

Research Application Summary

Opportunities and challenges of private sector female managers in the south west region of Cameroon

Chiamti, E.¹, Ekume Etomes, S.² & Molua, E.L.³

¹Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, University of Buea, SWR, Cameroon

²Faculty of Education, University of Buea, SWR, Cameroon ³Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine, University of Buea, SWR, Cameroon

Corresponding author: etomes2006@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper examines the challenges faced by female managers in the south west region of Cameroon and the opportunities open to them. Female managers were classified as entrepreneurs/business owners and employees in enterprises. Data were obtained from surveys and interviews of women and business persons. It was observed that a majority of women in the south west region of Cameroon are employees in business organizations, with only 4% of them owning enterprises they work in. This shows the challenges that women face in entrepreneurship. However, even as employees, most climb to leadership positions and employ collaborative management style with a 4% minority employing authoritative management style. A significant proportion feels motivated working in an environment where the majority of their colleagues are males and some 23% feel competent in such an environment. These women and business persons report that women have the opportunity to occupy positions such as accountants, auditors, tellers, cashiers, secretaries and many others. On testing the challenges of female managers, the statistical test fails to reject the hypothesis that women efforts are not affected by the challenges they encounter. The paper thus concludes that diverse approaches should be employed to enhance women's managerial capacities and improve on their performance.

Key words: Challenges, entrepreneurs, female managers, opportunities

Résumé

Cet article étudie les défis auxquels sont confrontées les femmes gestionnaires ou cadres dans la région du Sud-Ouest et les opportunités qui s'offrent à elles. Ces femmes ont été catégorisées comme entrepreneurs / chefs d'entreprise et employées des entreprises. Les données ont été obtenues à partir d'enquêtes et d'entretiens. Il a été observé que la majorité des femmes dans la région du sud-ouest du Cameroun étaient des employées dans les organisations professionnelles, avec seulement 4% d'entre elles possédant des entreprises. Ces résultats indiquent les défis auxquels sont confrontées les femmes en matière d'entrepreneuriat. Cependant, même en tant qu'employés, la plupart accèdent à des postes de direction et utilisent un style de gestion collaboratif, avec une minorité de 4% employant un style de gestion autoritaire. Une proportion importante se sent motivée à travailler dans un environnement où la majorité des collègues sont des hommes et quelque 23% se sentent compétents dans un tel environnement. L'étude rapporte que les femmes ont la possibilité d'occuper des postes tels que

comptables, auditeurs, caissiers, secrétaires et bien d'autres. En testant les défis des femmes cadres, le test statistique n'as pas rejeté l'hypothèse selon laquelle les efforts des femmes ne sont pas affectés par les défis qu'elles rencontrent. Le document conclut donc que diverses approches devraient être utilisées pour renforcer les capacités de gestion des femmes et améliorer leurs performances.

Mots clés: défis, entrepreneurs, femmes managers, opportunités

Introduction

Gender equality in the sphere of education and the job market has been the cry of most countries including Cameroon and international organizations to protect the female population for many years. As such, countries and some international organizations have put in place employment and education policies to reduce gender gap in the job market and education. Vaughan (2016) report that the concept of equality between men and women was set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Since then it has been fore grounded and elaborated in a number of international agreements, most prominently the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 on women, peace and security, and most recently Sustainable Development Goal 5, 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls', launched in 2015. Gender equality in education and other aspects of the education of the girl child is most relevant for equality at the job market though not a panacea. For women to occupy management positions, they need a lot of experience and education to be productive as their male counterpart. Without education, it is difficult for females to have lucrative positions in the job market. As female managers, they have opportunities to work in companies or enterprises and can equally take up entrepreneurial activities. Female managers are typically women who occupy management positions in a company or enterprise either by appointment or entrepreneurship while Women entrepreneurs may be individuals or a group of women who have the intention of starting a new enterprise. They exercise management functions such as planning, leading, executing, and controlling business activities (Manerkar, 2015).

Though the right to education protects the female population in most countries, they still find it difficult to compete with the male population in the job market. David (2015) reported that over the last 50 years, the pace of change in higher education linked to the wider economy has speeded up such that women now comprise over 50 percent of university undergraduate students across most countries. Given that higher education is an investment to an individual and the government and more than 50% of the population are female, their role in economic development cannot be overemphasized. They should be given equal opportunities in the job market to reap the benefits of education. The Global Monitoring Report by UNESCO (2016) asserted that achieving gender parity in education, does not necessarily translate into gender equality in economic activity and employment opportunities. Countries that have seen rapid growth in education attainment among girls have not seen commensurate increases in decent work. This indicates that even education does not give women equal opportunities in the job market. It has been observed that, women, in spite of their educational training are still discriminated against when it comes to assigning duties or posts where they can exercise powers in management of duties. Also, the women's attitude is not left out as some women have in them the intrinsic inferiority syndrome, which discourages driving ambitions to reach the top. They shy away from certain jobs because the society considers them to be for men. Female inclusion in the labor workforce and putting in strategies for such jobs encourage them in managerial positions and to take up entrepreneurial

positions will go a long way to reduce unemployment rates which is plaguing most societies. Given that women consist of more than half of the population of Cameroon and the education sector, their role in economic development cannot be over emphasized. This study lays emphasis on the importance of gender management in organizations.

The foregoing problem statement raises questions such as: what are the types of challenges faced by women in management positions in discharging their administrative functions? What effect do these challenges have on women's job performance? Are there management opportunities open to women in the job market? The general objective of this study is thus to examine the challenges faced by female managers in the South West Region of Cameroon and the opportunities open to them. To achieve this goal, we identify and describe the types of challenges faced by women in managerial positions in discharging their administrative functions, highlight the effects of the challenges on women's job performance as managers, and describe the management opportunities open to women in the job market. In the course of this we attempt to statistically test the null hypothesis that: "There are no challenges that hinder the successful progress of female managers in enterprises".

Materials and methods

The area of study is the South West Region of Cameroon with focal point being some randomly selected enterprises in Buea municipality and its environs. This focuses on the impact of the constraints in the successful performance of female managers, so this study dwells mainly on the relationship between challenges and opportunities and female manager's performance. Data used in this study were obtained from primary and secondary sources. The primary data were obtained from empirical observations and interviews. Questionnaires supplemented with face-to-face interviews formed the basic instrument for data gathering. The interview and questionnaires were a translation of the research objective into questions which were both open and closed ended. Information was also obtained from resource persons and additional source of data came from relevant documents from the University of Buea library, Metropolitan library, government documents, internet and other sources relating to gender management issues. The study was carried out in Buea Sub-Division and questionnaires were distributed to female entrepreneurs and managers in some selected enterprises. The simple random sampling technique was employed in making the selections. This method was chosen because it gives each element in the population an equal chance of being included in the sample size. Out of the 30 managers, responses from 26 were analyzed and inferential statistics employed to test the hypothesis.

Results and discussions

Biographic profile of female managers. The analysis revealed that on average 77% of women managers were single and 19% of them were married. In the study region female managers fell under the age group of 20-29 years (65%) and about 35% between 30-39 years. A high proportion of over 88% have at most two children, with the majority having no child. About 8% of these women have at least three children and at most five children. With respect to educational level up to 4% had attended primary education, 27% had attended high school, 23% had university education and 42% had professional education. From this survey, we noticed that the population of female managers was generally educated and inexperienced. It also indicates that we are dealing with a population of young adults. It further insinuates to an indispute fact that women are only recently getting into managerial activities. About 35% of these women fell between the age group of 30-39 years. This indicated low ageing population in female managerial activities which might be positive for future development.

Socio-economic profile of female managers. Almost all the respondents (96%) were employees, that is, they were not the owners of the various enterprises they work in. However, about 4% of them owned enterprises they worked in. The fact that the majority were employees brings us to the question; did they face any particular problem at entry? Some 88% of the respondents said “No” to the question. This does not infer that there was totally no entry problem, because 7% of the respondents answered “Yes” to this question, bringing out the problem of male chauvinism. With respect to the capacity of administration, about 4% of the respondents were Directors, 4% were accountants, 8% served as managers, 19% served as assistant managers, and a host of them (over 65%) served in other positions such as cashier, teller, internal controller, commercial representatives, secretary, computer technician, chief of agency, sales personnel and receptionist. From this, we notice that most of the female managers faced little or no entry problems and could serve in various capacities of work except for a few who complained of the problem of male chauvinism.

Challenges of female managers. A majority of respondents (92%) employed Collaborative Management style with a minority (4%) employing Authoritative Management style. A host of them (73%) felt motivated working in an environment where the majority of their colleagues were males and some 23% felt competent in such an environment. Over 88% reported that they had no rivalry at all, but a few (4%) complained of rivalry stemmed from their fellow women instead.

Although working in a male environment, so to speak, 96% of these women attested that they did not feel harassed, except for some 4% of those who felt otherwise. Women occupying managerial positions were generally treated friendly and cooperatively by those women with lower rank positions. About 4% of them were treated unfriendly and uncooperatively, with a few (4%) having a passive and indifferent attitude towards their fellow women with higher rank positions than them. The fact that the majority of women were friendly to their female bosses does not influence their decision to show favoritism when it comes to the recruitment of women, for 69% of those in senior positions said ‘No’ to that question and that recruitment was based on know-how. About 4% of these senior female managers admitted that the recruitment of female workers was influenced by their positions as female managers.

The friendly and cooperative environment that these female managers work in does not remove the fact that they faced challenges or constraints. They reported the constraint of poor time management and the constraint to reconcile work and home management. Because a lot is expected from them, these serve as a challenge to the female managers since they are expected to measure to the task. Although a majority (73%) said that domestic responsibilities did not interfere with their job performance, a few (15%) said that it did affect their work as they needed to come early to work and leave late (8:30am-5:30pm) from Monday to Saturday. With such time constraints, they sometimes failed to meet their obligations.

Opportunities for female managers. As regards longevity of service, about 35% of the respondents had served for at most 2 years, 23% had done so for at most 5 years, 7% for at most 10 years, about 4% had served for at least 10 years and above. Still, some 31% had served for less than a year and some for few months only. Over 65% of the respondents attributed their long servitude to their efficient and collaborative management style. From the analytical survey, female managers had a lot of opportunities. Women had the opportunity such as to occupy positions open to men as well. Indeed, there were many opportunities women could serve in posts of accountants, auditors, tellers, cashiers, secretaries and many others. Female managers in the field of travel agency had the opportunity to travel abroad.

Women in managerial positions had the privilege of maternal leave, chances to attend seminars abroad, had the opportunity meet many people of different levels and also further their education. Female managers who were courageous could make key decisions and had the opportunity to share ideas with their male counterparts. Because of their femininity and good management of the business they were able to attract more customers. In fact, it was apparent that female entrepreneurs had more openings for job progression.

Despite the opportunities, there were also obstacles. Often there were gender biases including lack of confidence in female management by the enterprise. Despite these limitations, women can still take advantage of the opportunities by furthering especially their education. Increased educational attainment by women will increase their opportunities in holding management positions and employment opportunities in general. If women are sensitized about the benefits of becoming managers, they can market themselves positively.

From the survey, it was found that majority of women did not occupy top management positions. For this situation to change for the better, women need to be serious in whatever they do and go for more professional training. Men and women should be given equal opportunities. Female entrepreneurs should work hard, gain experience, be fearless and innovative. They should have a sense of awareness and discipline. Moreover, women empowerment should be enhanced.

Whatever the case, a gender friendly environment can be promoted when there is open and frank communication/interaction. Discussion panels to talk more on gender equality should be organized. OECD (2016) reported that reducing gender inequalities was necessary not only for reasons of fairness and equity, but also out of economic necessity. Greater economic opportunities for women help increase labour productivity, and higher female employment widen the base for taxpayers and contributors to social protection system which will come under increasing pressure due to population aging. More gender diversity will help promote innovation and competitiveness in business.

Table 1 tests the significance of some attributes female managers face in the South West Region of Cameroon. The statistical test reveals that the responses are significant at 5% level of probability testing. The null hypothesis (H_0) of the significance for the variables under consideration is accepted against the alternative hypothesis (H_a). Thus there are challenges that hinder the successful progress of female managers in enterprises or companies. It is apparent that without these challenges, female managers could do better in the managerial duties.

Table 1. Test of hypothesis

Variables	T-value	$t_{\alpha/2, n-1}$	Decision rule
Ownership versus constraints	2.132	1.706	Accept
Ownership versus limitations	2.739	1.706	Accept
Ownership versus hindrance	4.282	1.706	Accept

Note: $\alpha = 5\%$, $n = 26$ $t_{\alpha/2, n-1} = t_{0.05/2, 26-1} = t_{0.025, 25} = 1.706$

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine empirically the challenges faced by female managers in Cameroon and the opportunities open to them. From the data collected and analyzed, it indicated that there were many opportunities open to female managers. Despite these opportunities, there are challenges that hinder the successful progress of female managers in the various enterprises. The opportunities open to female managers includes entrepreneurial ventures, accountants, directors, assistant managers, managers, auditors, teller and secretaries. Most of the females occupy first-line management positions which indicate the challenges that female workers face in getting to top management positions in enterprises. The challenges identified in this study includes poor time management, and reconciling work and home management.

Acknowledgements

This paper is a contribution to the Sixth Higher Education Week and RUFORUM Biennial Conference held from 22 – 26th October 2018 at the Kenya International Conference Centre (KICC), Nairobi, Kenya.

References

- David, M.E. 2015. Women and gender equality in higher education. *Education Science* 5: 10-15.
- Essounga, N.A.R. 2016. Women at the summit of larger corporation in Cameroon. *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies* 4 (1):74-81.
- Global Monitoring Report. 2016. Work: Achieving Gender Equality Requires Major Transformation. UNESCO Publishing.
- Nana-Fabu, S. 2006. An analysis of the economic status of women in Cameroon. *Journal of International Women's Studies* 8 (1):148-162.
- OECD. 2016. Meeting of the OECD Council at Ministerial Level, Paris. Report on the Gender Initiative: Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship. OECD Publishing.
- Vaughan, R.P. 2016. Gender equality and education in sustainable development goals. Global Education Monitoring Report: UNESCO.
- Vijayaragavan, I. 2014. Problems and opportunities of women entrepreneurs in India. *International Journal of Business Management Invention* 3 (7):59-61.
- World Bank. 2015. Report No: ACS13117, Republic of Cameroon: Fostering Skills for Inclusive Workforce Development, Competitiveness and Growth. A Framework for Action. World Bank Group.