrate how personal motivation and commitment contribute to one’s upward mobility:

“I believe knowledge is acquired not only through education; rather, there is a lot of knowledge that you accumulate through experiences, through different trainings and by your interaction with different people. If you keep educating yourself, there is high probability that you would grow in your career path.”

(A key informant interview, Gondar, Amhara)

Another key informant from Oromia reported that her experiences helped her realize that she needs to learn more to build upon her personal and professional growth. She noted:

“I took my own way of investing in myself after I identified gaps in my education and relationships. I have confidence in myself. The belief ‘tomorrow is better than yesterday’ kept me going.”

Similarly, a key informant from Gambella explained:

“My personal behavior is that I am open and ready to learn new things and update/adjust myself with the situation.”

To these women, learning more through their experiences, their interaction with others, and self-realization was an important part of their leadership journey.

Further, women's agency is mentioned as an important tool in its different forms. Some talked about agency as ambition, identifying purpose in life and/or ability to make choices, and others stated that it can be acted upon through their participation in politics, education, and support from government. They also cited exemplary women and "role models" as they expressed: "... We must break our fear and fight for our rights—specifically whenever we see unfair decisions that block women from coming to power..." The sense of '*I can*' seems to bring out an important element of self-esteem and self-image. Appreciation of women in leadership was found helpful to recognize and inspire other women to envision obtaining a leadership position and taking up the challenge. Key informants in Somali, working on capacity building shared their view as:

"...as you know there is an International Women's Day (March 8) and in this day we give appreciation, initiation, motivation for women who perform successfully and achieve well in their roles. We gave certificates and awards for those women who perform well in their roles. In addition, we create opportunities to allow women (to) share their experiences with one other. Stories of success, awards and appreciations motivate and encourage other women."

Enabling Conditions: Interpersonal level—Family and Peer

Interpersonal level factors are characterized by interactions with others, including formal and informal social networks and social support systems; in this study, we examined interpersonal factors between the women and their partners, friends, families, and colleagues. Results indicate that career advancement and the journey to leadership is very challenging, if not impossible, without certain supportive relationships. Several supporters were mentioned from family to friends, colleagues, and partners. While it is true that family responsibilities can delay women's career advancement, where there is support from family, and especially male family members (husband, father, brother), this can positively influence women's success. Women in our study who are married mentioned their husbands to be the most important supporters during their career.

"The support of my husband is obvious. Whenever, I am asked to take (a) higher leadership position, I first go and ask my husband if he is ready to support me and stand with me. My education and trainings helped me a lot and I am also very committed to my job. I work day and night to become successful and to discharge my responsibilities."

(A key informant, Oromia)

“My family takes the lion’s share. They support me a lot. They are the reason why I am here today. My husband understands me a lot. When I am preoccupied with office duties, he takes the responsibility of taking care of our children.”

(A key informant, Addis Ababa)

Besides spouse, support from parents, siblings and even children were mentioned.

“My father, who works at an NGO, tells me about role model females and he is eager to see through my journey. He tells me to be good and a hard-working woman. My father and other members of my family encourage me through my journey... my husband also supports and gives me advice.”

(A key informant, CSO from Somali)

“My mother was always with me. Especially, when I was doing my undergrad and graduate study, she was taking care of my kids. When I needed to go abroad for my Ph. D, I did not have to worry about my children. Although my husband is there, my mother always supported my ambition. Her contribution is imminent in my journey to advance my education and career.”

(Key informant, a leader, Addis Ababa University)

Networks, mentorship, and role models are important support relationships in the upward mobility of women. Participants agree on the important role of networks and mentors in encouraging women to pursue leadership. Role models demonstrate what successful leadership looks like, showing the processes and challenges therein. Mentorship and networks were rare, but where they did exist, they could provide a very supportive foundation. Despite the recognition given to networks and mentors in their role for women in leadership, not many participants have mentioned having a specific mentor who led them through their career. They shared that the existence of role models is certainly a contributory factor to their encouragement. As argued earlier in this report, notwithstanding the importance of formal mentoring, observing a role model even in the absence formal mentoring is also valuable.

“Women leaders that we see now working at different positions are good role models in using their time properly and in discharging the responsibilities vested on them. We are proud of

most women leaders in taking responsibilities and fulfilling their duties equally or even better than their male counterparts.”

(A focus group participant, Oromia)

Correspondingly, networking was mentioned by participants to be necessary for advancement into leadership. In few instances, participants thought that accessing both women to men and women to women networks, as well as informal networks of friends were seen as helpful, in progressing the career of women. Networking was recognized to facilitate career progress in several ways.

“We need more women to be openly supportive of each other so they can create safe space for themselves and young professionals.”

(A key informant leading a women’s rights organization, Addis Ababa)

“We need more role models to personally coach and mentor women of all ages to help them become successful.”

(A key informant, CSO leader, Addis Ababa)

Similarly, an office head in Oromia, recognizing the positive relationships she has with her friend expressed her experience as:

“A friend of mine is my model. She has a very strong work ethic and is hard working. I learned a lot from her while we were working together. She encouraged, advised, and motivated me all the time. Women become more effective if they have other women around them for support and motivation.”

While our study found few individual accounts of mentoring, networking, female-to-female support and women’s leadership growth, it does suggest that women believe such support would benefit them. Emotional support was reported, such as in the case above about the leader’s experience where her friend’s support gave her emotional courage and motivation. She valued her relationship with her former colleague/friend and its contribution to her professional advancement. This interpersonal support was stated by several women as important not only in progressing a woman’s career, but also, continuing to strengthen her once she reaches a position she wants. The fact that so many women described weak networks, few mentors, and high competition between women undermines this potential resource for female leadership.

Enabling Conditions: Community Level

In this study, we focus on norms and values, culture, and relationships to comprise community level factors. The primary support identified at the community level was the positive response to women's equal representation in leadership positions from the community at large. According to the interviews with women, stereotypes and assumptions that come from social values, norms and culture have affected most women, but participants are hopeful that changes in attitudes will encourage more women to pursue leadership. Some women mentioned communities that have developed mechanisms for advocacy to fight harmful traditional practices and beliefs.

For example, religious leaders and other community leaders have worked for gender transformation. A focus group participant from Bahirdar Amhara Region stated:

“I believe there have been changes in terms of community attitudes towards women; it is observable. You know change takes time and will not come overnight. I believe, policies and programs directed at benefiting women will curb the negative social attitudes towards women.”

Key informants in Somali added that communities now value competence as a criterion for leadership positions as opposed to ethnicity and gender as before.

“... But now this practice is fading after the reform or the coming of the regional president of Somali—Ato Mustefe to his current position. Clan discrimination affected other clan members and forced them to leave their home and migrate using illegal ways. Currently the criteria to join the leadership position has shifted from clan and gender based, to competence, knowledge of multiple languages particularly the Somali language, education, qualification and experiences.”

(A key informant, member of an association, from Somali)

Additionally, women perceive that the community's shift in understanding the value of girls' education and eradication of harmful practices such as early marriage will increase opportunities for career advancement and pave the way for women's leadership.

“The principle “education for all” has benefited women and persons with disability. Nowadays girls both in rural and urban areas have a chance to go to school. If schools do their work well, women will gradually assume leadership positions.”

(A key informant from Bahirdar, Amhara)

Another support factor identified in our study is the positive change toward recognizing women's performance as equal to that of men, which helps women gain confidence.

“There has been an improvement in attitude as well as commitment to accept that women can perform successfully. The belief that women are good at fighting corruption and other illegal acts has created a relatively better atmosphere for women leaders to come to power. Appointment of several women leaders at federal level can be taken an example.”

(A focus group participant from Oromia)

Moreover, many of the women interviewed from both the public and private sectors felt that women leaders tended to show more reliability than men. They mentioned that certain principles and values associated with women, such as integrity and honesty, predisposed women leaders to a lower likelihood of corruption. ‘Women are trustworthy’ is an important conception that came out in our study. Both men and women participants agreed that women are less likely to participate in corruption. The engagement of women in leadership, as perceived by most, has a positive effect on work and effectiveness. A focus group participant from Jimma, Oromia noted “...she works with great sense of responsibility such as free of corruption and sabotage...”. Conversely, it was mentioned in some of these interviews that due to these positive attributes, women may be unpopular in leadership positions as they will be considered obstacles to unlawful gain planned by others. Some believe that corrupt male leaders target women leaders by discrediting them, criticizing them, and in some cases providing them with unfair performance evaluations.

Enabling Conditions: Social and Structural Level

Social and structural level analysis considers the organizational and institutional factors that have an impact on women in leadership. To some degree, it also reflects national-level policy and structure as a facilitator or barrier to women in reaching leadership. Organizational or institutional factors encompass social and organizational institutions' characteristics, including their formal and informal rules and regulations. We focused on policy and institutional factors that influence opportunities and support for women in leadership. The government of Ethiopia has made demonstrated efforts to address gender equality considering the imbalances and problems women encounter. The major effort undertaken in this regard is including the gender component in its national laws, policies, and strategies, and ratifying international instruments pertaining to gender. The government has also established a national mechanism for addressing gender issues, building on programs and strategies.

Conducive Policy Environment

Relevant laws and policies relating to gender equality and women's protection include:

- The 1995 Federal Constitution:²⁵ Explicitly states that men and women have equal rights in all matters including cultural, social, economic and political spheres, and it grants women's

²⁵ FDRE (1995). The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Constitution.

equal rights to acquire, administer, control, use, transfer and sell property, including equal treatment in the inheritance of property.

- The Revised Family Law (2000):²⁶ Recognizes equal rights of spouses in familial decisions and administration, and control of community property.
- The revised Criminal Code (2004):²⁷ Serves as a protector for gender equality; criminalizing acts of domestic violence, rape, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and cutting, abduction and early marriage.
- The Revised Labour Law (2019):²⁸ Stands against discrimination in employment and payment, as well as protects pregnant women.
- The Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003:²⁹ Provides for women's entitlement to affirmative measures.
- Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No. 515 of 2007:³⁰ Gives special attention to women candidates in the recruitment process; and
- The Directive on Recruitment and Promotion of Civil Servants in its Article 5.6.1(a): Explicitly states that candidates who are women, members of the emerging regions or persons with disabilities, will be recruited using affirmative measures if their total grade during the competition is less than three percent.

These policy documents demonstrate the commitment towards gender equality presented by the government of Ethiopia. Furthermore, several policies and national action plans formulated by the government aim at ensuring women are provided services, opportunities, and facilities to improve their wellbeing in a healthy manner for the realization of the rights of women.

According to our discussions with key informants, government policies have helped women to advance in their careers. Despite the challenges in implementing existing policies, study participants confirmed that the overall policy environment and the provisions of affirmative action have facilitated women's ascension into senior-level leadership positions. This environment also helped increase the number of women leaders that are currently serving as role models for the younger generation. The enabling environment includes the provision of daycare facilities and other relevant services so that women can worry less about their domestic role and focus more on their public leadership role. A key informant from Somali noted:

“The current policy environment is encouraging and conducive. It is attractive because it gives priority for women...It appreciates women(s) leadership. For instance, women are increasing in number in many leadership positions such as Parliament, and in attorney and mayor positions.”

²⁶ Revised Family Code of Ethiopia (2000)

²⁷ Criminal Code of Ethiopia (2004)

²⁸ Federal Negarit Gazeta (2019). Labour Proclamation No. 1156/2019

²⁹ Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003

³⁰ Federal Negarit Gazeta (2007). Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No. 515/2007

Despite the gender gap in leadership positions, the overall policy environment promotes women's equal representation. It can therefore be inferred that a reasonably strong legal framework in support of gender equality is in place in Ethiopia, showing that several important steps have been taken by the government to accelerate progress on gender equality. Nonetheless, the implementation of these policies raises a question as to whether the intended outcome has been realized. Challenges are often attributed to a lack of capacity on the part of the implementing institutions to carry out the appropriate actions and to design implementing strategies. One of the important areas where gender equality is promoted through policy and strategy is education.

Education Opportunities and Training

In this study, participants said that achieving the relevant education or training standard was one of the most important enabling conditions for women to be able to compete in the workplace and rise to leadership positions. While “short term” training or opportunities were cited as helping women reach their potential or develop the necessary personal attributes (e.g., confidence) and skills (e.g., communication); once they were on the career ladder, necessary qualifications in a woman's chosen field were seen as prerequisites (e.g., relevant schooling, university education).

Many participants also talked about scholarship programs facilitated by their organizations. Some of these programs offer scholarships for Master's and PhD programs, supporting women's growth by making educational opportunities readily available. This was mentioned by several key informants from different sectors:

“The current environment is much better for women. For example, an organization that I know, encourages female staff by offering growth opportunities. I am lucky to join this group to work together in (the) women's empowerment department and community wellbeing initiative. The policy also encourages women's leadership. If women and men apply for the same position, female applicants are given 5 or 10 more points as an affirmative action. This is an opportunity given to us by the policy.”

(A key informant, CSO, Somali)

“Today there are many educated women who have reached PhD levels. Access to education has improved, which allowed many women to upgrade their capacities. This plays a significant role in empowering women.”

(A key informant from Bahirdar, Amhara)

Similarly, women have been able to update their knowledge and skills about financial management, amongst other programs related to empowerment. This approach has made women decisive, and it has influenced a sense of independence that encourages them to aspire to leadership positions despite societal impediments. A male executive director of a nongovernmental organization explained:

“We provide numeracy skills training to all women so that they can manage their accounts. We also support women community facilitators working to help these women ... Without creating supporting mechanisms in terms of finance, knowledge, and skills, we cannot expect women to be leaders. This is how we empower them.”

(A male key informant interview, CSO leader, Addis Ababa)

Specific leadership development initiatives include increased opportunities for training and educational programs with scholarships for a diploma, Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD level programs. Collaborative efforts between government institutions and UN Women, as well as nongovernmental organizations also created an opportunity for the establishment of leadership excellence centers in Oromia and Amhara regional states, revitalizing leadership capacity-building efforts for women leaders in those regions. A key informant from UN-Women reported:

“In collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs, we have been strengthening women leaders and aspirant women through targeted trainings in collaboration with regional universities.”

This study found that UN Women Ethiopia office has offered guided training for both aspirant and women leaders through its “women in leadership and governance” project. Since the launch of this program in 2011, more than 1,000 women, both aspirants and women currently in leadership positions, have received trainings (see Appendix 1: Number of women both aspirant and leaders received training through UN Women). Moreover, UN Women also offers a women's political empowerment program, where, since 2019, it has targeted more than 500 women to enhance their capacity in political leadership and campaigning. It also launched a mentorship program in 2019, where a standard mentorship guide has been developed, based on a mapping of mentorship initiatives targeting the Amhara and Oromia Regions. According to a key informant, the mentorship initiative was not fully operationalized due to COVID-19 and the security deterioration in the country.

Efforts to increase women's representation in leadership have gained prominence in Ethiopia. For instance, the presidential mentorship initiative targets university-level female students, enabling them to complete their higher education, which in turn allows them to enter the workforce. The presidential leadership program for women in Ethiopia also targets current leaders and enhances their capacity to increase their efficiency and effectiveness in their leadership roles. A female representative of a national leadership initiative noted:

“We are now collaborating with various organizations to enhance the capacity of young women to aspire and become leaders while they are in the university system. I believe this initiative will help us get more female leaders in the future.”

In our study, efforts were made to map out available initiatives that focus on enhancing women's leadership representation in Ethiopia. Major initiatives are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Initiatives for Women in Leadership

Regions	Type of Leadership Initiative (Capacity building training, scholarship for BA/MA/PhD in country and outside the country, mentoring/coaching etc.)	Funder
Federal level (MOWSA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in Leadership and Governance Programme. The program was launched since 2017/18 with the objective of creating a pool of women leaders by providing short term capacity-building training. Through this program in 2021/22 about 105 female leaders and aspirants were trained. • Presidential Leadership Program for Women Leaders is launched on February 2, 2022. Capacity building training is being provided for 60 middle level leaders drawn from federal and regional government, CSO and private sectors. The main objective of the training is to create a pool of transformative and capable women leaders and decision makers in Ethiopia to ensure increased participation and effective representation of women at higher leadership positions in the public, private and CSO sectors in Ethiopia. • Government-sponsored Female Scholarship 	UN Women, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the President's office, Civil Service University
Oromia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN Women "Women in Leadership and Governance Programme" with the objective of creating a pool of women leaders by providing short term capacity building training. In this program nearly 320 female candidates were trained. • Administrative pool: Provides short term on-job training for model women in leadership positions • UN Women leadership initiative in collaboration with federal government, led by President Sahlework Zewude: Provides short term on-job trainings for both women in leadership positions and model women who aspire to leadership positions and working in different sectors • Ethiopian Civil Service University: Provides domestic BA/MA/ PhD scholarship for women working in different sectors, including women working in different sectors and those in leadership positions. However, most women fail to pass the entrance exams in that are in place. For instance, of 80 women given the opportunity to compete, only a limited number of women pass the entrance examinations. 	UN Women
Addis Ababa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience sharing for health professionals at the Ministry of Health • Experience sharing for media personnel: International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) and Edward Morrow program, designed for journalists. • Short term trainings on various topics related to gender and leadership facilitated by the Addis Ababa Bureau of Women and Children. • Scholarships: For women civil servants at Civil Service University Mentorship: Public health department at Addis Ababa University faculty members • Leadership training and CEO breakfast (for women in business) 	Harvard University NIH grant obtained for the partnership project of faculty members in AAU + JH Association of Women in Business
SNNPR + Sidama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Women's Leadership Program" with the objective of enhancing leadership role and representation of women leaders through capacity building program • "Life skill training to women": To improve the quality of life and to promote women at leadership positions. 	Center of Concern with financial support of European Union Care Ethiopia

Regions	Type of Leadership Initiative (Capacity building training, scholarship for BA/MA/PhD in country and outside the country, mentoring/coaching etc.)	Funder
Amhara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in Leadership and Governance Programme. The program was launched in 2017 with the objective of creating a pool of women leaders by providing short term capacity building, training and mentorship. The program has been implemented by the Bureau of Women, Children, and Social Affairs in collaboration with Bahirdar university • Bahir Dar and Gondar universities: In collaboration with Amhara Women's Association and Amhara Women's Federation, provide bachelor's and master's scholarship opportunities • Government sponsored scholarship 	UN Women Bahir Dar University Gondar university
Somali	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No active leadership initiative by non-governmental organizations. However, there is volunteer-based female scholarship program at Jijiga University entrance examinations. 	
Gambella	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No active leadership initiative by non-governmental organizations 	

The government of Ethiopia has been working to encourage women-owned businesses in the private sector to expand and increase their visibility. Evidence suggests that the private sector has been dominated by men in the past. On the other hand, attitudes about women's empowerment and leadership seem to be more tolerant in the private sector, particularly in the business world.

“We design and provide capacity building support to the women through a program called the eco-friendly livelihood project. We give them training that helps them to partake in different businesses. For example, beekeeping: we hand them hives by organizing and training them in their neighborhoods. We then make revolving funds available to the women.”

(A key informant, CSO, Addis Ababa)

However, a key informant from Hawasa noted that as much as things may have changed in central locations, there is still a dire need for improvement of policies in rural area. These policies ought to be contextualized and adjusted to help people in rural areas.

“Currently there are new initiatives for women to come to leadership positions such as affirmative action, but this does not reach those at grassroot level.”

(A key informant, Hawassa, Sidama)

There is also an intergovernmental effort where government is working in collaboration with nongovernmental organizations and CSOs to create awareness and intervene on human rights promotion. Organizations seek to encourage women's participation by setting up policies and practices to ensure inclusion and representation.

“As an organization, it focuses specifically on women. We have a gender policy that declares 65% of beneficiaries should be women. In every project activity, gender mainstreaming and empowerment is the focus of the organization.”

(A key informant, Gondar, Amhara)

Similarly, workplaces were cited to have created opportunities for female hires by encouraging them to apply for positions.

“I am a female and whenever I apply for a job, I see that female applicants are very encouraged and appreciated. This helped me to reach my current position and throughout my journey.”

(A focus group participant from a CSO, Somali)

Participants mentioned the importance of family-friendly work initiatives including construction of day care centers and lactation rooms. Availability of better maternity packages support performance. Participants felt that the working environment for women is more encouraging now.

“These days with day care and other arrangements for women, we are looking at improvements. In some offices we see mothers bring their kids and leave them at the daycare center. This is a good beginning.”

(A key informant, Addis Ababa)

The availability of gender-inclusive policies and systems, coupled with an increase in access to education for women, as reported here, is a major resource for women's motivation and commitment to advance their careers and assume leadership roles. In addition, women have become determined to overcome any workplace-related challenges and hardships to succeed in leadership positions.

Barriers to Women's Growth in Leadership

As mentioned earlier, Ethiopian women are not yet equally represented in leadership. Our study shows that there are barriers that prevent or slow women from progressing in leadership positions. We discuss the barriers across the socioecological aspects and show how these aspects impact women's aspirations and ability to achieve leadership roles.

Barriers: Individual Level

Women described the challenges or barriers they experienced during their career development and efforts to achieve leadership. These women have experienced insecurities, negative preconceptions, the "double burden" and stereotypes attributed to the social norms and tradition of modesty in the culture. These barriers are commonly reported by both aspirant women and women currently in leadership positions in government, CSOs, and private sectors.

Double Burden

Women in our study reflected a reality in which women who have children are constantly torn between their work and personal roles and responsibilities, resulting in feelings of guilt and stress. Our participants described feeling overburdened and unable to maintain a healthy work-life balance. This significantly affects their aspirations to become leaders, as the domestic responsibilities they have at home interfere with professional responsibilities. There was widespread agreement among participants that there has been a gradual shift in gender roles through the years. On the positive side, recent years have seen greater economic and social empowerment of women, yet this has also increased their burden. Women remain responsible for carrying the double burden of care work in the household and in the workplace, while men are not expected to fulfill the same high expectations.

The expectation that women are solely responsible for domestic and caretaking roles remains and is internalized by women. Furthermore, pregnancy, breastfeeding, and the need for childcare cause gaps in women's career pathways, reducing their participation in the workforce and making it less likely they will achieve the same milestones and positions as men. Women's engagement in the workforce does not easily integrate into their household responsibilities as it requires long hours from home. This can also have an impact on their relationship with their family, often when they are married. The dual responsibilities carried out by women causes fatigue and can impede their performance at work. As echoed by almost all participants:

"Harmonizing dual responsibility (household and office leadership) is difficult. It is very hard to assume household chores after exhaustion in office and field work."

(A key informant from Debre Birhan)

Similar views are reflected in quotes below:

“This is an issue of sustaining generation. If women face harassment, if they find it difficult to balance family and work, or when they have family responsibility, in which women take the biggest share? If we bring women to leadership positions, then they are going to have double or triple burdens. Do we have systems that recognize these kinds of challenges? To be honest, the answer is ‘no.’”

(A key informant from Sidama, CSO sector)

“Domestic responsibility hinders women not to properly use their time for their professional responsibilities.”

(A key informant, Gambella, capacity builder)

“Some works emerge during holidays which make me compromise my family time. Sometimes, I take jobs home and work ‘til after midnight. I always try to strike a balance between my job and my family. But it is not easy.”

(A key informant, woman leader, Addis Ababa)

“...women face difficulties during pregnancy and often will not be promoted to leadership positions because it is obvious that they spent most of their time caring for their kids.”

(A key informant from Somali)

Women also described how some leadership positions require frequent travel away from the family, which is perceived as a cause of reluctance in taking up leadership positions. Where women lack support from families and marital partners, they find that their work interferes with their ability to bring up their children.

“The major dragging issue for the women is their home and children. Of course, your position might require you to move from one place to another, in this case your family responsibilities pull you down. In my case, I have tried hiring a helper/nanny, but I keep on losing them – they quit on me. If you don’t have a person who can be responsible for your children at home, you cannot do your job effectively as you will be torn apart.”

(A key informant from a CSO in Bahirdar)

“...When you have a family, you cannot do this, especially in our society because women are expected to lead the family, take care of the house chores or at least have time with their husband or play with their kids. This hinders you from places you want to go. I really admire those women who can actually balance both, but I do not think I can.”

(A key informant from Addis Ababa City Administration Council Member)

Women therefore feel pressured to sacrifice their aspirations or take personal decisions that put them in opposition to social expectations. This makes women feel conflicted, and participants described facing a dilemma about leaving their children when their work demands their time. A key informant talked about her experience as:

“I have passed through a lot. I struggled to make time between my work and caring for my children. I left office five days before giving birth to my first child and returned after a month. Women who give birth are not allowed to leave for more than two months. This has improved today as women are given maternity leave for 4 months. I gave birth to my second child after a year. I did not have the financial capacity to employ a nanny for my children because at the time my monthly salary was 230 ETB while my husband earned 300 ETB. The challenge of caring for my children and performing my duties at the office was immense. I then decided to resign from my job. People labeled and gave me a nickname “Belayniesh”—a sarcastic way of labeling me as a woman who gives birth to 3 babies every year. They gave me this name because I always went to the office with my two children carrying the older one on my back and holding the younger in my hands. I was horrified and disappointed at the time. Yet, I passed through that difficult time with patience and tolerance.”

(A key informant leading a CSO in Adama, Oromia)

On the other hand, there are many examples in the interviews and focus groups of women’s courage in challenging male dominance in leadership and the masculine work culture. Women are aware of the masculinization of leadership positions. A key informant stated:

“My friends and sister have been discouraging me especially when I was pregnant while working in Dire Dawa in one international NGO. They put lots of pressure for me to stay at home and care for my children and husband. However, I refused to confirm to the societal expectation. Because of my defiance, I am now working in this position, with good status.”

(A key informant working in one CSOs, Somali)

“A lot of men are still very patriarchal and do not support their wives and daughters to reach their fullest potentials either.”

(A male key informant, leading one consortium, Addis Ababa)

Lack of Self-confidence

Following the double burden, lack of self-confidence is the second most pronounced barrier reported by study participants. Lack of self-confidence is reinforced by women's negative self-image about their capacity, reflecting prevailing gender stereotypes in Ethiopian society. Moreover, self-doubt, as well as feelings of incompetence, were mentioned as factors that discourage women from seeking or taking up leadership positions. Self-doubt and lack of self-confidence, although reflected as personal factors, have a lot to do with how women are perceived at a familial and societal level. As part of prevalent gender conditioning that children receive in their upbringing, girls are repeatedly told to accept that they are less than their male counterparts.

This internalized mindset can be seen in how interviewed women described barriers to their leadership as self-inflicted. Negative self-image included fear or reluctance to take up jobs perceived as masculine.

“We have culturally biased assumptions about women, that we are not competent... Being a woman by itself makes you vulnerable to others. It suppresses your ability to shine and achieve your highest potential. Especially, at the beginning of our career, those working with us often try to exploit young women in so many ways.”

(A key informant, CSO leader, from Oromia)

“Women's self-confidence and commitment is decisive in this regard. Many of us lack confidence in decision making, collaborate with other members of the organizations, and often we fail to manage staff members. Self-confidence is central to women's failure to fulfill their leadership potential.”

(A key informant, leader, private company)

Women thus tend to choose jobs considered more “feminine” as opposed to others considered more appropriate to men; women would readily take up secretarial or other jobs perceived to be “light”. A Key informant in SNNPR noted: “...the important barrier is the poor image women have for themselves. Saying ‘I am just a woman, what can I do?’ ...underestimating themselves takes them back.”

Fear of being opposed or frustrated makes women reluctant to take up leadership positions even when promoted to such positions. A key informant in Bahirdar explained how women second guess themselves when pursuing new roles with more responsibility: “Women themselves are victims of low self-esteem because they came out from the same community that disapproves of women’s agency, and (they) have accepted their positions.”

Our findings suggest that self-doubt and a lack of self-confidence affect women’s motivation and personal determination. Women often shy away from assuming leadership positions or seizing opportunities that could be used as ladders for their career growth and path to decision-making positions. The significance of these findings is that the availability of mentors, networks and colleagues who encourage women to challenge their negative thoughts and re-evaluate important decisions can help shift women’s self-defeating internal processes. Other women who have previously undergone similar experiences are able to help upcoming female leaders readjust their perceptions of reality.

Lack of Resources/Financial Freedom for Self-progress

Women face economic barriers within and outside their households. Inadequate finances can affect women’s employment opportunities, including self-employment. Women also fear that they will not be able to control any income they generate if faced with pressure from home, e.g., family demands to spend their earnings on shared purchases and investments. Participants reported this lack of financial freedom, dependency on men, and poor access to financial resources as barriers to their access to learning opportunities that will in turn affect their career advancement. Unless their employer offers scholarships, upgrading their education depends on women’s ability to access any available household resources. A key informant from one academic institution reported:

“Economic dependency hinders women’s ability to upgrade their qualifications in pursuit of leadership. For example, in the case of Gambella, women are expected to give their salary to the husband; he is the one to decide on how to spend the money.”

(A key informant from Gambella)

It is important to have cooperative husbands and for there to be a conversion in cultural stereotyping for women to make their dreams of becoming leaders come true. Such harmful gender norms perpetuating gender inequality should be challenged through ways such as engaging men and boys as one important component. In addition, future programming can take note of the importance of education financing and group mentoring.

Lack of education and skills trainings was mentioned by participants as one of the individual barriers to women's upward mobility. Lack of relevant education results from responsibilities of women at home, which hinders their effort to follow such opportunities. Conversely, women have low access to other opportunities because they are dominated by men.

“There is limited opportunity for women to improve their education. From my observation, men are often competing and getting (more) chances of education than women. Despite women having interest to upgrade their levels of education, they face difficulties due to their responsibilities of caring for children. They also are short of financial resources to sponsor their own education.”

(A focus group participant in Oromia)

Barriers: Interpersonal Level—Family and Peer

Participants did not report significant barriers from any already-established networks. Women did not describe feeling exclusion or group favoritism from other women, although they did feel this type of resistance from men. Yet women did not appear to be able to leverage social networks of other women for professional benefit. In fact, “networking” appears to have a negative connotation, as some women believe other women reach leadership positions by capitalizing on their informal networks with male officials. It seems that networking is equated with corruption and/or the use of sexual favors. This can inform programs that they are more effective when framed in culturally and contextually meaningful ways, such as through community building. One women leader from Adama, Oromia explains this as:

“It is not the qualification or experience that play (the) key role for a woman to get attractive jobs or leadership positions; rather, personal relationships and informal networks with male officials—such as kebele leaders, sub-city leaders, and leaders at (the) municipal level.”

Another participant agreed by stating:

“All women do not have equal chance to assume leadership positions. While some women rise to leadership positions by chance, others become leaders via informal network(s). For instance, I was expecting to be appointed in an organization that I used to work. Despite my leadership readiness, commitment, and capacity, I did not get the leadership position. Relationship is a preferable criterion than capacity in assigning leaders to positions.”

(A focus group participant in middle level management, Addis Ababa)

In a few instances, key informants mentioned the lack of networks as a barrier when attempting upward mobility.

“Women have the double burden of caring for family and society, so they miss out on a lot of formal and informal networking opportunities. There are a lot of technical barriers women face from their male colleagues, especially male bosses, because they simply deny that women are capable of doing the same tasks. They think only men can do and it is demoralizing, (it) makes you hopeless and it is difficult to overcome.”

(A key informant from Federal)

Lack of mentoring was mentioned as a barrier for women in their leadership paths. Women mentioned that a woman leader does not often stay in the same position long enough to provide supervision and mentorship for other female colleagues under her. This happens in part because, as mentioned earlier, women are seen as trustworthy and far from corruption. While this could be an asset, it also deters some organizations from hiring women into leadership positions. They feel that this contributes to the absence of mentorship culture both within and outside the organization between women leaders and other women.

“Women leaders are frequently transferred from one sector to the other. We don’t see a woman serving for (a) relatively long time on one particular position. This I believe is one of the factors impeding women share their experiences, mentor and advise other fellow women.”

(A focus group participant, from Oromia)

Another key issue that emerged in our study with regards to relationships is family. Typically, support for successful leadership should start with immediate family members. Participants gave examples, both where family members are supportive of their journey, and where family members posed barriers. Most of the women in our study stated that the support they received from their families was what kept them going. Nonetheless, some others stated that lack of support from immediate family members affected their aspiration to leadership positions. Family level barriers appear more pronounced for married women. While some participants appreciated the support from their spouses, a few stated that marriage posed a barrier, for example, a key informant in Oromia noted:

“When I came to this position one of the discouraging issues came from my husband. (My) leadership position requires working beyond the fixed working time. For example, office meetings may be scheduled on weekends; other times meetings

get extended, and I am unable to go home early, or I may even be required to travel to other places for field work or training. These make my husband furious. He (says), ‘Why wouldn’t you quit this job? We have children who need care and there are many responsibilities in the house.’”

We also observed that family barriers appeared more influential in semi-urban areas. One explanation for this could be that cities offer better facilities and services than those that are accessible to women in semi-urban and rural areas. On the other hand, women in these areas are more vulnerable to the impact of persistent gender norms and constraints. Partly, such norms are persistent due to less access to education and information. Women leaders interviewed in the cities were more likely to describe having a supportive family.

Many spoke about a learning curve or how they got through difficult times when their children were small, but they also reported how they navigate their busy lives. Key informants reported that lack of adequate support from spouses hindered women from successfully finding themselves in leadership positions and maintaining these positions. Those who are married and have children are also thought to be less committed to their positions as responsibilities await them outside of the workplace.

“...The husband’s lack of interest for his wife to serve at leadership position is one issue. I personally believe in having a smooth family relationship in marriage. Most of the time husbands do not agree or even refuse for the wife to take on leadership positions. Moreover, women often fear of the blame and critique from others if they demonstrate weak work performance.”

(A key informant, a woman leader, from Oromia)

“Again, men in our country are hesitant to support their wife at home and it looks ridiculous for them to have the home work done by themselves. They are not supportive at all. Husbands feel that taking care of children, supporting women (in the) kitchen and performing home tasks are the sole responsibility of women. Hence, balancing home and office roles is the biggest barrier.”

(A focus group participant, Amhara)

“When a woman is empowered, there is a tendency that her marriage fails. The reason could be her husband. He may find it difficult to stand the independence that empowerment gives to

the woman. As a result, many women choose to stick with their marriage over career.”

(A key informant, General Manager, private company, Addis Ababa)

“Husbands normally expect women to serve at home and take care of her children. If she is not fulfilling this responsibility automatically things would lead to a malfunctioning family. . . This leads to husbands restricting of their wives from aspiring (to) leadership positions.”

(A male key informant, Research Institutes, Oromia)

Conversely, women stated that being unmarried can lead to being viewed as imposters and failures in their leadership roles. Society has a perception that unmarried women cannot be good leaders as they have not demonstrated their leadership skills by managing their household/family.

“Even the drivers in my office told me that they wouldn’t want their wife to take on leadership roles. Being a leader demands a lot. When you are a leader, you have to work double, and when you are a woman and a leader then you have to work threefold. It is time- and energy-consuming.”

(A key informant, Addis Ababa, City Administration Council Member)

Furthermore, our study found that there is a widely held perception that women in prominent leadership positions are either divorced or single. This perception affects married women’s feelings of eligibility for leadership positions. Social norms dictate that women prioritize family wellbeing over advancing in their careers if they are married, and participants themselves adhere to or feel constrained by these norms.

“When I started my job, it required me to be at the office day and night. Had I been married then, it would have been very difficult for me, and things would have [gone in a] different direction. Fortunately, I was single, and I was able to fully engage in my assigned responsibilities.”

(A key informant, woman leader, Oromia)

Female-to-Female Relationships (Sisterhood)

Another important issue that came out from the findings is that women lack confidence in women leaders, reflecting mistrust among women themselves. Participants gave examples of both positive and negative female-to-female relationships in their career paths. While the positive relationships have earlier been discussed in the Support/Enabling Conditions section, here we focus on the negative

relationships posed as barriers by women leaders. Women often consider their capacity to be lower than their male counterparts, leading them to willingly accept men leaders and actively oppose women leaders. These women tend to compete with other women leaders and see them as adversaries. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that women have difficulties building alliances (a sense of sisterhood) with other women. Some key informants and focus group participants assertively stated, “women are jealous of other women” and “discourage them from competing to take up leadership positions”. A key informant from Wolkite, SNNPR noted:

“As I said earlier, women don’t support each other. They are rejecting and jealous with each other. I tried to solve (this) with a number of conflicts that occurred between female leaders and co-workers.”

“Women need to form a strong network and collaboration. This is especially apparent among women who claim to be educated. Most of them have no interest in getting organized and addressing the issues of women and helping other women. We do not see them working together a lot and supporting one another. Even women tend to choose men bosses over women bosses. Most women in leadership positions had to pay a lot of sacrifices to be where they are today. But I do not understand why they do not support other young women.”

(A key informant from Addis Ababa Civil Service University)

Many of the women in leadership who participated in this study are in a place to provide this insight to others to follow. Many women could benefit from this guidance, who might otherwise believe that they are unable to measure up to the expectations.

Barriers: Community Level

The societal/community level setbacks are related to existing sociocultural norms and practices that favor men over women for public life because of gender stereotypes. Culture and gendered stereotypes are the most commonly mentioned themes from study participants.

Culture: Religion, Norms and Values

As mentioned previously, in Ethiopia, as in many contexts, despite women’s education and entry into the labor market, there remain widespread beliefs that a woman’s role is one of private homemaker while men head their households and have a right to public lives. These unequal representations certainly curtail women’s career advancement. It also makes women’s leadership positions difficult, to accept not just for the society, but also for the women themselves.

While these inequities are broadly cited, we found that women in certain communities are less trusted to represent their communities than others. This appears exacerbated in some regions such as the Somali region. Specifically, government and political positions are highly symbolic for the communities under that regional administration, making men appear to be the only viable role-holders. Women remain largely excluded from political positions, except for those in which government policy requires specific positions to be held by women, such as the Ministry and/or Bureau of Women's Affairs. In addition, harmful practices such as early marriage prevent many women from accessing education, which in turn affects their ability to ascend to leadership positions. Religious affiliation is also often used to either discriminate or promote women depending on the dominant religion practiced in each region, in both cases preventing women from advancing according to merit. The following quotes reflect how culture, norms, and religion affect women's ascendance to leadership and hinder women leaders from effectively playing their roles.

“Women are often afraid of the culture. Our [Somali] culture is also very difficult for women and most of the public-life-related activities are considered are only for men. Cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and early marriage also affect women heavily.”

(A focus group participant, Somali region)

“In most part(s) of Gambella, female children are considered as a source of wealth/income due to culturally acceptable high amount of dowry. . . As a result, early marriage affects female children from pursuing education and succeed[ing] in their life.”

(A male key informant, Gambella, Research institute)

“Early marriage is a major challenge; it had an impact on me. But I escaped, and that is how I pursued my education and (how I am) now working . . .”

(A key informant, Welkite, SNNPR)

“These days, we are educating female students to be aware of the cultural dimension that affects their aspiration. We are working to create awareness about girls and women's rights so that they would challenge traditional cultures which have negative effect on the overall wellbeing of women, and especially how it hinders them from using their potential.”

(A key informant, Oromia)

“...given the status of my company, in this city, you would be shocked when you see how people react when they know that I am the founder and CEO of the company. In many instances, their face shrinks all of a sudden. The attitude itself is one big barrier. If you are not goal-oriented, this can stop you from your way. While I am sitting on the desk, they would knock at the door and ask where the manager (he) is. ... The perception about women and competence is a big barrier. In some events, when it is announced that a CEO of a big company will make a speech, everyone expects a male person. Then when they find out it is a woman, they take it with a mixed reception, with awe and surprise. People do not check merit in most cases, just whether it is a man or a woman.”

(A key informant, Addis Ababa private company)

Gender Stereotypes

Government, the community, and nongovernmental organizations have introduced policies to reduce gender inequities in hiring and career advancement. Nonetheless, stereotypes about women still exist with the attitude that “women can’t do it” remaining rampant everywhere. Public leadership positions are often assumed to be for male members of society. Furthermore, certain industries, such as information technology and construction, are expected to be led by men, and women’s representation in these fields is minimal. A Study participant noted:

“Women are denied assuming leadership positions in large economic sectors such as finance and economic development, and investment. Women [are] deprived of taking part in high level decision making in executive committees at different levels.”

(A male focus group participant, Adama, Oromia)

“In the Somali region clan systems are very strong. And there is a belief that women cannot fit leadership position. They even directly calling phone and give him your position to him because they say that tomorrow you are going to be pregnant.”

(A woman leader, government office, in Somali Region)

“Negative social attitudes or prejudices by the community regarding women’s leadership capability is rampant. Women themselves

believe that we can't do leadership. The stereotype that women cannot be a leader is visible even in my journey; I have experienced it. This affects our mindset."

(A key informant, Debre Birhan, Amhara region)

These stereotypes are also responsible for the absence of networking by women leaders. Men are socialized to be confident, assertive, and self-promoting while culturally it is still considered inappropriate for women to have these characteristics, without which networking is impossible. Stereotypes associated with leadership are unquestionably masculine, and the traits accompanying leadership are thought to be that of male characteristics - independent, aggressive, competitive, rational, dominant, and objective; while women are portrayed as more communal and helpful, affectionate, sympathetic, kind, sensitive, gentle, and nurturing. On the other hand, there were also cases where some did not recognize that there is such a difference between men and women. For instance, a director at a government authority shared her view as:

"I have never faced any barrier because I am a woman. Of course, I have other challenges such as work-life balance and keeping my responsibility to my family intact. I do not buy the idea of stereotypes a lot. I do not believe people undermine me because of my gender. I believe I should be evaluated based on my work. I am not for people's low performance on the job justified to shouldering responsibilities that are gender induced. Performance matters, not gender."

The experience of the key informant who never had any barrier due to being a woman can be taken as a good example that stereotypes are not in the mindset of women pursuing leadership positions or those already in leadership positions. Rather, her insight refers to the mindset of all stakeholders in the process. The women leaders who were interviewed talked about stereotypes, but they did not state that these stereotypes stopped them from pursuing leadership opportunities. They discussed how the stereotypes can be barriers to women in general, impacting their work. This could be the reason that participants of this study are women who are already advancing their careers. A key informant from Amhara region noted:

"...people tried to discourage me. "They were saying 'What did you miss from being a homemaker? What can't you stay home?' But I did not give attention to all the negativities coming from them. I kept on moving and even tried to make them change their attitudes towards a working woman. I did not stay home like they advised me to..."

According to her, she has noticed that the stereotypical assumptions are still there, despite the noticeable shift that came through the years. Yet, their existence did not stop her from becoming a leader.

The Intersections of Age, Marital Status, and Ethnicity

We found that the intersection of gender with age and ethnicity puts a woman in a disadvantaged position from ascending into leadership positions. Participants pointed out that, although rare, these can be experienced by some women. We found examples of barriers based on gender and ethnicity in the Hawassa, Somali, and Gambella regions, where ethnic affiliation appeared to be a major factor in shaping women's leadership opportunities, rather than individual qualification or merit of the applicant. Specifically, a younger woman, who is not married, and not from the dominant ethnic group experienced multiple hindrances of vertical mobility. Interestingly, we observed a contradiction between this and participants' statements on the opportunities of leadership being better for single women. Participants stated that inability to speak the local dialect further hinders some women from accessing leadership positions. Sexism and ethnic discrimination intersect in these contexts. Women feel subtle forms of discrimination, which sometimes are difficult to attribute to their gender, or ethnicity, or both. These women must compete with men and women of the preferred ethnicity. A key informant reported:

“At some point I was denied of promotion to the next career ladder because of my ethnicity. It was devastating and (a) challenging time for me to comprehend. Then I overcame this difficult time, partly by showing good diplomacy and relationship with some key persons and sending elders as arbitrators to settle the issue.”

Similarly, a key informant from Debre Birhan, Amhara region, reported how the intersection of sex, age, and ethnic background or location may affect or serve as a pathway to leadership positions. She goes saying:

“Discrimination because of your age or ethnic group, or even for that matter from which Zone you are, is common and it determines which women to be on leadership or not. Assigning women from other sectors/districts de-motivates women from working in full commitment.”

Barriers: Sociopolitical and Structural Level

The findings of this study revealed that the social and structural environment in which a woman works can directly and indirectly affect the barriers and support in her advancement to leadership roles. The structural factors in support of a woman's pursuit of leadership roles are discussed in the previous section. Structural factors can be supportive, but they can also manifest barriers in women's career development. Despite positive steps taken forward in terms of policy, a widespread “implementation gap” was identified by participants who pointed out that policies were often not operationalized on the ground, especially

at lower levels and away from the central government. Good gender-inclusive policies remain “on paper” and are not put into practice. Poor implementation of policies also affects the implementation of available support, such as affirmative action mechanisms. The following quotes reflect the “good policies are only on paper” response from participants.

“We have a challenge in executing the policy into serious actions. Especially, leaders in every sector have the responsibility of making sure that the policies regarding women issues are implemented earnestly. But they are not.”

(A key informant from Bahirdar, Amhara Region)

“In some cases, policy formulated are meant for paper. They lack precision and direction in formulation and are not timely implemented. The policy by itself is also hindering because it lacks clear course for implementation.”

(A key informant, CSO, Somali)

“The policies are good but only of paper value. The problem is on translating the policies into practice, especially at lower levels.”

(A key informant, leader, Oromia)

Organizational Level

We identified organization level barriers in two dimensions: first, the nature of work within the organization, and second, the specific challenges faced by women based on their gender. Within the first, unfair demands such as long working hours and high workload were considered, while the second includes denying women leaders equal opportunities to men or putting different pressures on women to prove their equal capability to men. Participants stated that they are required to spend extended time at the office, cutting time off from their family. A key informant from Jimma, Oromia reported:

“... leaders are often expected to attend meetings with cabinets that go even up to midnight. We are also invited to attend occasions that extend to night hours. Not attending night-time invitations and events during meetings with higher officials is one of the factors affecting my relationship with my supervisors or high-level authorities.”

Organizational barriers also refer to the organizational-level factors that create differences in hiring and promoting men and women. While these barriers are different from organization to organization, they can create obstacles preventing women from advancement to leadership. We found that hiring and promotion processes can create an unintentionally personal and unfair experience, hindering women from leadership opportunities. Despite the introduction of affirmative action to compensate for women's reduced chances earlier in life—due to social barriers and gender norms that tended to push young women into marriage and childbearing first, over education and developing a career--there was a risk that affirmative action led to people assuming women had obtained their position because of their gender rather than their level of skill, qualification, and merit. Interview participants discussed a of perception of affirmative action as a means to give women a “boost,” such as additional points in the same job application, and/or a system of “quotas”, where a specific percentage of posts must be filled by women. A male participant from Jimma, Oromia stated that:

“... this should not be taken as filling posts to specific percentage, quota, women themselves have to compete with men and take the job. Quota representation for women does have its own negative implications in their current and future career(s).”

Assumptions about women's commitment to their work also result in unfair hiring practices. A related issue is work politics within organizations. Systems, rules, and procedures are hidden within organizations, making them difficult to navigate. If women fail due to a challenge in these systems, they become targets affected negatively by the system. A factor mentioned in the interviews as a hidden systematic outlook is the political standpoint of the woman. Women discussing female genital mutilation reported:

“If a woman takes a political stand that may challenge higher authorities, even when she is competent for the job, it is highly likely that the woman will be sidelined, undermined, and discouraged not to be promoted to a leadership position.”

Institutionalized Patriarchy

Institutional patriarchy in this report refers to a practice of favoring male leadership in organizations. Such patriarchy is one of the organizational barriers that is inculcated by the culture. Our study found that there is male dominance that reduces women leaders' contribution and limits their advancement. We found that gendered hierarchical power relationships are reinforced in public, nongovernmental, and private institutions. As a result, the environment does not motivate women to seek leadership positions. This is also apparent in the CSO sector when and if women reach leadership positions. We observed that this kind of work culture is more visible when the organization's founders or leaders are men. The following quotes reflect the operatives of institutionalized patriarchy.

“The nature of insurance task requires you to visit customers outside of the city and even to remote areas, demands you to spend some time with customers, and requires drink[ing alcohol] and do what your customers usually want you to do. And this has an impact in your family and marital life. For that reason, insurance companies want male managers for their company.”

(A female key informant, private sector, Addis Ababa)

“I, myself, did the same. I cancelled the employment of a woman for the position of a pilot project manager. By then we wanted to employ a full-time worker because we were in a pilot project, and we did not afford to lose the manager for any reasons other than project centered. As an employer you may find yourself in a position where you cannot tolerate wasting time by giving your employee pregnancy leave.”

(A male focus group participant from CSO, Bahirdar, Amhara)

“...People do not really take you seriously. They assume you to be naive. The main challenge that I am facing now is because I do not understand how to navigate through the political system. There is an established political bureaucratic culture in the country... We are still a country with a strongly patriarchal culture. The patriarchy is so apparent in politics.”

(A female key informant, Addis Ababa City Administration)

When the culture of organizations favors men, male leaders tend to discuss work issues and take advice from other males, causing further exclusion of women. This marginalizes women leaders, particularly if male leaders prefer to fill open leadership positions with other men. Participants pointed out that there are situations where qualified women are simply not considered for leadership positions, or promotions are only offered to men. Even when a position is given to a woman, the challenges she faces may become obstacles to further career development. A male key informant from Oromia reported:

“If a woman is assigned as a leader of an organization previously led by (a) male leader but still working in the same organization. We see that he disapproves and undermines the new leader just because she is a woman. He then becomes her challenge, creating obstacles in her work.”

Workplace Sexual Harassment/Gender Based Violence as a Disincentive

Participants recalled experiences of sexual harassment, particularly being expected to have an affair with a male boss to get a position or to not to be fired from their jobs. Experienced or perceived harassment and violence, or fear of violence, dissuaded women from pursuing their careers in male-dominated workplaces or sectors. In some cases, this related to their experiences of harassment while commuting to or working in isolated locations and venues, while in others, it relates to the use of inappropriate language, harassment, and/or use of sexual innuendos by colleagues, including managers and supervisors. The following quotes show how workplace sexual harassment is rampant and is affecting women's aspirations to become a leader or retain their positions.

"I once had a male authority asking me for sexual relationship if I wanted to be appointed for a leadership position. I refused, but I also did not get that position because of my refusal. I believe that it is not the qualification or competence that plays a key role for a woman to get to leadership or even a good job; rather personal relationships and informal networks with male officials pays off."

(A female leader, key informant, Adama, Oromia)

"There were times when I frequently faced sexual harassment by my colleagues. They wanted to exploit me simply because I am a woman."

(A key informant, Oromia)

"They [women] are vulnerable to rape, different kinds of sexual harassment and violence on their ways to look for better career especially to leadership positions. Women needs few facilitated conditions."

(A key informant, leader in a private company)

"Some people like your immediate bosses may try to sexually harass you, engage you into unwanted sexual relationships for the purpose of promoting you..."

(A key informant, Bahirdar)

“... there is widespread harassment. Be it verbal or other forms including sexual. This in fact hinder women from being ambitious to be (in) leadership positions. Sexual harassment also hinders a girl from becoming a leader and quit her aspiration and become leader whenever she gets a position. Sexual favor is often used by male bosses for becoming one or to have promotion. People usually expect something from women for the woman to have a job or leadership position.”

(A focus group participant, Bahirdar, Amhara region)

“Women may be challenged even after coming to leadership position because of gender-based violence. It is harming (the) working environment.”

(A key informant from CSO, Sidama)

“Workplace harassment is a big issue; men are often entitled to women’s time and romantic interest and will see women saying NO as something disrespectful.”

(A key informant, CSO, Federal)

“I also faced sexual harassment when I was learning my first degree. A teacher was pressurizing me and told me that he would give me an “F” if I refuse to have sexual relationship with him. I systematically passed through this challenge also without meeting his unwanted question.”

(A key informant, private organization, Oromia)



Needs of Women in Leadership

Women leaders are needed not just for fairness in terms of opportunities, but they bring skills, different perspectives, and cultural diversity within organizations. However, the barriers they face, in their experiences of upward mobility, make their succession to leadership less likely. Men and women in our study believe that the hurdles that are in front of women individually, culturally, and structurally make it harder for them to reach leadership positions. Then what needs to change?

We asked participants what needs to be done so that women may start realizing their potential and for them to aspire to and assume leadership roles. Responses suggested that personal level aspiration and commitment to leadership positions are fundamental factors in all social institutions including the family, interpersonal, and organizational level. Our study also found that personal level aspiration and commitment alone is inadequate, and that sustainable change needs to be supported by structural gender norm transformations. One of the frequently mentioned needs of women in this regard is enhancement in their technical expertise. Participants discussed the importance of capacity building programs and educational advancement opportunities to equip women with the relevant skills and knowledge.

“There is a need for women to develop interest in education, advancing their skill sets, so as to be able to compete in workplaces and in leadership. So, all we have to do is believe we can do anything; look for solutions to challenges we encounter. Things will not always be too easy to handle. Therefore, we need to educate ourselves, compete with others, and build our capacity. Government, CSOs, and other stakeholders’ role(s) should come after self-empowerment. Therefore, the woman herself needs to play the dominant role.”

(A focus group participant, Bahirdar, Amhara)

It was reported that capacity programs can be in the form of short- and long-term training to increase women’s competence in leadership skills. Suggested skills included: communication skills, emotional intelligence, mentorship, empowerment, opportunities to exercise leadership roles, scholarships for higher education, and strengthening affirmative action to offer more opportunities for women’s representation

at tertiary-level education programs. In addition to this, motivational seminars are thought to help and become a basis of moral support for women already in leadership positions. The Association of Women in Business was mentioned as a group that is organizing various seminars in empowering women in business and supporting their aspirations for leadership roles.

Participants agreed on the importance of creating an enabling environment for women to support their upward mobility. They described such an environment as starting from home and extending to their workplaces. As an immediate interpersonal factor, the family was given higher weight by participants regarding the support they need. They agreed that support from husbands and/or immediate family members plays a significant role for the success of any woman. This support encourages and facilitates her upward mobility. Similarly, community cultural biases can limit their mobility. This cultural bias should be addressed, and there is a need to create long lasting awareness that is geared towards general acceptance of women in leadership. In this regard, women mentioned culture and religion to be the main factors.

“...we need to promote acceptance by the community that women can be leaders. Society discriminates (against) women from the mainstreaming activities, while religion is another key factor affecting women to gain leadership positions.”

(A key informant, capacity builder, Somali region)

Community awareness programs that enhance change targeting both men and women are thus vital in this process. Stakeholders within the community are expected to collaborate to help women aspire into leadership and encourage them to take up leadership positions.

In a focus group that took place in Bahirdar, it was explained as:

“...stakeholders need to engage with women, men, in rural places and cities to bring attitude change. Family, colleagues, the government, and private and public education institutions must work together to help women aspire leadership and be successful at it.”

(A focus group participant, Bahirdar, Ethiopia)

Correspondingly, stereotypes as well as harmful traditional practices that impede women's ability to become leaders need to be addressed. Durable strategies are important in dismantling these stereotypes and biases towards women and girls. In relation to this, male involvement in women's success came out in the findings as a key driver for women's upward mobility. A way to involve men in supporting women is by focusing on the social attitudes, perceptions, and norms that men have internalized and that undermine women. It is fundamental to ensure that women leaders are supported by their husbands at household levels. This will be a motivating factor as women's roles carrying the “double burden” may ease and give them a chance to follow on their aspiration to become leaders.

“...work must be done on men/husbands to change their attitudes towards women. Engaging in household chores should not be left only to women. Rather men should share burdens of household chores. Interventions thus should include men.”

(A key informant, CSO leader, Oromia)

It also came out in the findings that trainings that advocate gender equality need to target men and boys. Participants believe that gender disparities begin from child-rearing, where boys are treated differently from girls. A transformation process with children's upbringing will emphasize the fact that boys and girls are equal through being treated equally in their rearing and by exposing them to equal opportunities can be critical in changing the perception around gender norms. This will help in inculcating a shift in child upbringing, which presently preaches boys for outside work, and girls for household chores.

Aspiring women and women holding leadership positions highlighted the need for mentors, role models, and networking. Leaders can mentor others through coaching, allowing young professionals to observe how they carry out their leadership roles. Moreover, participants strongly recommended that mentorship needs to go beyond the office environment. Women's networking similarly plays a significant role through developing bonds between women to exchange and encourage information and ideas. Such networking accelerates acquisition of skills and knowledge, in addition to the inspiration element embedded within it. They emphasized that peer-to-peer and female-to-female relationships need to be inculcated—calling it the ‘sisterhood chain’. Narratives were constructed as:

“...I am convinced that women themselves need to be responsible to raise their concerns and the concerns of other women. Women need to work together with their women sisters to enhance their participation.”

(A focus group participant, SNNPR)

“Women can empower each other in sharing their stories, which gives confidence to other women. Experience-sharing also offers techniques (for) how to solve problems in life.”

(A key informant, Somali)

At the organizational level, participants mentioned that many women may not possess the adequate financial status to pay for higher education. Considering the significance of educational advancement in encouraging women to gain access to leadership opportunities, they suggested that scholarship opportunities be expanded to all women in all regions, for undergraduate and graduate-level education. A key informant in Addis Ababa said:

“Access to education should be granted to all women everywhere. To help women in employment and leadership positions and ascend higher, need-based scholarship programs and other programs that help them to become competent are necessary.”

Safe space was a concern of most women in our study. They noted that women employees should come together and share experiences in a safe space.

“We need more women to be openly supportive of each other so they can create safe space for themselves and young professionals.”

(A key informant, women’s rights organization)

This space needs to be created by organizations through internal policies and actual implementation of these policies. Policies should also include gender transformative perspectives, using different strategies such as affirmative action and quota systems to promote women’s equal participation. One of the ways suggested by participants to show organizational readiness and political will is to help women in easing their burden of household chores, by providing enabling environments in the organization. Enabling environments may include initiatives like providing daycare facilities, changing/nursing rooms, and other accessible resources.

Overall, our findings show that it requires commitment from everyone, and across all organizations, to support women becoming leaders. The underrepresentation of women is a problem that needs to be tackled through a major change in conceptions about who can lead. The need to have support from their surrounding as a holistic method was stated as:

“Support from family, especially husband, staff and community in general, is important for women. Close follow up and support from regional and federal government as well is important. Actually, it is not easy but possible by doing the following: intensive community awareness about the significance of female’s leadership, provision of access and opportunity for women to be competent enough, designing female-oriented policy and work to make women free from cultural influence.”

(A key informant interview, capacity builder, Gambella)



Discussion

Ethiopia has laws and policies that provide for women's equal representation in leadership positions. Moreover, the country has designed affirmative action plans to facilitate women's aspirations and ascendance to leadership positions. Evidence from our study shows that participants acknowledge there have been significant changes over the past two decades. Ethiopian women are playing key leadership roles in many different sectors; in the three branches of government, in leading CSOs, and in private companies. Nonetheless, much remains to be done to achieve women's equal representation in key leadership and decision-making positions in both government and non-governmental organizations, including the private sector. Our study identified several barriers at all levels, ranging from individual, interpersonal, community, and organizational and structural/system levels. It was revealed that existing policy and program measures are far from being implemented fully. The challenges in achieving women's equal representation are embedded within the prevailing inequalities between men and women in the overall social, economic, and political dimensions, and they are persistent. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, Ethiopia's gender inequality index³¹ is at 0.517. Gender difference among key indicators is stark. For instance, mean years of schooling for females is 1.7; whereas the mean years of schooling for males is 4.3. Women's share of graduates from science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs in tertiary education is 17.3%, while share of graduates from the same field of study for males is 82.7%. This is consistent with our findings that women's representation in technology, construction, and other relevant science fields is very low. This suggests that women's disproportionate representation in key leadership positions is subject to the country's structural response. Structural changes are needed to transform the predominant gender inequality that manifests in key social, economic, and political processes.

Our study revealed that men and women's perception, behaviors and actions can delay the transformation of gender norms, and these changes cannot be achieved by policy and legislation alone. This is partly explained in terms of how the country's traditions, norms, and values retain more weight than formal legislation. On the other hand, even when the law seems to provide protection and equal rights to women educational opportunities, social support and financial resources are often inadequate for women to pursue their pathways into leadership. Our findings reveal that women have several needs that must be met, to be effective in their leadership roles. We suggest that these needs can also be taken as strategies to dismantle structural barriers and enhance enabling conditions to the progress of women leaders.

³¹ Gender inequality index measures gender inequalities in three important aspects of human development—reproductive health, measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates; empowerment, measured by proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older with at least some secondary education; and economic status, expressed as labour market participation and measured by labour force participation rate of female and male populations aged 15 years and older. It ranges from 0, where women and men fare equally, to 1, where one gender fares as poorly as possible in all measured dimensions. Accessed from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>

Further discussions at the individual, interpersonal, community, sociocultural, and organization levels are presented as follows.

Individual Level

Individual level issues are those which are intrinsic to the woman herself. They are emotional or attitudinal factors that come from barriers which impede a woman's efforts to advance. Family background and support, and personal drive, motivation, and commitment are attributes that are not necessarily possible to instill from the outside. However, as women become more accepted in educational and work environments, and as young women see more women in positions of leadership, the norms will slowly shift to be more welcoming and supportive. This should make it less "uncommon" for a woman to complete her education and pursue her career before or during finding a spouse and/or starting a family. Studies imply that women refrain from putting themselves forward, but rather, they tend to wait until someone recommends or discovers them.³² This may have an implication for programming outreach efforts, as the burden will fall on one side. Conversely, what women need to be is aware of the promotion and leadership possibilities for which their competence levels qualify. Our study findings are like Mutsagondo's (2015)³³ study, which observed that women are their own "worst enemies" when they understate themselves and other women. Internalized stereotypes, negative perceptions of women's capacities, and social norms that position women as homemakers who are responsible for all domestic responsibilities are often internalized by women themselves.

On the other hand, even if women exhibit significant self-confidence and personal drive to achieve their goals, these individual qualities will be insufficient. Women require trainings, both technical and life trainings, financial and material support, and targeted personal development to improve their self-image and enable them to act on their professional aspirations. As stipulated earlier in this report, participants mentioned The Association of Women in Business as an example of an organization offering a series of motivational seminars that work to empower women in business to aspire towards leadership roles. More initiatives like these are admirable and we recommend that they continue. Ultimately, women must have good negotiation skills to advocate for their own advancement and also to advocate on behalf of others. Relevant and focused trainings on negotiation skills can be of good value in this regard.

An important barrier identified at the individual level is work-life balance. Women are torn between their home responsibilities, especially family responsibilities, and their professional lives. This is attributed to the traditional norms that have defined role expectations for men and women. A woman must be a mother, a wife, and a leader, all at the same time. She is often challenged to choose between her family and her career. Studies have found that women are urged to compromise their career advancement and even leadership opportunities and interrupt their career paths to preserve their marriage and family roles.³⁴ In this regard, women can benefit from trainings and life skill education to resolve role incongruence from within, and so they can better define their life purposes in accordance with their own principles and values. The focus needs to be on instilling integration rather than balance. Diffusing the tensions between the two lives (work and home) actually helps a woman be more resilient, synchronizing her identity and become a good leader.

³² Mutsagondo, Samson. (2015). The long walk to leadership: Are women their own worst enemies? *Paradigms*. 9. 01-11. 10.24312/paradigms090101.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Apospori, E. a., Nikandrou, I. n., & Panayotopoulou, L. I. (2006). Mentoring and women's career advancement in Greece. *Human Resource Development International*, 9(4), 509-527. doi:10.1080/13678860601032627

Interpersonal Level—Family and Peers

Narratives in our study support the claim that a lack of role models is a barrier to the success and upward mobility of women in leadership. Women did not see mentors with whom they have a common goal, or a mentor did not exist at all. They shared insights that women in leadership or in the process of career advancement should seek, create, and maintain relationships with leaders and attract and secure successful mentors. The scarcity of women mentors and the exclusion of women from the leaders' network perpetuates structural and organizational barriers that hinder women's leadership opportunities. Participants in this study also noted that mentorship needs to go beyond the office environment. Mentorship must be practiced in schools at all levels alongside mentorship practiced in the work environment. Mentors can serve as role models for someone to follow, demonstrating professional skills, values, ethics, and integrity. They also influence ambitious women leaders' motivations in knowing they are acting as representations of a successful leader. Flanagan (2017)³⁵ established that women who have mentors and received the support from a role model become mentors themselves. We agree with Flanagan (2017) that mentorship thus causes a cyclic effect; the mentored becoming mentors, and role models creating other role models for women aspiring to leadership.

Networking is also an important skill for women who have leadership aspirations. Women leaders experience a lack of access to important social and professional networks due to different reasons. Some of these are in-gender group favoritism and home or family responsibilities, which have been analyzed in the barriers section. While exclusion from networks largely applies, there are a few women who maintained networking with other women colleagues for relevant formal and informal information sharing and decision-making. Interviews with participants revealed that networking is a necessary element for leadership opportunities. Networking would enhance women's ability to find out about open positions and to have network members advocate on their behalf. Women need to use every opportunity possible to expand and strengthen those personal and professional networks.

Considering the barrier women mentioned regard to female-to-female relationships, it is important to create opportunities for women to meet, cooperate, and share within a safe environment. This can be facilitated by women themselves with colleagues and organization leaders. Women of the same age may be able to learn from each other more than they do from older leaders. Programs that allow women to learn from the experiences of their peers, and a peer-to-peer experience sharing approach, as well as a role model approach, should be activated. Participants emphasized the importance of "support groups" or "women's caucuses" where women can get together in a safe space, compare experiences, and improve their ability to assist, nurture and mentor one another.

The overall significance of these findings is that women need to surround themselves with mentors, networks, and colleagues who can assist to evaluate their thoughts and decisions using reflective dialogues. Women will then be able to view their circumstances in properly focused mindsets and make decisions for themselves.

³⁵ Flanagan, N. (2015). Women in Education Leadership: Why Is This Important? What Difference Does It Make?

Community Level

Evidence from this study reveals that biases, stereotypes and prejudices hold women back from achieving their dreams of becoming leaders. These negative attachments are acquired, and once they are internalized, they can dictate women's behavior to ultimately be perceived true. Women can be more constructive and competent with the attitudes of those in direct control of leadership influenced and changed to positively aligned towards women's upward mobility in leadership. Women will carry a stronger sense of community when given the chance to engage in such leadership positions. We suggest inculcating the positive change of attitudes and mindsets for the position of women to improve. With the right assistance, encouragement, guidance and appreciation, women can show prosperity, liveliness, curiosity, and confidence. Society and community should thus adopt an attitude that states "*women can do what men can do*". This attitude is not only true, but it will also certainly help in boosting the self-image and self-esteem of women who are striving to be and become leaders. It is imperative to eradicate all expressions of stereotypes or attitudes that create a hostile environment for the advancement of women. This is, of course, a difficult change to catalyze from the outside. Nonetheless, gender-sensitization and gender consciousness-raising campaigns that portray women as competent leaders in a range of professional sectors may help encourage the necessary shift in perceptions and attitudes.

It is critical to address harmful traditional practices, including child marriage, that affect women's overall wellbeing, including their ability to access relevant services vital for their success. Participants believe that gender disparities begin during child-rearing, when boys are treated differently from girls. More specifically, the findings suggest that a transformative gender relationship needs to change in the parenting style that parents assume. This transformation in child upbringing will emphasize the fact that boys and girls are equal, and this will be experienced as children are treated equally in their rearing. Exposing children to equal opportunities can be critical in changing the perception around gender norms. Findings from this study also show that the barriers for women are worse in rural areas. More efforts on gender equality should be leveraged for regional states and rural areas than in urban areas.

Men's engagement is key to ensure that women leaders are supported by their spouses at the household level as a motivating factor in ensuring the existence of synergized efforts to push women to leadership roles and divide household chores among the wife and husband so that the woman is not overburdened. This also helps reduce marital pressures which sometimes results in divorce. Training men and boys on gender equality and gender mainstreaming will help to make them allies in women's equal representation in leadership positions.

Sociopolitical and Structural Level

Laws in Ethiopia are gender-neutral, assuming that both men and women are equally treated and provided with access to resources and implying that both men and women have the right to own and control their own assets. However, in practice, this is far from being true. In custom, men are better able to exercise rights, own and control assets, and access services and resources such as education. Even when a woman is contributing to household earnings, the man often exercises sole control over household finances and resources. We argue for legislative reforms promoting gender equality because they have an important impact on women's status. The country's efforts at reform are commendable. On the other hand, non-implementation of such laws or misrepresentation of these laws is as good as their absence. There are existing

policies that promote the equal participation of women in the public sphere. However, most policies need to be revised from a gender-transformative perspective to ensure genuine gender norm transformation.

The most important social/structural barrier revealed in our study is the prevalence of systemic organizational barriers. These barriers refer to those obstacles, inherent in organizations, which are related to policy and practice, institutional culture, and working arrangements and the environment. Interviewed women recognized that structural barriers existed for women, but they frequently focused on individual rather than systemic remedies. They gave a high degree credit to their personal agency, efforts, and hard work as responsible for overcoming structural obstacles and achieving success. At the same time, they also talked about the deep-rooted nature of the masculine work culture that persists in all settings. They said that the more obvious means of discrimination are being eliminated, but the subtle ones remain. This subtle unconscious bias reveals itself when requiring women to operate in specific workplaces or sectors that are not respectful of women, or that do not acknowledge their rightful place in leadership. It is also clear in the form of male preference, when training and personal development opportunities appear, when there is an unfair demand of work for the women, and many others. The glass ceiling is experienced when women feel denigrated at work and when they encounter regular sexual, hateful gossip about having achieved a certain position due to their looks, and/or the provision of sexual favors.

This undermines women's capacity to become leaders. Workplace environments thus require multi-faceted interventions ranging from non-tolerance policies against sexual harassment, ensuring work responsibilities are compatible with family duties; to ensuring adequate professional and social support for female employees. Some programs and policies that are designed for women, such as provision of childcare facilities or more family friendly work hours, were seen to also improve life for men, who would benefit from being more involved in parenting. Young children who see both parents actively participate and have success in the workforce will also grow up with different gender norms and expectations. They may have greater motivation to become female leaders if they are girls, or support them, if they are boys. Such workplace environments require organizational readiness in terms of resources, political will, and programmatic support for women to promote them to leadership. Organizational readiness can be understood to align with change initiatives that include variables such as commitment, trust, workplace autonomy, support, recognition, and fairness.

Based on the findings of our study, organizations should pay attention to women's career development, because they have power when it comes to women advancing towards leadership positions. Organizations should also take steps to overcome glass ceiling barriers and build their own family-friendly policies, even when legislative requirements are not in place. Empirical data suggests that stakeholders at the institutional level need to support women's leadership through leadership trainings and by nurturing the realization of becoming women leaders. These kinds of initiatives should be replicated in the form of capacity building programs, because improving women's expertise is one of the most frequently suggested intervention in our study. They also equip women with relevant knowledge and the skills that they need for upward mobility. Our study reveals that women need short-term and long-term training sessions to increase their competence in leadership. Training should include mentorship, empowerment, opportunities to exercise leadership roles, and scholarships for higher education. Affirmative action programs that offer more opportunities for women's representation at tertiary level education programs were frequently mentioned.



Conclusions

Our study has explored the barriers to and enabling conditions /support systems of women in leadership roles in Ethiopian settings. It portrays the ways in which stakeholders, including women, might help women leaders to overcome these barriers, strengthen facilitating factors, and make use of current opportunities. Women in leadership in Ethiopia are facing a range of barriers, including social stereotyping, traditional Ethiopian patriarchal culture, low self-determination to assume leadership responsibilities, the responsibilities of caring for family, and perceived womanly character traits. In line with the literature, we observe that women leaders benefit from possessing better skills in conflict resolution, leading with collaboration and relationship-oriented approaches, compared to male leaders. Interestingly, male participants in the study agree with this assertion.

The country has a policy of reserving a significant portion of leadership seats for women. However, as far as achieving it on the ground, a truly equal position in leadership for women is still a concern. More rigid laws and policies and strict guidelines for thorough implementation are needed. This can be done while parents engage in indoctrinating the concept of gender equality into their children.

Women leaders identified organizational barriers including controlling the power of women leaders, limited upward mobility hindering promotions to higher positions at work, and prejudicial treatment against women leaders. They stated that these barriers are the core explanations for women's underrepresentation in leadership. Unavailability of support systems, both personally and professionally, also emerged as key issues behind women's underrepresentation. Enabling conditions for women leaders, on the other hand, included support from family and friends, mentorship, and networking. We looked at patterns in which these aspects appear both as support; and on some occasions, as barriers; and we found that there are intersections. Women recognized their personal strength as a supportive factor. They give credit to their own resilience, personal agency, hard work, and efforts to overcome these obstacles to follow their leadership path and/or career advancement.

Finally, while we recognize a degree of heterogeneity existing among the regions, it was significant that the state of women's leadership was driven by common barriers, enabling conditions, and needs of women in each region. We appreciate the regional disparities regarding the issue at hand, yet the findings lack major territorial differences. Certain aspects of the subject were emphasized by some participants in the different regions compared to others. However, the emphasis given to these aspects did not rise to a level of significance as a distinguisher across the regions. Rather, differences in thoughts of participants, bearing in mind the actual indicators, have common threads. We have attempted to ensure good geographical

coverage to enrich the data. Yet, looking at key pointers of barriers and enabling conditions, the essential components are similar across the regions; findings were revealed in a consistent manner. Such overlap between findings is also a significant finding in itself, demonstrating that the state of women's leadership is almost static. These similarities should not go unnoticed. On the other hand, we also recognize the limitations of our study in terms of statistical generalizability attributed to the methodological design. Although the degree of similarity depends on the range of data collection and number of participants included, the number of regions included for comparison leads us to expect that future research will also find substantial similarity and transferability. Nonetheless, we have compiled a summary description of the data that was found in each study region for detailed explanation. (See Appendices 2-4.)



Recommendations

Our work advocates for a positive attitude towards women who aspire to become leaders in Ethiopia. These women need encouragement, motivation, and support. Below are recommendations drawn from our findings:

Individual Level

- Provide training for women to improve their self-image, self-esteem, to have high aspirations, and motivating them to have self-confidence.
- Provide trainings for women to resolve role conflict within the household and to make life choices that align with their values and principles.

Interpersonal

- Women must change the “old-boy” network dialogue into a “women can lead” network. Women who reach leadership have the capacity to start and develop similar networking systems as men, and they can expand to bigger networks as more women enter the system.
- Unity is needed among women, in the form of women’s caucuses or support groups, where women can gather in a safe space, compare experiences, and improve their ability to assist and nurture one another.
- Mentoring is recommended to fight the institutional norms and values that exclude women. Mentoring can be arranged where a woman who has experience and knowledge can actively support the development of another woman.
- Offer leadership training to mentors so they can give their support for the next generation of female leaders, creating a cycle in which mentored women become mentors for other women.

Community

- Work to reduce harmful stereotypes and replace them with more positive representations of women as competent leaders. Hold gender-sensitization and gender consciousness-raising campaigns.
- Deliver campaigns and deliver seminars on transformative gender relationships to reverse the gendered parenting styles that parents assume. Provide trainings on child upbringing to underscore the fact that boys and girls are equal and are to be treated equally.
- Engage men and boys in all gender dialogues, seminars, and campaigns, because it is key to advancing gender equality. It is also necessary to transform the traditional norms and values that reinforce patriarchy.

Social/Structural

- Develop strategies to break the “glass ceiling” using different strategies; for example, eliminating occupational segregation and accepting women in roles that are dominated by men.
- Design mandatory regulations to reflect 50% female participation in trainings, recruitment for leadership positions, and promotion.
- Offer women greater flexibility in where, when, and how to work. This could be a solution to women’s barrier of work-life balance to their leadership aspirations. The organization also gets to retain a competent woman who also want to be there for her family.
- Promote organizations that eliminate sexism and that offer gender equivalence experiences and opportunities for leadership.
- Allocate and arrange for organizational resources to support women’s needs (e.g., trainings) to achieve success, and offer strength-based professional development plans.
- Devise a system of mentoring and networking within organizations that will support women’s upward mobility, and advocate for potential woman leaders.
- Women’s empowerment and support programs such as affirmative action should involve women and they must be led by women themselves to challenge the masculine role-image.

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Appendix 1: Number of Women, Both Aspirant Women and Leaders, Supported Through UN Women, Women in Leadership and Governance Project

Regions	Year	Number of Targeted Women Leaders	Remark on Initiatives ³⁶
National ³⁷	2011-2012	40 female civil servants	Through the Joint Program on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (JP GEWE) Phase I. Given scholarship to pursue Master's degrees, which helped most to climb the leadership ladder.
	2018	55	UN Women, Women in Leadership and Governance Program which was launched in September 2017. (WILG Program) Donors for WILG include Sweden, Norway, Austria, Denmark.
	2019	196	WILG Program
	2021	115	WILG Program (Number includes around 50 women who benefited from a coaching program).
	2022	49	Presidential leadership program funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
Tigray	2015	61 (41 M/20 F)	Transformative Leadership Training through JP GEWE Phase II.
SNNPR	2015	69 (30 M/39 F)	Transformative Leadership Training through JP GEWE Phase II.
Amhara (WILG Program Target Region)	2015	500	Through JP GEWE Phase II.
	2018	476	WILG Program
	2019	37	WILG Program
	2020	198	WILG Program
	2021	293	WILG Program
Oromia (WILG Program Target Region)	2019	149	Through JP GEWE Phase II.
	2021	260	WILG Program
TOTAL		2,043	

³⁶ UN Women also has a women's political empowerment program that has targeted more than 500 women since 2019 to enhance their capacity on political leadership and campaigning. It also launched a mentorship program in 2019, for which a standard mentorship guide has been developed based on a mapping of mentorship initiatives targeting the Amhara and Oromia Regions. The mentorship initiative was prevented from being fully operationalized due to COVID-19 and the security deterioration in the country. However, there is a plan to pursue the same initiative as the security situation improves. UN Women also launched a Transformative Leadership for Gender Equality training program and a dedicated center in collaboration with Amhara BoWCSA and Bahirdar University in Amhara, and in collaboration with Oromia BoWCSA and Oromia Leadership Academy in Oromia, to increase sustainable capacity-building backstops for women leaders.

³⁷ National programs are carried out in collaboration with MoWSA, and they target all women from the federal to regional levels of the country, including Benishangul and Gambella.

Appendix 2: Women Leaders' Needs: Comparison by Region and Type of Organization

Region	Leaders in Government	Leaders in CSOs	Leaders in Private Sector
Oromia	<p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from family • Spousal support <p>Work environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational support by allocating adequate budget, logistics, good working environment and facilities • Encouragement and recognition for women's performance • Appropriate feedback • Clarity in implementing policies • Change in overall organizational attitudes towards women leaders • Harassment-free work environment <p>Capacity Building:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills training in self-confidence, leadership skills etc. • Economic independence • Positive public attitude/trust that women can do the job effectively. 	<p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family engagement in taking household responsibility • Spousal support <p>Community Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abandonment of sociocultural negative attitudes towards women <p>Work Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from high level leaders and their followers • Acknowledging women's performance, giving rewards, and motivating them to do more • Facilitate women engaging in various leadership activities. <p>Capacity Building:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-confidence and to believe in own ability to lead • Having a vision, commitment, and to work hard • Access to education at all levels for girls and women • Opportunity and exposure to leadership experience 	<p>Work Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage women to join the workforce in the private sector. • Establish an attractive working environment and system. • Supportive work environment <p>Capacity Building:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build the capacity of women staff in work related knowledge and skills. • Support from colleagues
SNNPR + Sidama	<p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from families <p>Work environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation facility or housing service near working area • Day care service • Close follow up from immediate supervisor • Conducive work environment • Long term trainings (BA/MA level) • Targeted training in female leadership • Experience sharing/exchange program under a female leader • Training in technology literacy (computer) 	<p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All mentioned by women working in government are already said. <p>Work Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion to higher position • Junior leaders need to be given the opportunity. • Gender-based division of labor change in the household (need to be balanced and spouses need to share responsibility) <p>Capacity Building:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspirational and motivational trainings to help young leaders become aspirants • Targeted and focused training on relevant life skills and leadership skills • Training to help women develop their own vision, be effective decision makers • Training in conflict management, self-confidence, problem solving skills • Women's own commitment 	<p>Work Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training in good communication skills • Women's own efforts to grow • Acknowledge women's work. • Reward women when they perform better to encourage others.

Region	Leaders in Government	Leaders in CSOs	Leaders in Private Sector
Amhara	<p>Work environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivating women leaders, deliver on-job training, support women's than loading the work only and be cooperative • Get men leaders' support for women leaders • Deliver training to change their attitudes to accept women's leadership • Avoid fearing of up and downs and put their fingerprint for their country. • Work on societal attitude change like school clubs involving girls, improve curriculum by including gender matters. <p>Peer Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the experience of successful women's leadership. • Leadership skill training and better budget support <p>Work Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition for their achievement • Motivating women leaders, deliver on-job training, support women's work rather than loading the work only, and be cooperative. • Get men leaders' support for women leaders. • Deliver training to change their attitudes to accept leadership, avoid the fear of up and downs, and to put their fingerprint for their country. <p>Capacity Building:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant and continuous capacity building • Capacity building training at all levels, that enhance attitudes and capacity to engage in leadership • Self-motivation, commitment • Recognition for their achievement <p>School Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making girls' education compulsory • Work on societal attitude changes, like school clubs involve girls, improve curriculum by including gender matters 	<p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support women starting from childhood • Nurturing from family, community (Awuramba community good example) • Family must come first, then your colleagues and the local community. <p>Community Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community attitudinal change, creating awareness for women and men • Nurturing from community (Awuramba community good example) <p>Peer Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share the experience of successful women leaders, motivate women, continuous coaching and mentoring <p>Work Environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating conducive working environment • Capacity building training for women • Share responsibility • Strong support • Set motivation strategies including word motivations. • Continuous coaching and mentoring, working at grass root level to be models. <p>Capacity Building:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education, leadership training • Family, government and NGOs play key roles • Involve women in policy development because they know the solutions, involve all women including housewives • Economic support • Projects that work on the family level, involve men also • Capacity building training • Provide guidance and support • Education, conducive working environment, updated training, community awareness training, appreciation(acknowledgment) • Scholarship opportunity, opportunity to participate in different meetings and research seminars <p>School Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need curriculum on women, gender and leadership at all levels of education, starting from primary to higher level. • Access to education for girls in rural areas 	<p>Capacity Building:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training • Continuous support and follow-up • NGOs unreserved support in logistics and training is important. • Pay based on their efforts • Give material and technology support and give recognition for their efforts. • Give education opportunity, and bounce.

Region	Leaders in Government	Leaders in CSOs	Leaders in Private Sector
Somali	Family: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self- preparation • Enhance educational status. • Familiarize self with politics. • Have experience and effort. • Have the concept and knowledge of politics, and the ambition to hold political office. • Eradicate harmful traditional practices 	Community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach community about women's roles and abilities to get acceptance. • Provide chance for education, training and exchanging of experience with others. 	Capacity Building: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economy is very crucial because it enhances their education and capacity. Work Environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family friendly work environments (maternity leave, assign them near to their families.)
Gambella	Capacity Building: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continues leadership skill training and experience sharing • Conducive and protective working environment • Professional and leadership freedom • Motivation and encouragement • Support and enable them to upgrade their education qualifications. • Provide/allocate appropriate financial and other resources. • Better educational access for higher education • Creating better economic opportunities and make them independent 	Work Environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical implementation of the designed policy and guideline • Conducive and protective working environment • Professional and freedom • Motivation and encouragement 	Capacity Building: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous training on leadership skills • Conducive and protective working environment Work Environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer support • Make accessible all guidelines and material resources and enable them to have better understanding about their organizations' mission, vision, and objectives. • Expand the institutions that provide leadership courses to be easily accessible for females. • Provide technical support.

Appendix 3: Barriers: Comparison by Region and Type of Organization

Region	Leaders in Government	Leaders in CSOs	Leaders in Private Sector
Oromia	<p>Personal Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's hopelessness • Inability to use the available opportunities for women • Economic dependence • Women themselves fail in assisting and encouraging each other and lack the courage to become leaders. • Knowledge and skills gaps • Women themselves do not have the knowledge to present their case and they also hesitate to come out and tell their problems. • Women's lack of knowledge and information on how the government system operates • Little knowledge about the laws and regulations • Low self-confidence and underestimating their ability to do the job • Women refuse to take higher leadership positions. This is due to fear of being divorced or separated. • Lack experience and culture of preparing prospective women leaders through coaching and training • In some cases, women with no experience are assigned to a leadership position, facing challenges in their job. <p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facing role conflict between family responsibility and leadership duties <p>Community Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative social attitude • Immense disregard and undermining of women, considering women are unable to lead by simply raising minor faults • Widespread social stigmas towards women's ability in general • Women undermine the ability and contribution of other women. <p>Structural/Institutional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reluctance of higher-level leaders to allow women leaders to promote a higher leadership ladder • Lack of programs that help women develop leadership capacity 	<p>Structural/Institutional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deprived promotion due to her ethnicity • Lack of conducive working environment • Young women mostly face a discouraging situation, they face low-performance evaluations. • Inadequate budgets <p>Community Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural barriers have influenced women not to ask their rights, even at the organization level. 	<p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household burden/responsibility is the main barrier hindering women leaders from discharging responsibilities. • Women leaders often think about household responsibilities while in office meetings. This exerts excessive pressure, obscuring women from fulfilling household responsibilities. <p>Structural:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of others in hindering your progression or discouraging you • Professional setbacks or problems that emerged • Negative social attitudes or biases (stigma and discrimination, if any, based on gender, age, ethnicity, political, ideological difference...) • Direct request for a sexual favor in higher education and also offices <p>Community Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative attitude for women in leadership positions if they abandoned their home and divorce their husband

Region	Leaders in Government	Leaders in CSOs	Leaders in Private Sector
Oromia (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrongful defamation against women leaders • Gender-based stigma and discrimination • Political and ideological differences • Interference of social, personal, and other factors in regular work • Women lack the opportunity to show their potential. • Low commitment to implement what is stated in policy regarding women equal participation in leadership • Ethnicity and political outlook • High likelihood of finding faults in women leaders, favoritism towards men leaders • Sexual harassment (asking for sexual favor) • Lack of network, personal relations women develop with men in higher leadership positions • Politicians' preferences for women who are submissive and easily accept every decision 		
SNNPR	<p>Personal Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear to come into a leadership position • Loss of inspirations <p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double burden both at home and institution • Families may not be able to allow to leadership positions. <p>Community Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities also may not accept women leaders. <p>Structural/Institutional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination based on sex by higher officials • Networking and relationship with higher officials • Ethnic discrimination 	<p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The double burden on women <p>Community Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness by the community <p>Structural/Institutional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not accepting women as leaders • Negative social attitudes • Discrimination by ethnic and religious status 	<p>Structural/Institutional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not being supported by government signatories • Not being encouraged (school owner) • Gender-based discrimination
Gambella	<p>Personal Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School dropout due to marriage • Taking the domestic responsibility <p>Community Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low acceptance of female leadership in the community • Culture of the community is the basic one, perception. 	<p>Personal Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge • Sometimes frustration and fear to be a leader <p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance from their husband (less interest and support from their husband) 	<p>Community Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural attitudes towards female leadership • Low acceptance from the community • Resistance from their husband <p>Structural/Institutional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance to their decision from male colleagues

Region	Leaders in Government	Leaders in CSOs	Leaders in Private Sector
Gambella (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An early marriage hinders females from continuing in their educations. • In the context of Gambella, most females, especially the natives, are expected to give their salary to their husbands. This makes them economically dependent and discourages them from higher/better leadership positions. 	Community Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture of the community is the basic perception • Less exposure and experience related to early marriage hinders females from continuing their education. 	
Amhara	Personal Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower educational level • Frustration against judgment • Poor academic and professional readiness • Women believe that they can lead. Family Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectation to become the primary caregiver for their children • Responsibility to lead home and to care for children • Household workload • Care for children • Absence of husband support • Family problems 	Personal Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women themselves believe that we can't do leadership. • Childbearing starting from 16 years and lack of same access to resources as men • Economic problem to cover my education cost and household cost • Self-doubt, lack of role models to get encouragement, belief that women's leadership is contradicted by religion • Lack of access to education • Women's low self-esteem Family Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility to lead my home, social relations • Having a child without family consent and early divorce 	Family Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My husband strongly opposed my leadership responsibility and forced me to stay home. • Lack of supporting family • Community says women leaders are worthless. • Community, lifelong thoughts on women's leadership skills, plus lower community awareness on saving and loan • Immediate supervisors' negative attitude, that women cannot be the leader, which they inherited from childhood • Men leader's prerequisite to do/have a relation with them to give position and upgrade women's staff • Burden at home, balancing work and home tasks, is a difficult one
Amhara	Community Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even if she performs well men did not recognize women's (achievements). • Negative community attitude on women's leadership capability • Community fails to motivate/ appreciate women's good work, as men this affect women's mind. • Negative community thoughts on women's leadership capability and skill • Men leader has negative feelings to give a high position to women • Societal awareness and attitude towards women: it emanates from the pattern of parenting, schooling, socialization that favors men to be a leader. • Societal attitudes, still associate leadership only with men 	Cultural Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative social attitudes or prejudices by the community regarding women's leadership capability • Community negative attitude regarding women's leadership • Having child without family consent and early divorce with my wife • Negative social attitudes or prejudices by the community regarding women's leadership capability • Women themselves believe that we can't do/leadership • Society privileges men. • Society discourages women by saying, "Why is she acting like a man?" • Making jokes on women leaders 	Cultural Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community says women's leaders are worthless. • Community lifelong thoughts on women's leadership skills plus lower community awareness on saving and loan • Customers are more attracted to men than women managers. Low acceptance of women managers

Region	Leaders in Government	Leaders in CSOs	Leaders in Private Sector
Amhara (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In addition, discrimination based on ethnicity, political ideology • The customers themselves need men and elderly leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most leader women are single because those with husbands do not get support. • Community expects women to stay at home. Home responsibilities • Community says also women cannot do well like men in a leadership position belief, do not appreciate and acknowledge women leaders' performance 	
Amhara	Structural Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failed to see and support women as men are seen and supported • *Gondar*: The customers themselves need men and elderly leaders. • Men staff did not want women leaders. • Give lower position starting from the department and even if she performs well, men did not recognize women's role. • There are policies and regulations but not successful until awareness improves. To know and implement 	Structural Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor government commitment to motivating women for leadership • Lack of experience to collaborate with women's leaders • Govt not free from politics • Govt demand to be a government party member, promotion is based on party affiliation. • Unhealthy Politics, sexual harassment • Must have the political experience to be a leader. • Assignment of women at Woreda level far, from their home • Evaluation difference women leaders are facing • Limited opportunities • Poor treatment of women's capacity, mocking attitude of men towards women's aspiration • Government not willing to provide working area, bureaucratic • Current political situation, many people do not trust the current political (party) and are fearful of high turnover, as a result, women are not interested to be assigned on a leadership position. • Budget for the telephone call • Shortage of budget(per-diem) to attend training • Challenge because of my ethnicity, those who are educated evaluate not by your activities rather by your affiliations too • The biggest barrier comes from men staff members, some showed signs of disdain. 	Structural Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate supervisors' negative attitude that women can't lead, that they inherited from childhood • Men leaders' prerequisite to do/have a relation with them to give position and upgrade women's staff • Bosses were not kind and positive. Just because they are only men, they need to let you (fall) behind every good opportunity. • Pressure and continuous requests for corruption and illegal things • But to be honest, the working environment and relationship for women leaders in this country are filled with a negative attitude, discouraging comments, demanding and risky working situations. • They choose to harass and discourage women. Instead of supporting and motivating women, some leaders focus on mechanisms of discouraging women, harassing them, and disempowering women.

Region	Leaders in Government	Leaders in CSOs	Leaders in Private Sector
Gurage	<p>Personal Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So much social affair • Refusing position (Focus Group 2P1) • Poor self confidence • Not giving enough time for reading, learning, and equipping • Not coping with challenges • Responsibility with the social issue • Not valuing their idea <p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility at home • Jealous husband • Childbearing <p>Community Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The negative attitude of society <p>Structural/Institutional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scarcity of training • Not being listened • Discouragement by other • Not being assigned to one's field of study • Absence of regular promotion • Women do not support each other. 	<p>Personal Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving up easily • Lack of encouragement • Lack of upgrading herself with education • Economic problem • Not valuing her decision • Economic problem • Lack of initiator <p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household responsibility <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unnecessary culture • Burden at the social area <p>Structural/Institutional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long distance to school • Lack of acknowledgment • Ethnic problem • Gender based violations • The few numbers of female leaders • Lack of training • Rumors 	<p>Personal Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own less motivation <p>Structural/Institutional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortage supply • Lack of enough staff • Some staff do not want to show you what they know. • More service requirement while having leadership skill
Addis Ababa	<p>Personal Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The women's view about themselves • The women's own negative self-esteem <p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of support from family • Family burden <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Society's view • Religious and cultural practices and views limiting women to the house, the kitchen, as servants of men <p>Structural/Institutional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failing to implement the policies • Failing to accept women as their bosses or heads 	<p>Personal Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women do not have qualifications to compete with men. <p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They do not have equal time with men. • Abusive and exploitative husbands <p>Community Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing women as incapable, as if they belong to the kitchen <p>Structural/Institutional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too high requirements in vacancies: The recruitment process in CSOs is discouraging for women. • For example, work experience and qualification • Not only their views of themselves but of other women are not right sometimes. Women need to accept the leadership qualities of themselves and other women. 	<p>Personal Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The women's own negative self-esteem <p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family responsibilities. Sometimes women would be forced to choose between family and career; many choose family and that is why we do not see many women in leadership positions.

Appendix 4: Enabling Conditions /Support/Opportunities: Comparison by Region and Type of Organization

Region	Leaders in Government	Leaders in CSOs	Leaders in Private Sector
Oromia			
Addis Ababa	Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of enabling policy and legal frameworks • Establishment of day care centers at the sub-city level in Addis Ababa: Good beginning that needs to be projected to different sectors • Women can voice their views • Affirmative action: provides women with relatively better opportunities to pursue education and leadership positions but still it is problematic in terms of scope and implementation 	Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent opportunity for many women to come to leadership position 	
SNNPR + Sidama	Personal Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal inspiration • Family support Structural/Institutional: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion from the institution • Training opportunities • Educational support • Affirmative action for computations 	Family Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family support and encouragement • Inspirations by women • Self confidence 	
Amhara	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government commitment to give 50% leadership position for women on-government from minister up to lower level (EMAH-DB-02, Level of leadership –vice head zone health • Currently global, national laws to bring women into leadership in Ethiopia • Government commitment to give position for women in different place • Technology that reduced the burden of women at home, like electric stove and laundry machine (EMAH-DB-06, Level of leadership –head of zone WCYO) • Life lesson, strive to use every work opportunity, family, and staff members • Political change in the last three years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to education for women • The existence of different community and government organization that helps women to exercise leadership • Government commitment to give 50% leadership position to women are favourite conditions (EMAH-DB-01, Level of leadership –senior) • Government commitment to give 50% leadership position for women (EMAH-DB-04, Level of leadership –area manager • Gondar: My parents helped me to participate actively in school clubs, my husband understands me, we were in same HIV/AIDS club, he helps me home related activities like taking care of our children. • DB: Access to education for women's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training delivered to women's only for women by NGO and governments • She said that there is enabling environment and policy for women's leader, because our SACO bylaws forced to give 75% of position to women's. • Government also decides to hold half. • Gondar: Family members, my husband, staff members, colleagues • Training delivered to women's only for women by NGO and governments • There is enabling environment and policy for women's leader, because our SACO bylaws forced to give 75% of position to women's. • Government also decides to hold half leadership position for women.

Region	Leaders in Government	Leaders in CSOs	Leaders in Private Sector
Amhara (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The existence of government structure women, children and social affairs, presence of women associations, to raise women issues and cooperate, demand change when needed. <p>Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DB: Government commitment to give 50% leadership position for women on-government from minister up to lower level *Laws: currently global, national laws to bring women into leadership in Ethiopia, *Technology that reduced the burden of women at home, like electric stove and laundry machine, <p>Enabling Conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal character: like supportive, ability to work in a team, transparent, personal motivation, Work experience, teamwork Capacity/Ability: ability work at grass root level and solve any problem faced Perspective: see things positively Support and motivation from other, Family support, different men and women's, colleague support, leaders in other organization *Education opportunity, education background, ready to learn Experience sharing commitment to learn from other especially from experienced leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The existence of different community and government organization that helps women to exercise leadership and Government commitment to give 50% leadership position to women are favorite conditions BD: Free and open environment, equal opportunity for both men and women Support from my husband, mother, sisters Policies and documents that support women Affirmative action Attitudinal improvement on women leadership...society are developing "she can lead mentality" <p>Enabling Conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe environment like Day Care, Prevent sexual harassment, There are inclusive policies but challenge in executing to actions. Gender mainstreaming, organizations that promote female employees, The prime minister perception on women participation and capacity 	<p>Enabling Conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DB: NGO provided the opportunity to engage in group saving to share idea from others to exercise leadership. Different training delivered to saving groups and Plc. leaders Perspective: positive thinking, transparency accepting the ideas of others Community facilitators and economic strengthen animators' support Personal effort to upgrade education Positive relation with people Communication skill and work interest and motivation Family support, education opportunity Current country condition, resource mobilization, against corruption, time management, efficiency of accomplishing a certain task The existence of different community and government organization that helps women to exercise leadership and
Somali	<p>Government Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current government system by itself is very supportive for women leadership. Provide chance of education Government also gives opportunities of leadership for women. Encouraging the potential and capacity of women leadership, The institution provides different opportunities like education, chance to participate in decision making, invite women in leadership training <p>Personal/Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal effort, vision, commitment There are some family support and encouragement for women leadership. 	<p>Government Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach community about women roles and abilities to get acceptance Provide chance for education, training and exchanging of experience with others. Participating in different training, dedication, loyalty, commitment The institution provides priority for women leadership, covers many issues of women in their schedule and program 	<p>Government Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equipping women with economy is very crucial because it enhances their education and capacity. Creating conducive work environments for women like improving the time for maternity leave, assign them near to their family or parent. Some private sectors facilitate opportunities for education, lending money <p>Personal/Family Level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being a reader Visiting and looking many things Asking others Self-prepared and make ready to reduce age related barriers

Region	Leaders in Government	Leaders in CSOs	Leaders in Private Sector
Gambella	Government Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of short-term leadership related training • Government policy (with implementation gap) • Better access for reading materials • Getting attention and availability of successful role model females at federal level and even globally 	Government Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government policy • Good education opportunity • Different opportunity to attend workshop training related with leadership • Organizational policy • Attention given by project and donor as well • High interest of donor in the project 	Government Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government policy (with implementation gap) • Availability of short-term leadership related training • Better access for reading materials
Gurage	Personal Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self confidence • Interest and commitment • Taking leadership role seriously • Effort to enhance technical competence through reading • Love to the profession • Developing a holistic perspective to issues (whole roundedness) and wisdom on how to lead Family Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family/spousal support • Elevated community awareness • Encouragement by some staff • Education opportunity • Development of guidelines • Female leadership trainings 	Personal Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patience • Respect for other • Helping other • Mother and sibling contribution • Friends support 	Personal Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal effort • Working extremely hard • Observe what other does • Ask for anything unclear • Exercise to know more • Communication skills Community Level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance by society