

**Women and Leadership; Participation, Constraints, Opportunities and Strategies in Amhara National Regional State Agricultural and Rural Development Bureau, Bahirdar, Ethiopia****Bimer Eyayu Enyew¹****Abstract**

Women's representation at higher levels of leadership is restricted predominantly in developing nations. The Untouched potential of women in the public sphere weakens the involvement they could make to effectual leadership at all levels. This study was carried out in Agricultural and Rural Development Bureau in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia. The main purpose of this paper was to investigate the situation of women in leadership positions in Amhara National Regional State Agricultural and Rural Development Bureau. The research method was qualitative approach and case study research design was employed as a research design. Semi-structured interview, key informants interview and focus group discussions were used to gather relevant data from women workers and bureau managers regarding the participation, constraints and strategies of women in leadership positions. The primary findings of the study disclosed that the participation of women in leadership positions is extremely rare. Though women participation in leadership and decision making is missing, opportunities like education, training, workshops and conferences are available to play a role in the status, experience and skills of women. The finding of this study also explored the constraints of women in leadership positions, such as internal constraints and external constraints. Consequently, the study has stated the strategies that help to overcome the constraints including leadership training, reducing multiple roles of women, building the psychological makeup of women as they can be leader, fighting stereotypes and discriminatory practices through awareness creation and promote women rights. Hence, to enhance women's participation in leadership positions it seems imperative that government and non government institutions should develop a solid package on leadership and carry out capacity buildings that could empower women.

Key Words: Women, Leadership, Participation, Opportunities, Constraints, Strategies,

Introduction

Gender gap does not result from any single historical condition such as social habits, religion, economic relations, or the laws; rather, it springs from a spectrum of causes. Most women are aware of the intricacy of the social order that so unfairly denies them of the opportunity to realize their life prospective. Currently, they are prominently aware that they are a part of that order. Many women now realize that their problem is not simply how to contend with men, but also how to re-imagine and help reconstruct a social order that has entrapped both men and women (Ann & Vaziri, 2000). Women have become far more active in the affairs of their societies over the past several decades, but they are still far from where they should be both in the private and public spheres. Their participation in managerial and administrative positions is around 33 % in the developed world, 15 % in Africa, and 13 % in Asia and the Pacific (Ann & Vaziri, 2000). Researches were conducted on better leaders for organizations, for instance

Folkman (2012), the authority in strengths-based leadership development, the speculation is rather clear and quite shocking. For women access to leadership does not always equal decision-making power due to hidden constraints in organizational cultures, social stereotypes, lack of skills and resources, including information and time, often work to undermine women's ability to succeed in leadership roles (Byanyima, 2007).

Historically, the landscape of women's leadership emergence has been steadily shifting since the 1970s. As women's educational achievements have increased, so have their job opportunities

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(Chandler, 2011). Women hold positions of power in a wide range of governmental, non-profit, and religious contexts. But they are still grossly underrepresented at the top and overrepresented at the bottom of the most influential leadership hierarchies (Rhode and Kellerman, 2006). However, since the 1970s, women have steadily emerged in leadership roles in all societal spheres. Women bring to the exercise of leadership an arsenal of strengths, which increasingly are received to benefit the entities they lead on local, national, and global levels. Women's leadership styles have been shown to be more transformational, participative, and inclusive than the leadership styles of their male counterparts (Chandler, 2011).

It is increasingly clear that a gender neutral view of leadership is insufficient, and that we need to consider the influence of cultural worldviews and socialization on shaping leadership style. There is much to suggest that feminist leadership styles are intentionally different more collaborative and transformational compared to men (Chin, 2011). Overwhelmingly, women have ability in web thinking, intuition, mental flexibility, long-term planning, creativity, imagination and verbal and social skills as well as different views of power to create undeniable win-win strategies in different spheres. Women are also better able to tolerate ambiguity a trait that most likely stems from their ability to hold several things simultaneously in mind (Fisher, 1999). According to Chandler (2011) in his work of "*What Women bring to the Exercise of Leadership*", women leadership is vital in many ways like for ethical behaviors, peace-building initiatives, social change, business, media, entrepreneurship and innovation. For example, women are more likely than men to speak out against unethical behavior and to use internal reporting channels in responding to wrongdoing.

Gender-role stereotyping such as 'think manager, think male' has negative consequences for women in organizations generally, but particularly in terms of the numbers of women in senior or leadership roles. The management competency frameworks in many organizations are still heavily weighted toward more masculine leadership traits and behaviors. Because stereotypical thinking is frequently unconscious, processes like candidate search, selection, advancement and remuneration can be unintentionally skewed against women despite equal opportunity policies and meritocratic practices. In fact, recent research suggests that the active promotion of meritocratic selection processes in organizations can have the paradoxical effect of activating unconscious biases about women's leadership competence and result in more discriminatory selection decisions. This is a challenge for organizations seeking to raise awareness about gender bias in selection and promotion, in that raising this issue may have a detrimental outcome for women in some circumstances (CEDA, 2013).

There are many factors which hold back women's ability to take part on an equal footing with men and to occupy positions of leadership, regardless of whether they are poor or not, but these factors always impact hardest on poor women. According to the online discussion report by Women Watch (2007), low level of education is the major constraint to women low status in workplace. Women still constitute the large majority of the world's illiterate population. In several developing countries, gender gaps in education and literacy persist.

The other most difficult hindrance for women seeking positions of influence is the gap between the qualities conservatively associated both with women and with leadership. The "great man" model of leadership is still with us and the term is seldom used generically. Most characteristics associated with leaders are masculine: dominance, authority, assertiveness and so forth (Rhode and Kellerman, 2006). Societal forces, such as hard-wired gender roles and societal expectations, are also obstacles. These include the belief that women do not want a profession and the disproportionately high burden of caring work that falls on women, even when they are employed in full-time work (CEDA, 2013). Traditional gender stereotypes still leave women with a double standard and a double bind. Men continue to be rated higher than women on most of the qualities associated with leadership. What is assertive in a man seems abrasive in a woman, and female leaders risk seeming too feminine or not feminine enough (Rhode and Kellerman, 2006).

Workplaces rest on the basis of meritocracy and merit is frequently mentioned as the reason why gender diversity strategies are not needed. The flaw in that argument is that meritocracies fail for reasons that are not intentional or overt, namely, unconscious bias. Men are unconsciously perceived as a better fit for leadership roles. Women who display characteristics associated with men face a

backlash from recruiters and are penalized for those 'un-stereotypical' traits. These associations are unintentional and unconscious (CEDA, 2013). Because such stereotypes operate at unconscious levels and selections for leadership positions involve subjective and confidential judgments, the extent of bias is hard to assess. Many women also internalize these stereotypes, which creates a psychological glass ceiling. On average, women appear less willing to engage in self-promoting or assertive behaviors, or to take the risks that may be necessary for leadership roles. In workplace settings, the result is that female employees may be less likely than their male colleagues to gain the assignments, positions, and support necessary for leadership roles (Rhode and Kellerman, 2006). While unconscious thinking, stereotypes, and biases pervade every aspect of everyday life, there are a number of unconscious biases specifically related to gender in organizational contexts that have systematically negative effects on women. Workplaces often provide many of the preconditions for unconscious thinking to occur: having to divide our attention across multiple tasks at once, having to make rapid judgments and decisions, and carrying out routine tasks (CEDA, 2013).

Gender stereotypes and traditional conservative beliefs that a woman's place is at home raising a family, and that women are followers, not leaders, prevent women from participating in public life. In our country context, there are different proverbs that undermine women and girls as they are not fitting for outside activities. In many parts of Ethiopia, men have decision making power both in the vast majority of public and domestic spheres. Women are also obliged to carry out both inside and outside activities without appropriate value. Violence against women, including women trafficking, threatens women's security and greatly impedes their willingness to take on public roles, specifically leadership positions. Organizations did not do enough to attract women leaders and to support them in their leadership roles. Lack of specific management training, skills training, professional development, decision-making skills and mentorship programs, which prevent women from being seen as effective leaders are trigger factors to retard women from leadership. Moreover, women felt limited by internalized gender stereotypes and lacked the confidence to see themselves as leaders. The problems and obstacles to women's exercise of leadership are complex.

Tackling the complex problem of women in leadership requires coordination and concerted efforts by multiple sectors, organizations and disciplines. To empower women in leadership positions the government of Ethiopia has done inconsequential achievements because huge gender gap is still prevailed. Women in the regional bureau continue to drop behind men when they come to leadership positions in the workforce and in senior job categories. Thus, this research paper maps out various aspects of the complex issue of women participation in leadership positions, constraints, opportunities and strategies to overcome the constraints obtained from the study in Agricultural and Rural Development Bureau (ARDB). Participants' views were explained briefly under the findings and discussion part of this research. Finally, the paper concluded with the presentation of concluding remarks and recommendations in the key areas of women and leadership.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Qualitative research approach was employed for this research in order to investigate the issue of women and leadership in Amhara National Regional State Agricultural and Rural Development Bureau. According to Dawson (2002) qualitative research explores attitudes, behavior and experiences of people through interview or focus group methods. The research design that was employed for this research was case study research design. According to Gerring (2007) case study research design to research is most usefully defined as an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units. The case study probes deeply and analyses interactions between the issues that explain present status or that influence change or growth (Best and Kahn, 20003). Creswell (2003) referring to (Stake, 1995) also suggests that case studies are research strategies in which the researcher explores in depth a program, and event, and activity, a process, or one or more individuals. Furthermore, Yin (2003) pointed out the case study as a research strategy is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena. Not surprisingly, the case study has been a common research strategy in psychology, sociology, political science, social work, business and community planning. Therefore, case studies



help us to connect the actions of individual people to the large scale social structures and processes. The logic of case study is to demonstrate a casual argument about how general social force shape and produce results in particular settings.

Data sources were both primary data sources and secondary data sources. The primary data sources were participants or interviewees, whereas secondary data sources were literatures from different books, articles and proceedings used as supportive ideas. The data collection instruments for this research were semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGD) and key informants interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 women ARDB workers to explain their responses and to provide more in-depth information on the situation of women in leadership position. As it is argued by Dawson (2002) semi-structured interviewing is the most common type of interview used in qualitative social research. Two FGDs were carried out to supplement and confirm data that were generated through semi-structured interviews and key informants. Discussions using semi structured or open ended questions were held with women workers (a group comprising of 8 women). The data from discussants were collected by note taking method where they discussed in detail on the given issues. The researcher was largely acted as a moderator during the discussions. Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted among key informants that allowed the researcher collecting data on relevant and well-informed sources about women and leadership in ARDB. KIIs were made from the director, vice directors and gender focal person of the bureau.

The data gathered from interviews and FGDs were analyzed carefully to keep their accuracy, trustworthiness and validity. In analyzing the data, qualitative analysis techniques were used. As a result, the data that were gathered from interviewees and FGDs were analyzed and explained using thematic qualitative data analysis.

Results and Discussions

The Extent of Women Participation in Leadership

Although different attempts made to create conducive environment for women, still their participation in leadership position is negligible. Some interviewees pointed out the main factors for women's lowest participation and leadership position strongly linked with their poor educational backgrounds, lack of experience and low competence capacity. Similarly, focus group discussants also indicated that the main factors for women's meager participation in leadership position are fragility, lack of professional competency, detesting leadership responsibility and lack of interest to take responsibilities. In line with this, an agricultural extension woman expert depicts as follows.

In my opinion the gender disparities were principally appeared in the previous regimes discriminatory political and educational policy that still contribute a lot for unequal representation and participation of women in leadership roles. Moreover, Merit Based Recruitment (MBR) mechanism of selecting leaders in the bureau also has its own outsized share for the non-existence of women in leadership positions.

Participants of this study suggested that in order to confirm women's participation in leadership and decision making positions, it is better to improve the mechanism systems or strategies to appoint them like the Ethiopian Parliament System (that used a quota system for women to be a member of parliament). For instance, they have observed from nine work unit offices, and no woman found in the leadership position or all managerial levels are occupied by men. They also stated that even among 48 bureaus in the region all top level positions are occupied by men except the Regional Women's and Children Affairs and Culture and Tourism Bureau. In this regard, another interviewee also revealed that:

Though men are taking the leading roles in leadership, we did not confute because we couldn't say the bureau has done nothing to improve women leadership and decision making positions within its organizational frameworks. Honestly speaking, to nominate women workers in the leadership position and to increase our level of participation, the bureau has provided educational opportunities for all staffs beginning from clearer and posters to



experts and managers with exceedingly special emphasis for women in diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs.

It is therefore suggested that the participation of women in leadership positions in the bureau is remained at the lowest level, while appreciating the attempts of the bureau to empower women's qualification in their profession via providing educational opportunities in particular and its initiation to mainstream gender in general as it was indicated by key informants.

Constraints To Women's Participation In Leadership Positions

As it is found in the findings of this study, women themselves and external factors are the two major categories of constraints that hold back women to leadership positions. As it is described by participants of this study, women have own problems which are not less than external constraints. Owing to personal problems, a woman expert interviewee said similar with focus group discussants as follows:

We ourselves are the source of constraints to take part in leadership positions. For example, lack of interest, fear of taking leadership responsibility, hating leadership positions, lack of confidence are some of the manifestations of our bureau women workers. By taking into consideration these reasons, we assumed that we are not created and endowed for leadership positions in different professional or work place settings.

Similarly, the report of online discussion hosted by Women Watch (2007) on women in leadership roles conclude that gender issues consist of women's obstacle to themselves in the form of internalized oppression (the cumulative impact of male oppression of women on their psyche, conditioning them to act against them and to take this as normal, and so try to stop any attempts to change this situation). Women who lack confidence are likely to opt out of potential leadership positions. When the dearth of women in management is analyzed, one of the routine responses is to attribute the problem to female failure. Women in professional and management roles are often told their negotiating skills are poor, or that they lack confidence, problem solving skills and leadership presence. Thus, their style of operating is generally regarded as lacking or ineffective and in many cases the alternative set of desirable skills bears an uncanny resemblance to a traditional alpha male approach (CEDA, 2013).

On the other hand, the majority of interviewees and discussants stated that the major part of constraints to leadership position of women arose from external factors. These include;

Socio-cultural factors: include stereotypes, discriminatory practices, and educational background. According to participants of this study, in their societies, cultural values and norms prohibited women to take part in developmental and political leadership positions. A problem is worse for married women because they have dual burdens and the influence of their husbands. Several participants also noted that gender stereotypes and traditional conservative beliefs that a woman's place is at home raising a family, and that women are followers, not leaders, prevent women from participating in public life. Likewise, Rhode and Kellerman (2006) also argued that traditional gender stereotypes still leave women with a double standard and a double bind. Men continue to be rated higher than women on most of the qualities associated with leadership. As a recommended approach, CEDA (2013) also connoted that business and government leaders can help improve women's equality of opportunity through culture change by breaking down stereotypical gender role constraints embedded in workplace culture. For example, by encouraging fathers to take more parental leave to which they are entitled, reconsidering how childcare and other non-work commitments fit within the system and exploring the feasibility of designing workplaces that promote flexible work practices for all employees regardless of gender and family status. Mainstreaming flexibility can help to counter the association of flexible work with 'women's work'.

Most women worker interviewees also suggested that educational background is the most challenging factor that deters women from leadership positions. They also revealed that the affirmative action given to women to get leadership position is not that much relevant because it has undersized



share and key requirements are work experience and educational level. Women have insufficient relevant work experience and educational background for the reason that they were not enrolled in education as compared to men in the past era. It is due to the fact that the previous regimes of the country had influence on women's participation in the public sphere particularly in education. So far, a woman was expected to be a smart wife by treating her husband and children and accomplishing household activities properly.

Dual work roles: Both interview and FGD participants stated that they are engaged in dual work roles, and therefore it is too difficult to them to take part in leadership positions. Naturally, women love and care for their children more than men. When they went out from their home, they think about their children security and home based activities. Due to these reasons, women are not interested to play a part in leadership positions. Rhode & Kellerman (2006) also pointed out how gender roles and gender-related stereotypes are inconsistent with leadership responsibilities. Having children makes women, but not men, appear less competent and less available to meet workplace tasks. The term "working father" is rarely used and carries none of the adverse connotations of "working mother." Attitudes toward self-promotion reflect a related mismatch between stereotypes associated with leadership and with femininity: Women are expected to be nurturing, not self-serving, and entrepreneurial behaviors viewed as appropriate in men are often viewed as distasteful in women.

Gender blind policies: according to Gender Focal Person of the bureau and some interviewees', there are gender blind policies because the majority of agricultural and rural development policies were designed before a decade. The concept of gender inequality as a cross-cutting issue is a recent phenomenon particularly in Ethiopia and it requires updated policies that mainstream gender. Similar to this concept, Women Watch (2007) on its discussion depicted that the existence of gender-blind policies in the organization have a negative impact on "promoting gender equality and limiting opportunities for women to take decision-making and leadership positions. Correspondingly, Hoare & Gell (2009) also showed that institutional gender bias represents a challenge to all women looking for equal participation and competing for leadership positions, as does the way that political and economic systems are organized. Skepticism and mistrust of women's ability to lead, and the stereotypes and prejudices about their role in institutions and their lack of appropriateness for leadership roles and decision-making are other major challenges for all women.

Lack of affirmative action's: although affirmative action as a policy of giving special consideration to women is a debatable issue among different sections of groups and scholars, the participants of this study are the proponents of affirmative action to be used in the bureau. Accordingly, the findings in this study stated that the affirmative action given to women is not sufficient to virtually reinforce women to take leadership positions. Furthermore, some interviewees noted that the existing affirmative actions are temporary measures and are not long-term strategies to empower and bring women for leadership positions. As a result, they have suggested that affirmative measures should be taken seriously at bureau and regional level to ensure the real participation of women in leadership roles.

Lack of leadership training: the participants of this study explained that there is no leadership training for women because the majority of women are supportive staffs and are not in management positions. Hence, absence of leadership training along with their poor educational background and work experience restricts women participation in leadership and decision making roles. Thus, it can be suggested that the constraints to leadership position of women are occurred at individual, societal and institutional levels. Likewise, a study conducted by Endale (2014) also showed that the major factors that hinder women's participation in public leadership and decision making positions are various and observed interrelated. These include: lack of adequate educational status required from women, absence of commitment by the concerned body, backward socio-cultural attitudes, lack of sufficient experiences from women to hold the leading positions, overburden of domestic responsibilities, as well as negative attitudes of men towards women, and lack of confidence from women themselves. It is

clear from these and other similar statements that many women have no leadership training opportunities due to their absence in leadership positions where training is available for work unit leaders only. In addition, women low level of education restricts them from leadership and similar training chances.

Opportunities: “To be a Leader Woman”

Key informants, many interviewees and discussants of this study said that there are various opportunities for women to be a leader. Of these opportunities, the main one is educational opportunity. The bureau provides implausible educational opportunity for women as it is a crucial requirement to attain leadership positions.

However, according to some interviewees, there is still a challenge related to women education in the bureau that refrain them from leadership positions. The woman interviewee working in the bureau spoke on this as follows:

The vast majority of women workers in our Bureau who get educational opportunity are lower level workers. They go to colleges or universities for further study which is not greater than diploma or degree level. Contrary to this, their male counterparts achieved this educational level and had many experiences, and also have more than this educational level. Hence, either they get educational opportunity or not it is difficult to them to occupy leadership positions easily unless other inimitable measures are taken.

Participants' principally key informants also noted that trainings, workshops and conferences are the other opportunities that are existed for women to motivate them to join leadership and decision making processes. In these occasions, women can also demonstrate their talent pertaining to ability in skills, knowledge and communication. The existence of gradual awareness and some updated gender policies that include gender experts and practitioners, gender mainstreaming, civil service reforms and current gender sensitive policies are initiative opportunities for women to inspire them to be a leader. Concurrent to this, affirmative action also plays a role for women in occupying leadership positions though it is not adequate and long term policy.

Some interviewees also assumed that modernity can reduce strict traditional norms and values of the society, such as harmful traditional practices, gender stereotype and discriminatory practices. As one woman described these opportunity:

As a result of prosperity and advancement of Information Communication Technology (ICT), the world is recently globalizing and becoming in to a small village where everyone easily live together. The contemporary global change facilitates to transfer best experiences and practices of gender equality from one country to the other. When information exchange is carried out between individuals, organizations, societies and countries modern thinking and attitudes would prevail over gender traditional attributes. Consequently, conservative conventional values and stereotypes that hinder us to engage in the public sphere in general and leadership position in particular will be enormously reduced.

However, all opportunities that are identified by the participants of this study could not be achieved in a short period of time and bring about women in leadership positions. It is not an easy task since many of the opportunities require much time and attitudinal changes at individual and societal level. There is a long established thought by women, men and the society as a whole to accept women's leadership ability and skills which is challenging to change in a single time.

Mechanisms Or Strategies To Overcome Constraints

Organizations increasingly devote significant time and resources to strategies and practices aimed at increasing the representation of diverse groups, particularly women in leadership positions. Coupled with legislative and regulatory interventions aimed at eliminating discrimination, organizational efforts have had some success in creating workplaces that better reflect the diverse societies in which they operate (CEDA, 2013). Parallel to the previous discussion, such a reform agenda will require strategies on the individual, institutional, and societal levels. As well, Rhode and

Kellerman (2006) revealed that to achieve greater gender equality in leadership will require expanding opportunities for talented women and enabling them to perform effectively in positions of power. Most importantly, interviewees and discussants of this study identified different strategies to eliminate women constraints to leadership positions.

Self-awareness

Participants of this study indicated that self-awareness for women themselves is the best mechanism to occupy leadership positions. Women should develop their confidence and should think as they are able to do and equal with men. They have to also understand as they would be best in leadership positions as they are seen in different areas where they have properly taken their responsibilities, for example women traffic police. Rhode and Kellerman (2006) connoted that a necessary first step involves self-reflection. Women need to be clear about their goals and values: What do they want, why do they want it, and what are they prepared to sacrifice to get it? Clarifying those priorities can then help women identify where they want to be in the short and long term and what it will take to get there. Individuals also need to consider their managerial strengths and weaknesses and to obtain adequate feedback from others about necessary improvements.

Reducing multiple roles of women

Women participants revealed that multiple roles of women at domestic level should be reduced with the help of their family members and the society. They indicated that boys and men or sons and fathers must share these roles of women, especially at family level. It is this role that restricts women to take leadership responsibilities as they are the only actors in carrying out household activities. Most of the time, in their society, males do not take part in domestic activities and if they are involved they are considered as females and their action is seriously hated by the society even by his wife and daughters. This attitude must be changed through awareness creation trainings, education and legal reforms in view of the fact that almost all roles have no relationship with the anatomical sexes. Furthermore, strengthening women's opportunities to participate in decision-making and to attain leadership positions in the economic sector has a paramount significance in reducing the multiple roles of women.

Fighting against stereotypes and discriminatory practices

Participants of this study indicated that maximum efforts should be done to combat gender stereotype and discriminatory practices through awareness creation (education and trainings) to disclose the untapped potential of women in leadership positions. They further suggested the mind set up of the society is full of patriarchal feelings, and the society assumed the father is the dominant leader that existed in all time. Hence, such kind of erroneous beliefs should be altered through non-legal and legal measures. Traditional attitudes and beliefs about women's role in society continue to prejudice both men's and women's preconceptions regarding women's ability to participate fully in public life (Hoare & Gell, 2009). Similar to participants' ideas, CEDA (2013) believed that stereotypical gender roles are deeply ingrained into society and reflected in the way we allocate household chores and unpaid caring work for women. While societal gender role stereotypes are difficult to break down, organizations can have a role to play by enabling equal partnership between men and women at work and in society. For example, organizations could encourage fathers to take more parental leave, thereby sharing caring responsibilities more equally with mothers.

Legal measures

Participants stated that legal reforms and measures are vital to avoid constraints to women leadership participation. These measures are essential mainly to alleviate gender based violence, violence against women, harassments and other harmful traditional practices both in the work place and society. Mentoring programs and other initiatives are also important to improve women's leadership opportunity so as to develop their careers and equip them with leadership skills. According to Hoare and Gell (2009), in their work of women's leadership and participation, to overcome the

constraints to women to take part in leadership positions, legislative reform i.e. policies of decentralization have been of particular significance in increasing women's representation at the local level.

Capacity Building Mechanisms

Participants' highlighted specific areas of training which they saw as important for women's leadership-capacity building, including: management and knowledge of agricultural activities, technological awareness and advocacy and decision-making. Providing targeted training to women who want to assume positions of leadership is one way of enabling more women to influence decision-making processes. They also stated that providing educational opportunities as a strategy to improve women's leadership positions is another strategy to strengthen women workers. In most cases, educational level and work experiences are considered as key requirements for leadership positions on the ground. Unlike men, women and girls were not enrolled in schools in the past eras due to various constraints.

Even though affirmative actions at the current time given to women are temporary measures, it contributes to women to participate and play in leadership roles. Participants also pointed out the existing affirmative actions are not adequate to bring women in leadership positions in particular and to achieve gender equality in general. Thus, women participation in leadership can be reinforced through giving special attention to women experts or workers.

Comparative Analysis of the Study: "Relating Theory with Practice"

Masculinity was the strongest predictor of self-reported leader emergence. Feminine traits did not lend themselves to contributing to the women thinking of themselves as leaders. Only the females with strong masculine attributes considered themselves leaders with any degree of frequency. In addition, masculine and androgynous individuals were combined and compared with data from feminine and undifferentiated individuals. The combined masculine and androgynous group members described themselves more frequently as demonstrating knowledge and having experience than did the feminine and undifferentiated group members (Gedney, 1999).

The findings and the discussion of this research report on women and leadership displays that women's participation in leadership roles in Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development is almost absent due to diverse and complex factors like socio-cultural constraints, low educational levels, lack of leadership trainings, dual work roles of women and others. Some participants also noted that the absence of women in leadership positions in the bureau is because of their own reasons, such as lack of confidence, lack of interest and hating leadership positions. This idea is supported by Friedan's *Feminist Mystique* (1967) prompted similar explanations for women's absence at leadership levels; "***The fault, according to Friedan, is not in culture but in ourselves.***" Rhode and Kellerman (2006) illustrated in their literature "*Women and Leadership*", almost four decades later, Lisa Belkin's cover story in the *New York Times Magazine* laid blame in similar places. In her account of the "*opt-out revolution*," women are underrepresented in leadership positions less because "the workplace has failed women" than because "women are rejecting the workplace." "Why don't women run the world?" asks Belkin. "Maybe it's because they don't want to". Therefore, these views from different scholars support the existence of internal (by women themselves) factors affecting women leadership positions that are clearly identified in the findings of this study.

According to the participants, the majority of constraints to women in leadership positions are also fall in socio-cultural factors like customary practices, legal constraints, discriminatory practice, and stereotypes. Participants also stated that opportunities that impresses women to take part in leadership positions like education, reformed gender policies, trainings and workshops. Finally, participants also identified strategies or measures that should be taken to improve women's leadership position in the bureau, such as education, legal measures, affirmative action, etc.

Therefore, the findings and discussions of this research are related with ***Liberal Feminist Theory***. Liberal feminist theory asserts that women's subordination and incapability to different roles is rooted from customary and legal constraints. Affirmative action, reproductive rights legislation,



educational reforms, and equal opportunity legislation represent important liberal feminist programs that have attempted to assure that women and other minority groups are not systematically disadvantaged (Tong, 2009). So, for the successful achievement of bringing about women's in the leadership position in bureaus, it is better to implement the strategies of liberal feminism.

Feminist leadership attends to advocating fair opportunities for women and demanding the respect to which women's abilities and intellect entitle them. It includes personal agency not only to remember where we are in time in terms of women's rights, but also to take on what we must to bring society to a place where all women will be treated fairly (Betty, 2001)

Conclusion And Policy Implications

The views presented in the discussion are, for the most part, gained from participants on the role of women in leadership positions in Amhara Regional Agricultural and Rural Development Bureau. Both in the past and current time, the most powerful and best-paid managerial positions at low, middle and top levels are still out of reach for all women in the bureau. According to the finding, almost all interviewees assumed that women's participation and benefits in leadership as well as in decision making processes is absent due to various factors, such as cultural and traditional influences, leadership sensitivity nature that requires competence, lack of confidence, lack of training, and so on. Participants outlined a number of strategies to increase women's participation in leadership positions in the bureau. In their views, education, training, legal reforms and measures, self-awareness, and fighting against gender based violence and violence against women. However these measures should be taken at individual, societal and institutional levels irrespective of the aforementioned measures.

To sum up, the regional bureau should have a long way to go to achieve equality of opportunity to empower women in leadership positions. The bureau should mainly focus on all constraints of women that are mentioned here to leadership positions in the office. These constraints must be addressed to ensure and then narrow the gender disparity in leadership and decision making process. With strong dedication and leadership, apparent governance and accountability the changes and reforms needed to progress towards equality can become tangible and deliver benefits to every women staffs of the bureau. For example, the Amhara Regional Government should implement education programs, skills building and leadership training that prepares women for leadership positions. Human resources departments need to perform to attract women to leadership positions and support through affirmative action, transparent processes, raising awareness and providing training to women. Therefore, it is really important to analyze deeply the major assumptions and strategies of liberal feminism to internalize in the regional bureau context and reduce or eliminate the sources of gender inequality, discrimination and oppression so as to design applicable measures to empower women in leadership and decision making processes.

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