

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP  
POSITIONS IN PUBLIC SECTORS: THE CASE OF JABI TEHNAN  
WOREDA, WEST GOJJAM ZONE, AMHARA REGION, ETHIOPIA**

**MA THESIS**

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**Challenges and Opportunities of Women in Leadership Positions in Public  
Sectors: The Case of Jabi Tehnan *Woreda*, West Gojjam Zone, Amhara  
Region, Ethiopia**

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**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of MASTER OF  
ARTS IN GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

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Haramaya University, Haramaya**



## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my dearest parents, who have provided me with everything I need and have surrounded me with great affection in order to achieve my objectives in life.

## STATEMENT OF THE AUTHOR

By my signature below, I declare and affirm that this Thesis is my own work and I have followed all ethical and technical principles of scholarship in the preparation, data collection, data analysis and compilation of this Thesis. Any scholarly matter that is included in this Thesis has been given recognition through citation.

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

The author was born on April 29, 1996 G.C in West Gojjam Zone at Womberma *Woreda*, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. She attended her primary education at millennium Primary School and Secondary and preparatory education at Mekonnen Shindi Secondary and Preparatory School. After successfully passed the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Examination, she joined University of Gondar in 2016 and graduated with Bachelor of Art in Gender and Development Studies in 2018 G.C. Soon after graduation, she has been employed at Haramaya University as Graduate Assistant in Gender and Development Studies. After one years of service, she joined Postgraduate Program Directorate of Haramaya University in October 2020 to pursue her Master of Art Degree in Gender and Development Studies.

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# **Challenges and Opportunities of Women in Leadership Positions in Public Sectors: The Case of Jabi Tehnan Woreda, West Gojjam Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia**

## **ABSTRACT**

*Today, the number of women in positions of leadership is increasing. Even though this is the case, women leaders encounter significant challenges during their leadership journey. The general objective of this study was to assess the challenges and opportunities of women in leadership positions in public sectors. Mixed research method with explanatory-sequential mixed research design was employed for data collection and data analysis. The data collected by questionnaires and interview for selected public sectors head office and employees to explain the challenges and opportunities of women in leadership position. Consequently, probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used to select the respondents and to make discussants the researches. Selected data analyzed by descriptive statistics. The result showed that women faced socio-cultural challenges (conflict between work and family responsibilities and lack of family support) with mean value 4.06 and 3.86 respectively. Organizational challenges(a lack of female role models, an uncomfortable working environment, gender-based discrimination, lack of support, absence of leadership trainings, absence of childcare centers, a lack of organizational networks) with mean values >3.5, and leadership related challenges(inflexible working hours, stress and unsatisfactory pay) with mean values >3.5 were the major determinants influencing women leaders' career progression. The study also identified significant opportunities and supports for overcoming those challenges. The opportunities include mentoring and coaching, training and networking opportunities, affirmative action, maternal leave, and family support. The study concludes that women in leadership positions faced a number of challenges, as well as limited opportunities that targeted women in the study area. Hence, the government should pay attention to them and develop initiatives such as family-friendly laws to assist women in overcoming their challenges.*

**Keywords:** Career progression, Challenges, Leader, Leadership, Opportunities

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background of the Study

Promoting a diverse group of women to leadership positions helps to make institutions, businesses, and governments more representatives (Northouse, 2021). The presence of women in leadership position worldwide brings development, and ensures social justice through gender equity at leadership and decision-making levels (Melese, 2019). It is also expected that the combined output of women and men in leadership will be greater than either gender could have produced alone (Thomson and Laurent, 2015).

Thus, equal participation of women in leadership is essential to materialize human development (KYAW, 2019). In light of this, global efforts have been made through a variety of legal instruments and institutional reforms to ensure women's equal participation in leadership. Women's participation in the labor force has increased in recent years, however, their representation in leadership positions remains significantly lower than that of men (Schuh *et al.*, 2014).

Women constitute around 40% of the world labor force but not achieved much gender equality in any countries of the world. Despite representing nearly half of the global workforce, women are under-represented in leadership roles; men greatly outnumber women in leadership, especially in top positions (Powell, 2018). Women occupy 25% of senior-level positions and just 5% of the top executive roles. In Canada, they account for only 45% of its public sector leaders. In Japan, the world's third-largest economy, women account for 2.5% of public sector leaders. In India, the world's largest democracy, only 7.7% of public sector leaders are female. In Saudi Arabia, the figure is zero (Misra and Singh, 2018).

In Africa, various legal instruments and systems are designed to promote women's leadership, both at the continental and country level. The representations of African women in all spheres of life and at all levels, especially in leadership are still low although they represent 52% of the African population. According to the International Parliamentary Union, in March 2020, only 23.4% of Africa's parliamentarians are female. Women are also poorly represented in ministerial



positions with an average of 22% across Africa. Only 12 countries have more than one-third female ministers including Rwanda (53.6%), Guinea Bissau (50.0%), South Africa (48.3%), Ethiopia (47.6%), Seychelles (45.5%), Mozambique (42.9%), Angola (40.0), Uganda (33.3%), Sao Tome e Principe (33.3%), Zambia (32.3%), Eswatini (31.6%), and Madagascar (30.0%) (Moller and Roberts, 2017).

Comparing the positions of men and women in professional positions in Ethiopia, women occupy only 29% while men occupy 71% of the professional positions. In addition, Ethiopian women are mainly engaged in clerical and fiscal administrative positions. More specifically research data show that only about 2% of the general management and decision-making positions are held by women while the 98% is held by men (Gobaw, 2017).

Each stage of career progression represents a set of opportunities and challenges to achieving a powerful position in an organization (Armstrong *et al.*, 2018). According to research conducted in Western countries, challenges of women in leadership are attitudinal and structural barriers to women's full participation, widespread acceptance of gender inequality and gender violence that underpins them (Vasavada, 2012). Similar research findings include absence of female role models, a lack of effective mentoring, a lack of opportunity to gain experience and visibility in types of positions, exclusion from informal networks, higher performance standards for women than for men, difficulties caused by competing family demands, and a lack of strong action by top management to ensure equal opportunity (Ykul *et al.*, 2013).

Research on African countries identifies major challenges that African women leaders face, such as societal biases, male-dominant corporate cultures, work-family responsibility, discrimination, sex stereotypes, and a lack of access to education (Amayah and Haque, 2017). Lack of academic qualification, gender stereotyping, overburdening of domestic responsibility, lack of confidence, lack of support at home and at work, religious practice, and lack of experience have been identified as the main factors preventing women from advancing to top leadership positions in Ethiopia (Melese, 2019).

Despite the numerous challenges, several women advance their careers by taking advantage of available opportunities, such as organizational incentives and institutional safeguards. Understanding the challenges that women leader's face, as well as the opportunities they use to

overcome those challenges is critical to increasing women's representation in leadership positions (Glass and Cook, 2016).

As a result, women leaders in both developed and developing nations faced a variety of hurdles along their climb to the top. The problems might be similar or dissimilar depending on culture and working environment. Keeping these notions in mind, it is beneficial to research the challenges and opportunities for women in leadership positions by enrolling *Jabi Tehnan Woreda* public sectors. According to information from the Zone Women and Children Affairs Office (2021), women are better represented in various leadership positions in this *woreda* than in other *Woredas* in the Zone. Based on this, I picked this *woreda*, and these provide a favorable environment for researchers to conduct fruitful interviews and question them.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Women's participation and leadership are not only necessary prerequisites for addressing gender inequality, but they are also a fundamental human right (Kitonga, 2020). Globally, the presence and status of female leaders have improved dramatically over the last half-century; however, research indicates that women in leadership positions in a variety of professions continue to face a number of challenges that hinder career progression. The anti-female nature of the organization and institutional discrimination, such as limited access to networking processes, a lack of mentoring, and limited training and development opportunities, have all contributed to women's low career progression (Adhikary, 2016).

Any intervention aimed at increasing women's participation must begin with identifying the challenges faced by women leaders and the opportunities for overcoming those challenges. In this context, some studies have been conducted on the challenges faced by Ethiopia women leaders. For example, Bahiru and Mengistu (2018) conducted a study on the challenges faced by women leaders of business organizations in Addis Ababa. The study identified work overload, cultural and social norms, family responsibilities, insufficient family friendly organizational initiative, and social and community responsibilities as challenges for female leaders.

Similarly, Aragaw (2018) examines Women Leadership Challenges in the Case of Ethiopian Electric Utility: Trends and Emerging Patterns. The study's findings revealed that women

leadership challenges identified by this study are an educational gap, a socio-cultural attitude, a gender insensitive organizational culture, a lack of an organizational supportive system, gender-based violence, and company recruitment and promotion practices.

Another researcher Birkneh (2017), *Assess the Challenges and Prospects of Women Managers in Financial Sector in the case of Development Bank of Ethiopia*. The findings showed that challenges that women managers face during their leadership roles are not spending enough time with their families due to work, family responsibilities interfering with work, having to outperform male leaders to be considered effective, and a lack of support in the household when work is demanding.

The aforementioned studies only emphasized the challenges that women face in positions of leadership. In addition, these studies do not attempt to identify leadership-related challenges. Furthermore, these studies do not attempt to investigate the existing issues of leadership opportunities for women's career advancement. Moreover, previous research did not investigate the lived experiences and perceptions of women leaders in public sectors, specifically the factors they perceived to be contributors or barriers to career advancement to the leadership position. Based on this gap, this study identifies the challenges and opportunities of women leaders during their leadership periods.

Etagenge (2019) also conduct a study on *Factors that Affecting Participation of Women in Leadership Position in Public Sectors: In Case of Menzlalo Woreda North Shoa Zone*. The findings showed that organizational and work place policy factors are the main factors that affecting women participation in leadership position. The researcher only showed factors affecting women participation in a leadership position are organizational and workplace polices, did not try to attempt other factors like socio-cultural, and leadership related issues that influence women in a leadership positions.

Moreover, Muktar (2021) conducted research on the *Opportunities and Challenges of Female Health Leaders in Ethiopia's Three Regional States*. The findings highlight individual, social, and organizational factors influencing women leaders' career development. The researcher did not recognize any leadership-related challenges faced by women in positions of leadership that have an impact on their careers.

Furthermore, most studies have focused on the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions rather than the challenges they face after becoming leaders. The issues related to challenges of women leaders help even to find out why they were not represented in higher leadership positions. As a result, the purpose of this study is to identify the challenges and the opportunities obtained by women leaders in their career progression in *Jabi Tehnan Woreda* public sectors of West Gojjam Zone.

### **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

#### **1.3.1. General Objective**

The general objective of this study was to assess the challenges and opportunities of women in leadership positions in public sectors in *Jabi Tehnan Woreda*, West Gojjam Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia.

#### **1.3.2. Specific Objectives**

Specifically, the study aims to:

- ✓ Explore the types of positions held by women in the study area's public sectors
- ✓ Identify the challenges that influence women leaders career progression to leadership positions in the study area; and
- ✓ Assess the opportunities that women leaders got during their leadership positions in the study area.

### **1.4. Research Questions**

- ✓ What types of positions do women hold in the study area's public sectors?
- ✓ What are the challenges that influence women leaders' career progression to leadership positions in the study area?
- ✓ What are the possible opportunities that women leaders gained during leadership positions in the public sectors of the study area?

## 1.5. Significance of the Study

The study's significance comes from its ability to clearly show the challenges faced by the women leaders on their journey to leadership positions, as well as the opportunities they had to overcome those challenges. As a result, the significance of this study will be focused on the four issues listed below. First, the study results will assist women leaders in becoming aware of the challenges they encounter, as well as in considering potential solutions to the challenges and obstacles to holding better leadership positions. Second, the study will contribute to the generation of relevant and practical information on employees' knowledge of the issues women encounter in their positions. Third, the findings provide administrators with further information on the challenges that women leaders face, as well as the mechanisms for providing critical assistance in order to close the existing leadership gap. Finally, the study will assist other potential investigators in conducting further research in the subject of women and leadership.

## 1.6. Scope of the Study

This study focused on the challenges that influence women leaders' career progression and the opportunities available to women in leadership positions in Jabi Tehnan *Woreda* public sectors. The study findings may not be fully applicable to the situations of other women leaders in Ethiopia or elsewhere. As a result, the scope of this study is limited geographically, in terms of issues and target groups. Geographically, this research was conducted in the context of Jabi Tehnan *Woreda* public sectors. The target groups of this study are subordinates who are under the supervision of the women leaders, top men leaders who supervise women leaders, and women leaders themselves. As a result, the study is limited to women in leadership positions and may not consider the challenges and opportunities faced by women in non-leadership positions.

## 1.7. Operational Definition of Key Terms

**Career Progression:** refers to the upward movement or advancement in the leadership hierarchy.

**Challenges-** refer to factors that restrain women leaders from performing their duties effectively and holding better leadership positions.

**Leaders:** - refers to individual who hold senior managerial position through nomination or merit in their respective office structure.

**Leadership:** - refers to influencing, guiding, facilitating and making decision on the matter of the organization.

**Opportunities-** refer to a situation or condition that might facilitate or create conducive environment for women leaders.

## **1.8. Limitation of the Study**

This study has some limitations that can be addressed in future studies. First, the study could only include public sectors in *Jabi Tehnan Woreda*; it would be preferable if the study covered all *Woredas* in the West Gojjam Zone; this was the study's limitation. Second, while it is well known that several challenges affect women's career progression in leadership positions, this study has chosen to focus solely on three groups of predicting variables (organizational, socio-cultural, and leadership related challenges). Other variables, such as global factors, structural factors, behavioral factors, and others, are not included. Finally, the sample did not include other women leaders in the private sector, and the researcher did not take into account the opinions of subordinates under the supervision of a male leader. These gaps have to be filled by other researchers.

## **1.9. Organization of the Paper**

The study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter is an introductory section that includes the study's background, statement of the problem, objective of the study, significance of the study, and scope and limitations. The second chapter includes a review of the literature. The third chapter is concerned with the study's research design, which includes all methods and tools used in the study. The fourth chapter is entirely dedicated to data presentation, analysis, and discussion of key findings. The final chapter presents conclusions and recommendations based on the findings.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1. The Concepts of Leader and Leadership**

Leadership is a broad concept that includes three distinct elements: people, goals, and influence. Leadership is an influence relationship between leaders and followers who want to see real changes and outcomes that reflect their common goals. A leader typically provides a vision of what needs to be done and how it will be done, which drives the organization's performance in achieving its goals. Leaders of organizations have a clear mental picture of the organization's present and future, as well as how to connect the present with the future (Silva, 2014).

### **2.2. Women and Leadership**

Gender effects on leadership have significant implications for a comprehensive understanding of leadership (Northouse, 2021). For various reasons, researchers and organizations have shown an increasing interest in women in leadership roles in recent decades. One of the reasons is that gender is an important component of contemporary notions of effective leadership styles (Paustian *et al.*, 2014).

The modern concept of leadership style has evolved from a traditional masculine or autocratic style to more feminine or genderless democratic and transformational leadership styles. Developing a more gender-neutral view of leadership will improve leadership effectiveness by allowing people to engage in the best leadership practices. The study of women and leadership is critical in shedding light on aspects of gender barriers that are subtle and thus often overlooked (Northouse, 2021).

### **2.3. The Kinds of leadership Positions Hold by Women**

Leadership has traditionally been a male prerogative in corporate, political, military, business, and other societal sectors. Despite increased access to supervisory and middle management positions for women, they remain rare as elite leaders and top executives. To explain this phenomenon, public and scientific debate has focused on the concept of a "glass ceiling," which

is a barrier of prejudice and discrimination that prevents women from advancing to higher-level leadership positions (Choi, 2019).

In today's world, more women than ever are entering the labor force, but men hold the majority of top management positions in almost all countries. Managers are more concentrated in lower-level positions and have less authority than men. Moreover, women continue to be concentrated in traditionally "female" functional areas of companies such as human resources, health, education, social welfare, corporate communications, community and governmental relations, marketing, and finance (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013).

Similarly, according to Moyana (2018), women tend to hold lower-level positions such as clerical and support staff while continuing to hold management positions considered feminine (example human resources, marketing, corporate social responsibility). According to Maseko (2013), the nature of women's career paths is a barrier to their advancement to top positions because at lower management levels, women are typically placed in non-strategic sectors, as well as personnel and administrative positions, rather than professional and line management jobs leading to the top. This is often compounded by women's limited access to formal and informal networks essential for advancement.

As a result, Rowley et al. (2016) noticed that many female executives have dual attitudes toward their careers, with a strong desire to continue working but a lack of interest in career advancement. These professional women prefer lower-level (low or mid-level) positions with less pressure to perform multiple roles rather than higher-level positions with more responsibilities and duties. As a result, women leaders' concerns about work-life conflict limit their career options.

#### **2.4. Challenges of Women in Leadership Position**

As a result, extensive research has been conducted to better understand the various forms of discrimination and barriers that continue to impede women's advancement (Glass and Cook, 2016). This section of the study discusses the literatures on the challenges that women leaders face in leadership positions.



### **2.4.1. Socio-Cultural Challenges**

There are social and cultural biases that include both the internal view of women and the external view of women held by society as a whole (Northouse, 2021). The variety of roles that women assume during peak periods of their professional and academic careers explains one factor that explains gender differences in salary and promotions. These social factors frequently result in self-selection into gender-specific occupations and positions within occupations (Trauth, 2017). As a result, the socio-cultural challenges that impede women leaders' progression to positions of leadership are as follows:

#### **2.4.1.1. Gender stereotyping**

Gender stereotypes both describe and prescribe stereotypic beliefs about the characteristics of men and women (Northouse, 2021). Men are stereotyped with agentic characteristics such as confidence, assertiveness, independence, rationality, and decisiveness, whereas women are stereotyped with communal characteristics such as concern for others, sensitivity, warmth, helpfulness, and nurturance. Gender stereotypes hold that masculine and feminine characteristics are intertwined with leadership in the sense that participation in leadership necessitates masculine characteristics (Amayah and Haque, 2017).

Gender bias in institutions is a challenge for all women seeking equal participation and leadership positions. Skepticism and mistrust of women's leadership abilities, as well as stereotypes and prejudices about their role in society and their suitability for leadership roles and decision-making, are significant challenges for all women (Makulilo, 2022). Notably, when women enter a male-dominated career path, they are expected to demonstrate their ability (Latchanah and Singh, 2016).

According to Henry (2018), even if a woman is unequivocally successful in male gender-typed work, she faces career-hindering problems in work settings, such as being disliked and personally derogated. This bias against female leaders helps to explain the numerous findings indicating less favorable attitudes toward female leaders than toward male leaders, greater difficulty for women to attain top leadership roles, and greater difficulty for women to be perceived as effective in these roles. Gender biases can be especially harmful in the decision-

making processes for selecting elite leaders, because the unstructured nature of those decisions allows biased decisions to be made without accountability. Overall, substantial empirical evidence suggests that gender stereotypes can significantly alter women's perceptions and evaluations of female leaders and have a direct impact on women in or aspiring to leadership positions (Northouse, 2021).

#### **2.4.1.2. Lack of family support**

Lack of family support to women leaders' results in conflict with career demands and also leads to women delaying their advancement into management or executive positions (Singh and Prasad, 2014). In addition, Bahiru and Mengistu (2018) also shows that women who lack personal and social support from family members were forced to leave their leadership positions due to work overload. Some women also lack emotional support from their families, particularly from their spouses, who may disagree with their targets. The lack of support is attributed not only to the work environment, but also to family and male peers. Women leaders bear additional burdens when they are required to attend public functions that higher-level positions frequently require (America Association of University Women (AAUW), 2016).

In most cases in Ethiopia, because the burden of child care is entirely on the shoulders of women, and there are almost no support systems in the country to share this burden, women give up their fast track to leadership positions and choose to devote their full attention to their children. Thus, the lack of a support system, particularly in childcare, has significantly contributed to Ethiopia's declining number of female leaders in all sectors (Aragaw, 2018).

#### **2.4.1.3. Conflict between work and family responsibilities**

Work-family conflict is a type of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are in some ways incompatible (Mohamad and Bakar, 2017). Work-family conflict models suggest that conflict arises when demands for participation in one domain of life are incompatible with demands for participation in another, and that this conflict can have a significant impact on the quality of both work and family life (Goh *et al.*, 2015). Work-life balance challenges can greatly affect women advancement (Akpınar-Sposito, 2013).

As women are expected to undertake the majority of domestic and child-care work, often in addition to paid work outside the home, younger married women in particular are likely to experience 'time poverty' (Arora, 2015). At this stage in their lives, professional women are faced with trying to manage a career, a home and child-care that results in greater conflict between work and family (Baumgartner and Schneider, 2010).

As a result, women continue to be the ones who take more days off and interrupt their careers. As a result of these actions, women have fewer years of job experience and fewer hours of employment per year, which slows their career progression and lowers their earnings (Zhou, 2015). Empirical evidence suggests that family-related work interruptions for women have a significant impact on their opportunities for advancement and pay (Latchanah and Singh, 2016).

#### **2.4.1.4. Lack of confidence and ambition**

According to Kaiye and Singh (2013), women lack the basic traits and skills needed to succeed in leadership positions due to a lack of ambition and confidence. A lack of self-confidence is a major challenge in these male-dominated environments, resulting in a self-imposed psychological barrier (Latchanah and Singh, 2016). Furthermore, other research indicates that women are the cause of underrepresentation in top leadership positions because they are hesitant to take on high-level positions. It goes on to say that women are afraid to express their needs; they are not assertive; they are afraid of power and are unwilling to play the game (McKinnon, 2014).

Furthermore, women who aspire to higher levels of leadership are more likely to respond with lower aspirations than men. This is due to a lack of self-confidence, a fear of failure, and a perception of themselves as good leaders. This reluctance stems from the fact that women are stereotyped (Getachew, 2014).

#### **2.4.2. Organizational Challenges**

Many obstacles related to organizational structures can either slow or impede women's professional development. Organizations, according to Karam and Jamali (2013), are patriarchal institutions that inevitably place women in lower positions and clearly favor men.

#### **2.4.2.1. Lack of female role models**

According to Elmer (2013), access to an influential member of the leadership team is critical for women's upward mobility. However, Latchanah and Singh (2016) reported that a lack of role models and mentorship programs was a major organizational roadblock that prevented women from advancing to more senior positions.

Because of gender stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination, there are few women at the top who can serve as examples or role models. As a result, the lack of senior female role models is still cited as a major barrier to women's career success. A large number of European managers cite the lack of female role models as the second most significant barrier to women's career success, after sex-role stereotyping of leadership (Derks *et al.*, 2016).

At the career progression stage, when women make critical career decisions, the presence of role models can be very helpful in steering them in one direction or another. When women make up only a small percentage of upper management, such guidance and support for female employees is severely limited. The scarcity of senior women made them appear unsuitable as role models. Both of these factors make role modeling difficult for young women aspiring to positions of power (Dworkin *et al.*, 2018).

#### **2.4.2.2. Lack of network opportunities**

Networking behaviors are defined by Macintosh and Krush (2017) as individuals' attempts to develop and maintain relationships with others who have the potential to assist them in their work or career. Previous research has shown that effective organizational networking improves career outcomes such as access to information, social and professional advice, and increased job opportunities; promotions; and career satisfaction. As a result, the negative consequences of the absence of organizational networks on female leaders' career advancement included a lack of professional support, career planning, and information sharing, as well as a lack of interpersonal relationships with subordinates. Women's lack of access to organizational networks suggests that women leaders are likely to be deprived of professional support, career planning, access to key personnel, and organizational information, among other things. Men exist, but women are

excluded from them and from informal networks, which are critical for career development and growth.

Miller (2016) discovered an implicit disadvantage in which men had a more fully developed informal network in various occasions between colleagues. This aided their career development, whereas women are unable to participate in the informal network. As a result, they miss out on a lot of important information for career progression.

In this regard, women are less likely than men to have the networks, contacts, social and professional experience that public leaders are expected to have (Rho and Lee, 2018). Furthermore, women are said to be less adept at networking than men, to dislike or find it distasteful, and to have no time for it due to the time commitment (Thomson and Laurent, 2015). In fact, networking takes up time outside of working hours. In this regard, a study found that women are unable to attend informal and evening meetings due to domestic responsibilities.

#### **2.4.2.3. Lack of empowerment practices**

Another challenge that women leaders face is a lack of empowerment, which manifests itself in their inability to influence decision-making and achieve organizational goals due to a lack of empowerment tools or methods (Goldman and Little, 2015). Access to knowledge, the delegation of sufficient authority, and access to information can all lead to empowerment, as can self-development, reward and encouragement, participation in goal setting and policymaking, and the identification of means and methods (Alsubaie and Jones, 2017).

As a result, any deficiencies in any of these areas will result in a lack of empowerment and, as a result, ineffective leadership. Evidence suggests that several factors contribute to women leaders' lack of empowerment. These include a lack of administrative efficiency, limited training opportunities, a lack of professional exchange and cooperation with other institutions to gain diverse experiences, and the exclusion of women from some policies and regulations as well as decision-making (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

There is also research evidence that women receive less formal training and have fewer developmental opportunities at work than men, both of which are likely to limit the progress of women leaders (Northouse, 2021).

#### **2.4.2.4. Absence of childcare centers**

Because social norms assign childcare and eldercare roles to women, care responsibilities are likely to limit women's ability to enter and remain in the paid workforce. Such responsibilities limit their opportunities for advancement and work in the evenings and on weekends. In organizations, care-giving roles coexist with leadership roles. Women's careers may suffer as a result of such care giving stereotypes. Women's lower career success has been linked to more interruptions and discontinuity in career development. This is due to women's greater involvement in childcare responsibilities. Women's human capital is reduced by family responsibilities because their careers are interrupted due to childcare and other family-related responsibilities, which are typically more women's responsibilities (Mattila and Uusilehto, 2019).

A lack of affordable childcare had hampered the advancement of talented women in their careers. Women are the most affected by this issue, which is consistent with previous empirical findings. As previously stated, mothers forego work in part due to imposed social norms regarding who takes responsibility as the primary caregiver. Furthermore, mothers were more likely than fathers to conclude that childcare constraints had harmed their careers (Easter, 2020).

#### **2.4.2.5. Gender-based discrimination**

Women face more obstacles and rely on strategies for advancement that differ from those used by men. Women face discrimination in a variety of ways, including job segregation, wage disparities, sexual harassment, denial of career development opportunities (including mentoring and poor performance evaluations), and a lack of promotion opportunities (Sharma and Kaur, 2019). Gender discrimination in the workplace is usually subtle. According to one writer, discrimination has become so ingrained in company cultural norms and organizational status quo that most people are unaware of it (Martin and Barnard, 2013).

Furthermore, researchers have discovered that employers frequently assign similarly qualified men and women to different occupational positions. Such differential sorting may be attributed to a perceived mismatch between stereotypical female characteristics and the alleged requirements of some jobs. This finding implies that the perceived and actual demands placed on leaders in larger, more complex institutions create an impediment to hiring or promoting women to top leadership positions (Cook and Glass, 2014).

#### **2.4.2.6. Lack of support from the organizations and superiors**

Organizational or corporate culture refers to how we work, interact with one another, and get things done in an organization (Camacho et al., 2018). As a result, a lack of supportive workplace practices can directly impede women's progress (Singh and Prasad, 2014). One of the challenges that women leaders face, particularly those in male-dominated fields, is gender-related workplace hostility and a lack of peer support. This challenge has been described using terms such as sexism (Amayah and Haque, 2017). Moreover, Bird (2006) stated that bosses/organizations who do not value work-life balance are the number-one reason that people quit their jobs.

#### **2.4.3. Leadership Related Challenges**

Leadership takes time and requires a lot of effort, leaving little room for other priorities, and both men and women may think about that. Negative aspects of leadership include losing work flexibility, losing personal flexibility, having less time for personal and family activities, and doing too much work for too little reward. These disadvantages make it less likely that people will aspire to positions of leadership. However, we contend that gender moderates the relationship between leadership negatives and leadership aspiration. We hypothesize that because of differences in career socialization, women are less likely to aspire to lead the more they perceive negative aspects of leadership, compared to men (Sanchez and Lehnert, 2019).

Similarly, Hejase et al. (2013) contend that leadership positions are extremely stressful and necessitate hard work, long hours, and numerous sacrifices. Furthermore, the amount of time spent at work and the importance placed on work by employees are important determinants of their commitment levels and opportunities for advancement within the organization. However, for many women, the time demands of such positions conflict with family obligations (bringing

up their children, cleaning the house, preparing food, managing the household. Men, as the head of the household, have less parental responsibility, giving them more time to devote to their work and increasing their chances of becoming leaders and managers. "If women do not care enough for their children, they are aware that their children are at risk of neglect." If men don't care enough, they know their wives will"; this is a barrier for women in and of itself. Furthermore, the assumption that a good leader is someone who prioritizes work at all times is another barrier to women's upward mobility.

The high inflexibility of the working day, as well as the location of work, may make it difficult for female leaders to balance dual expectations of their family and leadership responsibilities (Shivakumar and Pujar, 2016). In addition to the foregoing, when women are presented as high-level leaders in any organization, they face time constraints in both their professional and personal lives (Cho et al., 2016). This implies that because of the gender division of labor, women are overburdened with multiple responsibilities, resulting in time constraints to fulfill all of their roles.

Women's careers and perceived competency influence their leadership aspirations differently than men's. Because men are frequently overconfident in their abilities and frequently apply for positions that they are only partially qualified to hold, and women are frequently underconfident in their abilities (Sanchez and Lehnert, 2019), this lack of confidence is what drives women's lower aspirations to leadership (Artabane *et al.*, 2017).

Women are perceived to be less likely than men to exhibit what are perceived to be effective leadership behaviors, and they receive lower performance evaluations from both men and women subordinates. According to Glass and Cook (2016), women, unlike men, face a leadership conflict. When a woman promotes herself, she loses popularity; however, when she does not assert her authority, she is perceived as less competent.

Despite the fact that many researchers have discovered that there are few differences in the innate abilities of male and female managers (Powell, 2018), stereotypes about women being less capable leaders than men persist. Women are initially rated lower than equally competent men. These perceptions may have an unintended impact on supervisory interactions when the woman is being supervised as well as when she is the supervisor. Furthermore, femininity is associated



with incompetence, whereas masculinity is associated with competence. Women may be at a disadvantage because they have been socialized to exhibit more docile, unleader-like traits, which sends a message of incompetence (Abu-Tineh, 2013).

Furthermore, House (2016) identified images of masculine leadership, a lack of a support system, long hours working, low salaries, insufficient budgets, stress, numerous evening events, and family obligations as factors that hampered women's career advancement.

Similarly, Bozkus (2022) cited increased responsibilities, decreased authority, increased accountability, stress, and inadequate pay as the top reasons women were challenged in leadership positions. Other difficulties include the strain on their family life, the low salary in comparison to the responsibilities of the position, and the long hours (Mahfouz, 2022).

Leadership positions necessitate long hours and are stressful. This burden is added to the responsibilities of child care, home, and family for women. Some factors that contribute to stress for women in leadership positions include balancing work and family life (Muasya, 2016). According to Wirth (2001), women work longer hours than men in nearly every country around the world, and they are responsible for caring for children, the elderly, and handling all domestic responsibilities. These experiences caused women leaders to experience conflict between work and family roles, which put them under stress.

This section discusses the challenges that women leaders face in positions of leadership. Women leaders on various paths face different challenges. Many researchers have already shown that there are varieties of obstacles that hinder women leaders' career advancement. These factors linked with women leaders' personalities and societal conditions may impede their capacity to completely perform their leadership function successfully. According to a review of relevant literature, women leaders confront several hurdles that restrict their effectiveness and prevent them from reaching their full leadership potential. Organizational structure, misunderstandings with husbands, the difficulty of managing professional and family commitments in the lack of structural, social, and family support, family obligations, and a sense of isolation in informal networks are among the problems. Furthermore, inflexible working hours, stress, incompetency, and payment dissatisfaction all contribute to women's low career advancement in leadership positions. This may inhibit the career development of certain women in positions of leadership.

## **2.5. Opportunities of Women in Leadership Positions**

Women have many opportunities for tackling the wide-ranging challenges including their own personal trait, organizational incentives, and support they get from individuals closest to them. Recent studies also show that there are many advantages gained from women participation in decision-making and leadership (Glass and Cook, 2016). Women can seize these benefits for strengthening their presence in leadership positions.

### **2.5.1. Government Initiatives**

Many governments around the world, and particularly in Sub-Saharan African countries, have encouraged women and girls to enter the labor force and assume positions of leadership (Amayah and Haque, 2017). These initiatives include a leadership development program, affirmative action, and quotas to support and enhance their participation.

### **2.5.2. Rise in Availability of Women's Networks**

The informal network becomes more important as one advances in an organization. Internal women's networks have also emerged in large organizations in recent years. These networks were viewed as critical innovations that could mark a watershed moment in the quest for greater gender balance in management (Thomson and Laurent, 2015).

A study found that such networks could promote diversity by challenging invisible structural obstacles to the promotion of women. In addition to giving women a more powerful collective voice, supporting their development and being an autonomous power base from which to seek information, exert influence and challenge policies and decisions, women's networks were said to be good places in which to develop networking skills. Similarly, the existence of external women's networks serves many vital purposes, including lobbying, information sharing, education, and mentoring (Visser, 2011). As women are also good on the internet, they can use that to form informal network and they can have the convenience of doing that from home.

Access to influential networks is integral to growing one's professional skill set and moving up in the leadership hierarchy. Networking can sometimes be difficult for women for a number of

reasons. According to the AAUW (2016), women with significant family responsibilities may not have the time to build social networks or meet work colleagues after work hours. According to Parks (2018), women need to get involved in something that interests or is important to them. It offers the opportunity to stand out, expand your circle of contacts, and develop relationships with people both inside and outside of their organization.

### **2.5.3. Leadership Development Programs**

Many organizations are enhancing women's career development by involving them in career development programs (Northouse, 2021). Training in leadership and management equips women with rare and important skills. The employment environment can be hostile to women leaders and sometimes they even refuse to accept top positions for fear of criticism and discrimination. This is one of the reasons a training that empowers women to deal with all kinds of harassment as they progress in their careers is crucial (Amayah and Haque, 2017). Moreover, some leadership development programs are helping women to build their networks by increasing networking opportunities, expanding the depth and range of developmental relationships, and highlighting the benefits of networking (Kalpazidou *et al.*, 2016).

### **2.5.4. Affirmative Actions**

Affirmative action in employment helps to bring the underutilized labor of excluded categories of the society to the market. Despite the required knowledge and skills, many women do not engage in full employment due to the stereotypical views against women (Visser, 2011). Affirmative action's tend to increase the numbers of women in leadership, making diversity among them more likely (Fitsum, 2017). More and more countries are adopting quotas to increase women participation in leadership position (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2018).

### **2.5.5. Mentoring**

Research in career development has indicated the importance of positive support from important others in an individual's life. Women who dared to embark on careers outside gender-circumscribed roles indicated that they received support and mentoring from outside of their families, including from educational professionals such as teachers, professors, and guidance

counselors. In addition, co-workers and bosses played key roles in motivating them to achieve success in their current career paths ((Latchanah and Singh, 2016).

In general, the opportunities indicated above are all existing, separately or in combination with each other, as a support for women to improve their representation in decision-making positions.

## **2.6. Theoretical Framework of the Study**

This study used a social psychological approach to understand the relationship between gender and leadership, and the theory explains the challenges women face in positions of leadership.

### **2.6.1. Social Psychological Theory**

A social psychological approach is one of the most applicable theoretical frameworks used to understand the nexus between gender and leadership. In doing so, the theory explains how both the social context and people's perceptions influence leadership processes involving gender. The theoretical approach often focused on the barriers that women face in the leadership domain. The greatest barriers of women in leadership are the prejudice and discrimination that stem from gender stereotypic beliefs and implicit theories of leadership (Hoyt and Simon, 2017).

Social psychological research has provided ample evidence that the prejudice and discrimination results from women perceived "lack of fit." Furthermore, this prejudice and discrimination contributes to women's experiencing greater difficulty in attaining and being perceived as effective in leadership roles. The majority of social psychologists' study gender and leadership focus on the barriers that women face. Women navigate a complex maze of challenges along their leadership journeys. The greater difficulties women relative to men, encounter in leadership was originally dubbed the glass ceiling, stereotype-based expectations, organizational structures and cultures, and the often-inequitable divisions of domestic labor (Hoyt and Simon, 2017).

A prominent theoretical focus for social psychologists interested in gender and leadership concerns understanding the nature and impact of gender-based biases that create a stereotype-based lack of fit between women's characteristics, skills, and aspirations and those deemed necessary for leadership effectiveness (Hoyt, 2014).

The rationale for using this theoretical framework in this study is that it examines gender and leadership and attempts to distinguish between female and male leaders. According to the theory, the difference and inequality between men and women is caused by gender-based stereotype expectations on men and women that are instilled in them through socialization. In addition, the theory helps to a better understanding of how stereotypes shape expectations people have of female leaders, as well as how they influence women's own thoughts and behaviors via stereotype threat processes. Moreover, the Social psychological approach important to understand gender and leadership reveal how gender does matter in how people respond to leaders and how leaders approach their roles. As a result, this theoretical framework is employed in this study.

## **2.7. Conceptual Framework of the Study**

A conceptual framework involves forming ideas about relationships between variables in the study and showing these relationships graphically or diagrammatically (Potschin-Young *et al.*, 2018). Based on a review of related literature, the conceptual framework for the dependent and independent variables is depicted in diagram form below. Independent variables are the manipulated variable in the study whose presence or absence influences the change in the dependent variable, whereas the dependent variable is the variable that is measured or evaluated in the study. The independent variables in this study are socio-cultural challenges (work-life balance, gender stereotypes, lack of family support, less confidence), organizational challenges (lack of networks, gender-based discrimination, limited access to empowerment practices, lack of support from the organization and top leaders and lack of female role models), and leadership related challenges (inflexible working hours, incompetency, stress and low salaries). These challenges determine the dependent variable (women leaders' career progression).

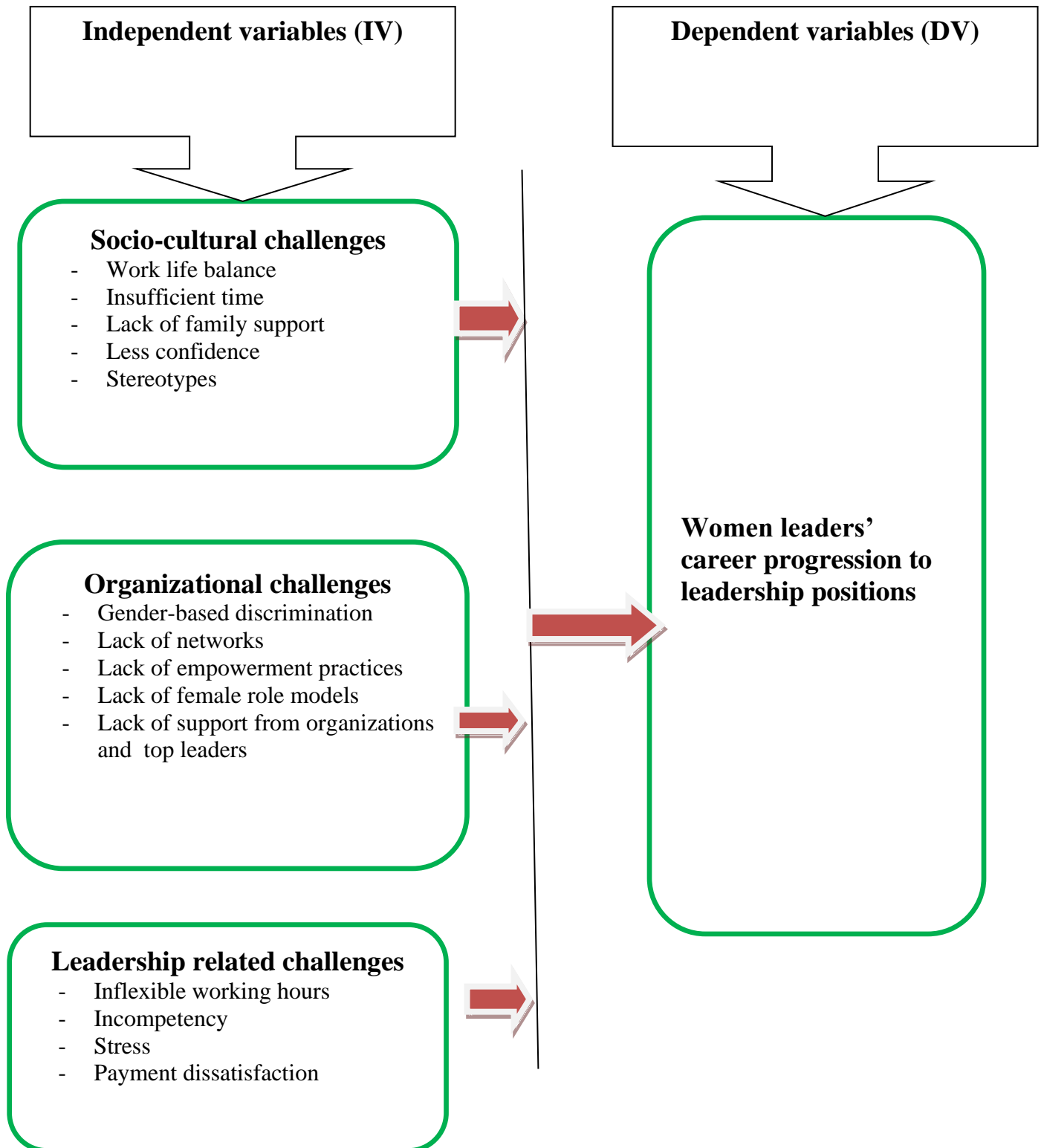


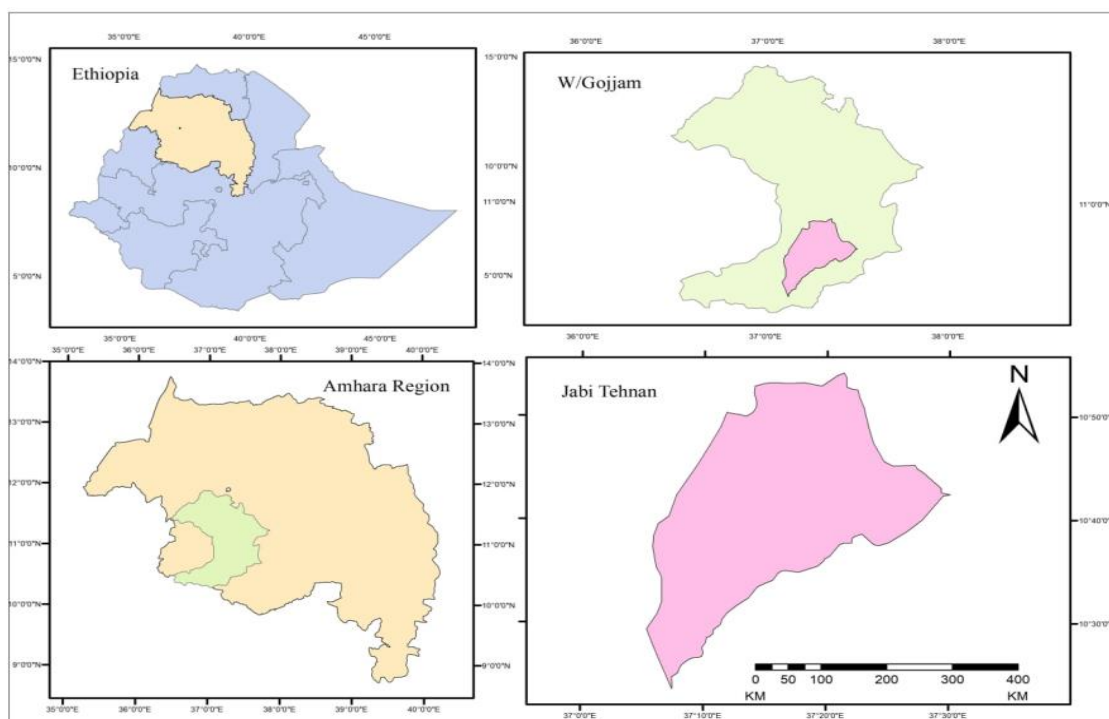
Figure 1: Diagram showing the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

#### 3.1. Description of the Study Area

The study was conducted in *Jabi Tehnan Woreda*, which is one of the 15 *Woredas* of the West Gojjam Administrative Zone. It is bordered on the southeast by *Dembecha*, on the west by *Bure*, on the northwest by *Sekela*, on the north by *Kuarit*, and on the east by *Dega Damot*. The study area is situated 380 kilometer North West of Addis Ababa and 176 kilometer South east of the *Bahir Dar*. The *Woreda* has 39 *kebels* and *Finoteselam* is the capital city of the study area. The *Woreda* has a total population of 277,590 people, including 139,616 male and 137,974 female. With regard to religious mix, 97.05 % are Orthodox Christians, 2.84 % Muslims and, 0.11% are Protestants. The majority of the population (93.8%) lives in the rural areas predominantly dependent on subsistence agriculture while the remaining (6.2%) live in urban or semi urban areas (Taye, 2016).

The geographical coordinates of the study area are located between 10° 30'00" to 10° 58' 30" N and 36° 40' 30" to 37° 31' 30" E and the altitude of the *Woreda* ranges from 1,500-2,300 meter above sea level (m.a.s.l). Agro-ecologically, 88% of the *Woreda* is classified as *Woyina Dega* and the remaining 12% as *kolla*. According to the *Woreda* office of agriculture, the topography is classified as 65% plain, 15% mountainous, 15% undulating, and 5% valley. The average annual rainfall is 1250 mm and the annual temperature varies from 14-32 °C. Since the majority of the population lives in the rural area with crop production as the main livelihood option, arable land constituted the largest portion of the *Woreda* land use type. Mixed farming, with crop and livestock production, constituted the main livelihood for the rural community of the *Woreda* (Taye, 2016). The soils of the *Woreda* are classified as 60% red, 25% brown, and 15% black soil. Additionally, from fertility point of view, it's classified as 27% fertile, 71% medium, and 2% infertile soil (Asmare and Gure, 2019).



**Figure 2:** location map of the study area

### 3.2. Research Approach and Design of the Study

The study employed a mixed methods research approach that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. Mixed methods research is a research method that combines the collection, analysis, and integration of quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) research approaches (Mason *et al.*, 2021). Quantitative research involves the numerical analysis of data, whereas qualitative research involves the scientific description of people, events, and phenomena without the use of numbers. So both methods are useful and valid, a study can employ both research approaches. In this study, mixed methods research was used because the combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches yields a better understanding of the research problem than either of the two research methods used alone.

Based on the objective of this study, an explanatory sequential research design was employed. According to Subedi (2016), an explanatory-sequential design consists of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results. The rationale for this approach is that the quantitative data and results provide a general picture of the research problem; more analysis, specifically through qualitative



data collection is needed to refine, extend or explain the general picture. Hence, data were collected sequentially in this study based on the study design. Firstly, quantitative data were gathered through the distribution questionnaires. Second, semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data on issues that require further explanation and for triangulation purposes. So, an explanatory sequential research design was employed in this study.

### **3.3. Target Population**

The target population is a collection of elements from which the sample is drawn (Etagegn, 2019). The study target population was 240 (male and female) employees led by women leaders. The study incorporates the views of subordinates of women leaders in the study area for the purpose of deeper understanding of a case and triangulation. According to a *Woreda* administration office document, *Jabi Tehnan Woreda* has nine women leaders out of the 26 public sectors. The total number of subordinates under the supervision of women leaders in these 9 sector bureaus is 240. As a result, the study populations of the research are all women and men employees who currently work in 9 public sectors of *Jabi Tehnan Woreda* under the leader of women.

### **3.4. Sampling Techniques and Sample Size Determination**

To select the respondents from total study population, both probabilities and non-probabilities sampling methods are used. The probability sampling/ simple random sampling/ method by lottery system are used because every unit of population has equal chance to be as a member of sample. It avoids biasness and helps to generalize data gain from sample respondents. Moreover, non-probabilities sampling/ purposive sampling/ used to recruit participants for qualitative data. Purposive sampling is used to obtain relevant information from the relevant body based on their experience and knowledge of the phenomenon. As a result, the participants include men leaders and all women leaders in the study area. It decided to use this method in order to gain relevant data about the present status of women leadership and large enough to provide more reliable sample for the study.

The appropriate sample size of this study was taken by using the Yamane formula (Neuman and Rossman, 2006) which is based on a 5% margin and 95% level of confidence.

The equation is,

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

where

N= Total population

n= Sample Size

e= Standard Error

1= Constant

N=240, n=150, e= 5%

As stated previously, the overall sample size of this study was 150 respondents, calculated using the above formula, from such a target population of 240 employees. As a result, the study selected 150 respondents to fill the questionnaire.

### **3.5. Source of Data**

The data required to answer the research questions about the challenges and opportunities for women in leadership positions, particularly how they influence their career progression. The unit of analysis is women leaders' career progression to leadership positions.

#### **3.5.1. Primary Source**

Primary data are the original data collected from respondents by the researcher. As a result, primary data was gathered using questionnaires and interview guides. As a result, women leaders, their subordinates, and top male leaders acted as primary sources of information in order to gain a viewpoint on the challenges and opportunities women in positions of leadership in the public sectors.

### **3.5.2. Secondary Source**

Secondary data is information gathered from various written documents that generally help in the acquisition of useful information to supplement the information received from primary sources. As a result, secondary sources conducted a desk review of various relevant books, papers, journals, articles, and related research works.

## **3.6. Data Collection Instruments**

In order to obtain adequate information, the researcher used a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview and documentary review was the major data-gathering instruments.

### **3.6.1. Questionnaire**

The data for this study was gathered using a well-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire had only closed-ended questions. This question was aimed at obtaining primary data from subordinates working under the supervision of women leaders in various offices around the study area. The information collected through questionnaires was related to subordinates' perceptions of the challenges that influence women leaders' career progressions. These data gathering procedures were used in this study because they would yield comparable statistics.

### **3.6.2. Semi-Structured Interview**

The interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner by the researcher. The semi-structured interview guide includes open-ended questions to allow participants to discuss their experiences and ideas on the topic under consideration. A semi-structured interview was done with both the supervisors of the women leaders to examine their perspectives of the issues faced by women leaders and the women leaders themselves to determine the challenges they encountered and the opportunities acquired in a leadership position. In general, the interview guide consisted of open-ended questions about women leaders' leadership challenges and opportunities obtained during their leadership periods. Data collection was terminated at the point of saturation, where the researcher was not able to get new information by adding more respondents.

### **3.6.3. Documentary Review**

According to Kothari (2017), documentary review refers to the source of information found in published and unpublished documents, reports, statistics, manuscripts, letters, or diaries owned by individuals, institutions, or organizations. In order to find updated information from documents, the researcher purposefully used documents from the Jabi Tehnan *Woreda* human resource office to see the types of leadership positions held by women.

### **3.7. Data Analysis and Presentation**

The study used a mixed methods research design, which included both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. To analyze quantitative data, the study applied descriptive statistics. Hence, for quantitative method, upon completion of the data collection, the data was coded, edited and entered into the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 20 and then the data was analyzed through descriptive statistics. Following that, the quantitative findings were supported or triangulated by the qualitative findings, and they were discussed in accordance with previous studies.

Descriptive statistical tools were used to present quantitative data. The important statistical measures that are used to summarize and categorize the research data are table, percentages, frequencies, and mean.

Thematic data analysis was used to analyze the data gathered during the interview. In general, the collected qualitative data was analyzed through narrations, descriptions and direct quotations.

### **3.8. Validity and Reliability of the Study**

To ensure the validity of the research results, the study triangulated statistical findings with interviews. Furthermore, for the purpose of analytical generalization, the study's findings and results were interpreted in light of a review of related literature and previous research studies. Above all, the use of a mixed research approach increased the validity and strength of the study's results by supplementing statistical data with data collected through qualitative data collection methods. As a result, the data collection's legitimacy was ensured, and the advisor's opinions and all beneficial recommendations were incorporated.

Reliability is defined as the degree to which measurements are error-free and thus provide consistent results. As a result, the researcher conducts a pretest to ensure the study's reliability. As a result, certain respondents were chosen for pre-testing. This is because it assists in identifying questions that do not make sense to participants/make them feel uncomfortable, as well as flaws in the questionnaire that may lead to biased responses and determining the level of knowledge among respondents. Cronbach's alpha was also used because it assesses the instrument's internal consistency or the study's reliability. Cronbach alpha was calculated for each of the three independent variables and one dependent variable. The questionnaire is considered reliable if it has a Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of at least 0.7 (Taber, 2018).

Table 1. Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) Coefficient Table

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
Socio-cultural challenges	5	0.746
Organizational challenges	7	0.746
Leadership challenges	4	0.745
Women leaders Career progression	2	0.813

### 3.9. Ethical Considerations

To maintain the ethical issue of this study, the researcher first obtained permission from the Department of Gender and Development Studies and asked approval from the relevant body. An agreement was reached with the respondents and participants in order to obtain permission to conduct the discussion and fill out the questionnaire in an ethical manner by describing the objective of the study in Amharic language, which enables every participant and respondent to understand and be aware that all data was collected from them and used only for the purpose of research. When the data was gathered, the researcher was informed by the respondents that they may ask any question at any moment.

Similarly, because Amharic was the medium of communication, the interview schedule was developed in Amharic. The researcher inquired about the willingness of respondents to participate in this study by informing them that their identities would not be written in the study document. Furthermore, appropriate settings and times were chosen based on their ideas in order for them to express themselves confidently.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter analyzes, interprets, and discusses the results of the sample survey conducted through the use of questionnaires and interviews. One hundred fifty (150) questionnaires were distributed in total. While 139 were returned, 4 questionnaires from women and children affairs office, 5 questionnaires from group leaders and 2 from social affairs office were not returned. The result was presented by descriptive statistical tools, as well as qualitative analysis techniques. Descriptive statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, and mean were used for quantitative data. Here, the first part of the result presented kinds of leadership positions held by women in the study site. The second part focused on the challenges that influence women leaders' career progress. The final section explores opportunities they got for career advancement.

### 4.1. The Kind of Leadership Position hold by Women

A documentary review was used in this section to demonstrate the various types of leadership positions held by women in the study area.

Table 2. The number of sectors in which women hold leadership positions in the study area

No	Sectors	No of women in leadership
1	Women and children affairs office	
2	Women's association	
3	Women's league	
4	Youth and sport office	
5	Technique, vocational and Enterprise office	
6	Group leader	
7	speaker's office	
8	Social affairs office	
9	Culture and tourism office	
	Total	9

**Source:** *Jabi Tehnan Woreda* human resource management office, 2021

Table 2 shows the sectors which is lead by women leaders in the study area. Out of 46 leadership positions in 26 public sectors, only 9 leadership positions are held by women in the study area. Moreover, the Table shows women leaders in the study area are highly represented in women related leadership positions. This result is consistent with the works of Moyana (2018) women tend to work in support roles and continue to hold traditionally feminine leadership positions (for example, human resources, marketing, and corporate social responsibility).

According to the interviewed participants, women concentrate at lower and middle level of leadership positions. For example, one participant from the head of the *Woreda* administrative office said:

Despite the fact that the number of women in supervisory leadership positions has increased rapidly in our organization. The number of women in positions of higher leadership remains extremely low. Lack of line experience, insufficient career opportunities, time, gender-based stereotypes, work-life balance, and a lack of recognition and acceptance of women's leadership performance are among the reasons.

In addition, participant 5 also said:

Most women hold middle-level leadership positions. Besides that, the organization selects women for positions related to women. Furthermore, women did not seek and apply for top-level positions on their own because they were afraid of failing to demonstrate their abilities in work-life balance issues. As a result, most women do not want to apply for the positions, claiming that women prioritize their families over better leadership because it takes too much time, which is a burden for women to balance home responsibility and leadership, and they are not eager to take the posts because of traditional beliefs that place home responsibility on women. It is difficult to be a good mother while also being fully engaged in your work.

As a result, it is possible to conclude that women tend to concentrate on stereotyped feminine leadership abilities such as support staff positions requiring low-skilled service jobs.

## **4.2. Challenges of Women in Leadership Positions**

One of the study objectives was to analyze the challenges that women faced in positions of leadership. In this regard, respondents to the survey were asked to identify the challenges that women leaders faced in their respective organizations. The respondents were asked to score the main issues on a five-point Likert scale: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), and severely disagree (1). For ease analysis the mean value range from 1.00 to 2.49 were low, from 2.50 to 3.49 were moderate and greater than 3.50 were rated as high effect, according to (Etagegn, 2019).

### **4.2.1. Socio-cultural Challenges**

The most significant challenges for women's progress in leadership are social-cultural barriers. Socio-cultural barriers refer to the broad concept of gender roles in society, which qualifies men for authority and dominance based on gender characteristics. As a result, the main socio-cultural barriers are listed below.

#### **4.2.1.1. Conflict between family responsibilities and their work**

Table 3 below depicts the extent to which socio-cultural challenges influence women in leadership positions. In this regard, out of 139 sample respondents, 58 (41.7 %) and 55 (39.5 %) responded strongly agreed and agreed that there was a conflict between family responsibilities and their work, respectively. While 10 (7.2 %) of those respondents were unable to make a decision. The remaining 9(6.5%) and 7(5.0%) respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that there was a conflict between family duties and their work on women's professional advancement in leadership positions. As a result, this suggests that the conflict between family duties and their leadership role is a barrier to women's advancement in leadership positions.

As finding of the analysis indicate that, the respondents view had the 1st highest score average mean 4.06 rating was that women leaders faced role conflicts in at home and at the workplace those challenges greatly affect the women's career progression in leadership position. The finding was supported by Baumgartner and Schneider (2010), professional women are faced with trying to manage a career, a home and child-care that results in greater conflict between work and family and inhibits them from realizing their full potential in leadership.

In addition to the above data, as shown below, the participants clearly reflected qualitative information throughout the interview period. For example, participant 1 stated:

Before marriage, it is simple to strike a balance between personal and professional life because they simply have to prioritize their professional life. Work-life balance gets more complicated after marriage since an individual's obligations rise as they have to care for each other, and in the case of women, their responsibilities double as they also have to care for their family members. It is now extremely difficult for women leaders to balance their



personal and professional lives. My mother is currently assisting me in taking care of my family chores.

Similarly, Participant 6 she also said:

Women take on many roles such as mother, wife, and leader, as well as all home obligations. Taking on several jobs causes role conflict, especially for women in positions of leadership. Furthermore, a conflict between work and family life has genuine implications and has a direct impact on the quality of family life and professional advancement of women leaders. Career advancement is also impossible with an imbalanced work and family life, and this condition will only add to the stress of women leaders.

In addition, the head of the *Woreda* administration office also supported the above findings. He said that:

When compared to male leaders, women have many challenges in achieving a specific level of position. Men and women today have equal opportunities to use and progress in their professional lives all across the world. As a result, women are efficient and successful in their given positions, despite the fact that they face several problems on one hand to satisfy the organization's goals and on the other hand to fulfill the three primary gender roles of productive role, reproductive role, and communal role. This places a double load on women and has an impact on their leadership career advancement. Even this year, two female leaders in our organization have resigned from positions of leadership due to the difficulty of balancing several tasks at home with their job commitments.

As a result, it is possible to infer that without the right assistance, various duties may be one of the most significant challenges that women confront in their professional progress.

#### **4.2.1.2. Lack of family support**

Table 3 shows that out of 139 sample respondents, 46 (33.1 %) and 61 (43.9 %) of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that there was a lack of family support. whereas 8(5.8 %) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. The remaining 14(10.1%) and 10(7.2%) of sample respondents respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed on

the lack of family supports. As a result, the findings indicate that a lack of family support is a barrier to women's career advancement in leadership positions.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the respondent had the mean (average) scores 3.86 rating consider with lack of family support, so, those challenges highly influence women's career progression in leadership position. The findings of this study is supported by Singh and Prasad (2014), lack of family support for women leaders' results in conflict with career demands, which lead to women delaying their advancement into top management or executive positions. Similarly, Bahiru and Mengistu (2018) who confer that women who lack personal and social support from family members were forced to leave their leadership positions due to work overload.

In addition, as described below, the interviewee participants reflected qualitative information from their perspectives on family support. Participant 7 stated:

My husband is a traditional husband, and he refuses to assist me with housework or with the children. He is not pleased that I am pursuing my master's degree through the extension program. Furthermore, with all of my responsibilities at work and at home, it has been extremely difficult, and it appears that I must make a decision. The options are not straightforward. I considered quitting my job, but doing so would have a significant financial impact on our family. I have even considered divorce, but I realized it is not the answer because it would be detrimental for my family's upbringing. Now I am unsure how to manage things at work and at home.

Participant 4 , on the other hand, stated that she received some assistance from her husband, which was extremely beneficial to their professional success. The assistance she received in caring for the children aided them in balancing their work and family obligations. She stated:

My husband may not go to the kitchen to prepare food or wash dishes, but he has been a huge help in handling everything the children require from me. My husband's assistance is the foundation of my success. I would not be here if it had not been for his help. Spouses play an important role in helping women leaders balance their work and family responsibilities. Women leaders with families cannot be effective without the assistance of their husbands.

Women leaders face obstacles and rejection from their husbands as well. Some husbands are uninterested in their wives taking on leadership roles. This was the most difficult challenge, according to the interviewees. For example, participant 5 stated:

Families, particularly husbands, want to spend time with their wives. As a result, they do not want their wives to be politically involved. It is difficult to find a husband who willingly agrees to help his wife become a politician. As a result, a woman who is constantly nagging her husband about it will be unhappy with her career. Finally, in order to keep her family from being isolated, she will decide to leave the political game.

Similarly, participant 2 she also shares her experience as follows:

My family's attitude is positive to some extent, but I occasionally face challenges from my husband, such as when I arrived late at night due to an elongated meeting or an urgent task, my husband did not understand when they have meetings at this time. Furthermore, he believed that I did not devote enough time to my family responsibilities.

Based on the findings, it is reasonable to conclude that women, particularly those who are married and have families, are subjected to constant family pressure. This, in turn, leads to a lack of interest and makes it difficult for them to advance in their careers. Furthermore, almost no husbands are willing to assist their wives with household responsibilities. This creates tensions between their domestic and professional responsibilities.

#### **4.2.1.3. Lack of self-confidence**

According to Table 3, out of 139 respondents, 36(25.9 %) and 48(34.5 %) strongly agreed and agreed that there was a lack of self-confidence, respectively. While 19 (13.7%) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. Whereas the remaining 20 (14.4 %) and 16 (11.5 %) of sample respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that a lack of self-confidence was a problem. This implies that women's career advancement into better positions is hampered by a lack of self-confidence.

As finding of the analysis indicate that, the respondents view shows the mean score 3.49 rating was that women still having lack of self-confidence in administration, this indicates that those

challenges moderately influence women in leadership position. The findings of the result was concurrent with the works of Getachew (2014) who shows that women who aspire to become in higher leadership are more likely to response-lowered aspiration than men. This is the result of lack of self-confidence by themselves, fear of failure and lack of sense of themselves as good leaders.

In addition to the statistical data, the interviewees provided qualitative information, which is outlined below. According to participant 5 stated:

In addition to external barriers that prevent us from advancing, women lack self-confidence to push forward; we are afraid to apply for higher positions. I was afraid to apply for the positions because I was afraid I would not do well, proving that women are not qualified for higher positions. Furthermore, lack of self-confidence is a result of incorrect socialization in girls, who emerge from adolescence with a poor self-image, relatively low life expectations, and far less confidence in themselves and their abilities than boys do. As a result of this impediment, women leaders are fundamentally less confident than men leaders.

Similarly, the *Woreda* head agreed with the previous idea. He also said:

Women leaders lack confidence, underestimate themselves, and wait for their male counterparts to move. They have a variety of responsibilities, such as family, social life, and so on. Because of these responsibilities, many women leaders are afraid to compete with male colleagues and advance up the career ladder for fear of being judged, or men refuse to accept responsibility for women. Furthermore, they are afraid of not being accepted by their coworkers and have a sense of being a victim. Furthermore, women are hesitant to take advantage of this opportunity due to a lack of confidence.

The result was strengthened by McKinnon (2014) women themselves are the cause of underrepresentation in top leadership positions because they are reluctant to occupy high positions and afraid to voice their needs; they are not assertive; they are scared of power and are not eager to play the game.

As a result, lack of confidence is viewed as a factor preventing women from advancing to senior and executive positions. Women frequently lack self-confidence and self-belief in comparison to men, which leads to less risk-taking and more conservative career choices.

#### **4.2.1.4. Stereotypes on women's roles and abilities**

As shown in Table 3, out of 139 respondents, 30 (21.6 %) and 52 (37.3 %) of the respondents respectively responds strongly agreed and agreed that there were stereotyped views on women's abilities and roles. While 21 (15.1 %) of respondents were unable to make a decision. The remaining 20 (14.4 %) and 16 (11.5 %) of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that the existence of stereotyped views on women's roles and abilities. This implies that stereotypical views of women's roles and abilities obscure women leaders' career advancement.

As finding of the analysis indicate that the respondents view had the score average mean 3.43 rating was that stereotyping on women leaders roles and abilities, those challenges moderately affect the women's career progression in leadership position. These findings support the previous research findings of Makulilo (2022) that state skepticism and mistrust of women's ability to lead, and the stereotypes and prejudices about their role in society and their lack of suitability for leadership roles are major challenges for all women. On the contrary, Al-Shawi and DAHWI (2010) shows female leaders attributed positive perceptions and stereotypes about their professional capabilities.

The interviewees reported a prevalence of stereotypical views and a lack of acceptance from their supervisor and coworkers. For example, participant 2 stated her ideas as follows:

There is a gender stereotype about women's leadership capabilities when compared to men's. It is especially difficult when you have men working for you because many do not accept your leadership. Being a woman in a position of leadership is not the same as being a man. You are disrespected and unacknowledged. People still believe that women cannot have positive impacts and ideas in the workplace, that leadership is a man's domain, and that women dominate household responsibilities. As a result, there was a stereotype on women leaders' leadership effectiveness in our organization from top to bottom, and men leaders always criticized women's abilities.

Similarly, Participant 3 shared her experience:

Even though there is a progress in people's attitude towards women, there are still some people who could not change their attitude still now. Many men in our society believe that women should be submissive and that their true role is to be found within the family. I believe they recognize women's capability and potential but refuse to accept it. I think they are threatened by the presence of women in positions of power. They make it more difficult for women to progress, and hinder women to full heartedly exercise their responsibility.

In addition, Participant 5 also stated her ideas as follows:

Women are not trusted to hold higher levels of leadership, and men are given preference over their female counterparts for leadership positions. Women are typically chosen for positions of leadership in supervisory and women related issues. Furthermore, women in positions of leadership were denied recognition because leadership was still associated with a male figure. Men and other women frequently believe that women are incapable of managing a leadership role because they are too emotional.

As a result, the interviewees stated that most women do not aspire to climb the career ladder in the same way that men do. Most women find it difficult to go beyond social expectations. Women are expected to care for their families, while men are expected to care for their careers. These stereotypical attitudes have a negative impact on society's acceptance of women's ability to lead. As a result, both men and women colleagues, as well as subordinates, are uneasy about being led by women because they associate leadership with men.

#### **4.2.1.5. Insufficient time**

According to Table 3, out of 139 respondents, 25 (18.0 %) and 56 (40.3 %) of the sample respondents respectively responds strongly agreed and agreed that women faced insufficient time both at work and at home. While 12 (8.6%) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. The remaining 26 (18.7 %) and 20 (14.4 %) of sample respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed those women leaders had insufficient time both at work and at home. This implies that women in positions of leadership faced insufficient time both at workplace and at home because of juggling multiple tasks.

Therefore, the finding of analysis indicate that, the respondent had the mean scores 3.29 rating was the issue that insufficient time were moderately affect the women career progression in leadership position. The result of this study was consistent with the study of Arora (2015), which shows that women are expected to undertake the majority of domestic and child-care work, often in addition to paid work outside the home, younger married women in particular are likely to experience 'time poverty.

In this regard, the interview results supported up the ideas outlined below. Participant 4 expressed her thoughts as follows:

Meetings are typically scheduled after work hours. This is a great challenge for me because I schedule a lot of time after work to do things at home. Unlike men, women are primarily responsible for overseeing our family's needs, particularly ensuring proper nutrition and hygiene. I do not have housemaids to help us with such responsibilities, and it's difficult to manage both at the same time.

Furthermore, another interviewee participant 6 briefly explains the issue of insufficient time:

I am a mother of four kids. Balancing motherhood and a leadership role at work was a difficult task. Despite having multiple work responsibilities, it is important to remember that the most important aspect of being a mother is to provide her children with the assurance of unconditional love, regardless of time constraints due to work. As a result, women's leadership is a difficult task that necessitates dedication and sacrifice. This is not due to a lack of ability to exercise leadership roles, but rather to a lack of time to balance personal and leadership responsibilities. Furthermore, I feel guilty for devoting more time to my jobs at the expense of family time. As a result, the most difficult challenge was balancing my time and energy in order to continue working.

Furthermore, participant 3 also shares her experience as follows.

Improving and wanting to improve yourself is a challenge because leadership is busy, working hours are too long, traveling, or dealing with other people. Moreover, women leaders who had many responsibilities at home and at work did not have time to read to stay up to

date. We would like to update and keep up with everything new in the field, but we do not have the time.

As a result of the findings, it is possible to conclude that women leaders faced time constraints as a result of juggling multiple household tasks, and that their legal leadership positions resulted in an unhealthy work-life balance.

In general, the finding of socio-cultural challenges, conflict between family responsibilities and their leadership role, and a lack of family supports were the main challenges that influenced women leaders' career progression.

Table 3. Percentage distribution of respondents' response to socio-cultural challenges of women in leadership position

Socio-cultural challenges		Level of agreement				SD	Mean
		SA	A	N	D		
Conflict between family responsibilities and their work	Frequency	58	55	10	9	7	4.06
	%age	41.7	39.6	7.2	6.5	5.0	
Lack of family support	Frequency	46	61	8	14	10	3.86
	%age	33.1	43.9	5.8	10.1	7.2	
Less confidence	Frequency	36	48	19	20	16	3.49
	%age	25.9	34.5	13.7	14.4	11.5	
Stereotyping about women's roles and abilities	Frequency	30	52	21	20	16	3.43
	%age	21.6	37.4	15.1	14.4	11.5	
Insufficient time	Frequency	25	56	12	26	20	3.29
	%age	18.0	40.3	8.6	18.7	14.4	

**Source:** obtained from survey data, 2021 DF= degree of freedom

#### 4.2.2. Organizational Challenges

Many obstacles related to organizational structures can either slow or impede women's professional development. Organizations are patriarchal institutions that inevitably place women in lower positions and favor men. The reason for women assuming lower positions is due to organizational structural factors, not because women and men are not equally capable and committed to assuming positions of leadership.



#### **4.2.2.1. Gender-based discrimination**

Table 4 shows that out of 139 respondents, 33 (23.7 %) and 73 (52.5 %) of the respondents respectively responds strongly agreed and agreed that there was gender-based discrimination against women leaders. While 20 (14.4%) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. The remaining 4(2.9%) and 9(6.5%) of sample respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with the prevalence of gender-based discrimination against women in leadership positions. This implies that the presence of gender-based discrimination restricts women's progression into higher-level leadership positions.

The finding indicates that women leaders who faced gender-based discrimination had a rank mean value score of 3.84, indicating that gender-based discrimination had a significant impact on women's career progression in leadership positions. This result confirmed with the finding made by Alsharif (2018), which highlighted that discrimination in dealing between men and women has a significant impact on women's career development, as it is a major cause of women's loss of leadership position, as well as the lack of having equal opportunities for working compared with men in the case of similar conditions.

In this regard, participant 4 stated her ideas below:

The most significant barriers that women leaders face in the workplace are functional barriers such as discrimination in training courses that increase their efficiency, develop their capabilities, and provide them with various managerial and leadership skills. I experienced direct gender-based discrimination. West Gojjam Zone collaborated with Bahir Dar University to prepare five-day leadership development training courses for all women employees in Bahir Dar. When I asked for permission to gain access to the training for my supervisor, he refused. Then I called the Zone women and children affairs office and requested training, which I did but missed one day. Because of the presence of this practice, I declined a position of leadership.

As a result, it can be concluded that gender-based discrimination has serious consequences for women leaders, including decreased job satisfaction, job loss, and career interruption. It is also prevents women from actively participating in the labor force.

#### **4.2.2.2. Lack of organizational networks**

Table 4 shows that out of 139 respondents, 39 (28.1 %) and 59 (42.4 %) of the respondents respectively, strongly agreed and agreed that there was lack of organizational networks. While 10(7.2%) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. The remaining 17(12.2 %) and 14(10.1 %) of sample respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that the lack of organizational networks. This demonstrated that women in leadership positions are not equally participating in informal networks due to a lack of time to engage in these informal communications; this has an impact on women's career advancement and holding better leadership positions.

Therefore, the finding of analysis indicate that, the respondent had the mean scores 3.66 rating was the issue that lack of organizational networks were highly affect the women's leadership career progression. The study findings is agree with the study of Mattila and Uusilehto (2019), which stated that because of work-family balancing, women face challenges when socializing with colleagues and building professional networks. In fact, women have very little time for networking because of family responsibilities. However, this finding is in contrary to the previous studies of Al-Shawi and DAHWI (2010), which shows that for Lebanese female leaders organizational networks and interpersonal relationships within the organization is not a barrier to their career success because female leaders has no problem working with male colleges in the organization.

Similar to the above result, participant one as she stated;

Regardless of an individual's competence, performance, qualification, or experience, relationships through an informal network create opportunities for men to assume top leadership positions. They also claimed that despite having extensive experience and qualifications, women are excluded from informal networking due to their multiple roles. The lack of women in the informal network makes it difficult for them to access valuable information about various jobs while also missing out on much of what can be gained through this process. As a result, the informal network has been invaluable to me because I have multiple roles after work and do not have enough time to participate in these networks.

This finding is concurrent with the study of Miller (2016) who revealed that men had more fully developed informal network in different occasions between colleagues. This helped them for their career development whereas women do not get a chance to participate in the informal network. Thus, they miss a lot of vital information's important for career development.

As a result, men leaders are very close to new opportunities, information, and updates that will help them advance in their careers. Women leaders, on the other hand, devote all of their time to work and family matters, leaving little time for networking and socializing.

#### **4.2.2.3. Absence of capacity-building trainings**

According to Table 4, out of 139 sample respondents, 31 (22.3 %) and 74 (53.2 %) strongly agreed and agreed that there was a lack of capacity building trainings for women leaders, respectively. While 13 (9.4%) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. The remaining 12(8.6 %) and 9(6.5 %) of sample respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with the absence of capacity building trainings for women leaders, respectively. This implies that the lack of capacity-building training courses for women leaders makes it difficult for them to move up the ladder.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the respondents had mean (average) scores 3.76 rating consider with absence of capacity building trainings for women leaders. Therefore, those factors were highly affecting women's career progression in leadership position. The findings of this study is consistent with Al-Ahmadi (2011) thus, lack of administrative efficiency, limited leadership training opportunities, lack of professional exchange opportunities and cooperation with other institutions to gain diverse experiences in any of these aspects will result in a lack of empowerment and, consequently, ineffective leadership.

The interviewees mentioned something about training provision. For example, participant two stated:

During my career, I faced some challenges that may have hampered my advancement at work, such as a lack of facilities within the institution, training courses, and workshops that encourage women leaders' participation. As a result, the greatest challenge for me during my

position is the availability of any capacity building-leadership trainings prior to and following my leadership position. The absence of these programs has an impact on my leadership performance as well as my ability to balance my career and family responsibilities. Even though I am not currently in a leadership position, I believe that if the opportunity arose, I would handle the situation and the things so much better because of the training.

Similarly, participant 3 also stated:

I have two years of experience as a leader in my current organization. I did not have the opportunity to participate in any capacity-building leadership trainings for women leaders. The institute, in particular, does not assist women leaders in their professional development. We do those things on our own. Women who are assigned to leadership positions without adequate training face the risk of being harassed by their subordinates. As a result, the government should organize women's training as a form of capacity building. Furthermore, the trainings should create an environment that encourages women to participate in the informal network, which would improve access to information.

As a result, women leaders in the study area pointed out a lack of specific leadership training and professional development, which prevents women from being perceived as effective leaders.

#### **4.2.2.4. Absence of childcare services**

As shown in Table 4, out of 139 sample respondents, 26 (18.7 %) and 76 (54.7 %) strongly agreed and agreed that there was a lack of childcare services, respectively. whereas 11 (7.9%) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. The remaining 17 (12.2%) and 9 (6.5%) of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that the absence of childcare services for women. This implies that the lack of childcare services on the job site impedes the advancement of women in leadership positions.

Therefore, that may concluded the respondents view had the highest score average mean 3.67 rating was absence of childcare services were major factors that affect women in leadership position. This research finding is also consistent with Easter (2020), which shows that a lack of affordable childcare had prevented talented women from progressing in their careers.

One of the interviewee participants from the Women and Children's Office raised the issue of childcare service. Participant 4 stated:

The government sector has provided four months of maternity leave. Daycare centers were unaffordable for all female employees in our organization. In the absence of these services, women are forced to abandon their professional careers in order to devote their full attention to child rearing and household responsibilities. Because all mothers prioritize their children's safety over their own professional advancement. They would increase their earnings and seek new job opportunities if they had better access to childcare services in our organization.

As a result, it is possible to conclude that the lack of childcare services is a barrier for women, particularly women leaders who have children.

#### **4.2.2.5. Lack of support from the organizations and their supervisors**

According to Table 4, out of 139 sample respondents, 28(20.1 %) and 77(55.4 %) strongly agreed and agreed that there was a lack of support from supervisors and the organizations, respectively. While 14 (10.1%) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. Whereas the rest 14(10.1%) and 6(4.3%) of sample respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed with the lack of support from supervisors and the organizations. This demonstrates that a lack of support from the organizations and supervisors affects women's career progression to a leadership positions.

Therefore, it can be concluded that lack of support from the organization and top leaders had the highest mean value score 3.77. Those challenges greatly influence women's career progression in leadership position. According to Singh and Prasad (2014), a lack of supportive workplace practice can directly inhibit women's progress. Similarly, Amayah and Haque (2017) indicates that one of the challenges experienced by the women leaders, particularly those in male-dominated fields, is a gender-related workplace hostility and lack of support from peers.

In addition, Bird (2006) stated that bosses/organizations who do not value work-life balance are the number-one reason that people quit their jobs.

The result was also confirmed by the interviewee participant. Participant 8 expressed her thoughts as follows.

There was no support from our supervisors or anyone else in the organization. Our organization does not assist female leaders balance work and family responsibilities. After all, we do have maternity leave. However, there is no supervision, and we work independently. Instead of supporting women leaders, coworkers constantly criticize their work performance and abilities.

Similarly, participant 4 stated:

Women in our organization do not have access to relevant leadership training and development to empower female leaders. The analysis also indicated that the organization has not established any long-term motivation system for women's empowerment, attends to, and tries to meet the needs and concerns of women in leadership. Despite the fact that there are rules and regulations indicating women's empowerment in organizations, they are not encouraging and valuing women leaders for their creativity and contributions in a leadership position. Furthermore, supervisors of women leaders do not invest time and energy in assisting women leaders in overcoming weaknesses and improving their potential. Furthermore, there is less emphasis on openly supporting successful mentoring relationships for women in leadership positions; top-level leaders are not committed to encouraging women's overall development to become more effective leaders.

In addition, the organization's leader stated:

The *Woreda* does not have any special provisions that treat women leaders preferentially; this is the gap. The lack of a support system for women leaders posed a significant challenge in both their personal and professional lives. As a result, there is no such preventive mechanism in place to prevent barriers faced by the women leaders. According to him, none of them includes special provisions to address the challenges faced by low and middle-level women leaders. The only exception identified is maternity leave; this concerns all women employees and is not specifically designed for women leaders in the organization. In general, there was a problem with the concentration of women leaders in our country's administrative structures from top to bottom.

As a result, according to the study findings, many of the work-life balance policies and services mentioned are unavailable to women leaders. For all participants, maternity leave was regarded as the only benefit that aided women in balancing work and parenting roles.

#### **4.2.2.6. Uncomfortable working environment**

According to Table 4, 34 (24.5 %) and 78 (56.1 %) of the sample respondents, respectively, strongly agreed and agreed that there was an uncomfortable working environment in the workplace. While 10(7.2%) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. The remaining 11 (7.9 %) and 6 (4.3%) of sample respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that the uncomfortable working environment for women in leadership positions. As a result, the majority of respondents indicated that an unpleasant working environment is a barrier to women's career progression.

The finding also support by women leaders challenged by uncomfortable working environment had the rank mean value scores 3.88 rating was the issue was uncomfortable working environment were highly affect women's career advancement in leadership position.

As a result, in addition to this statistical information, the interviewee participant also conveyed the qualitative information outlined below. Participants 5 generalize the issue of a working environment as follows.

The working environment is not comfortable for all employees and is the most significant impediment to women's career advancement. The workplace is still a man's world; women are in positions of leadership, but only a few are in positions of senior leadership. Male stereotypes about gender roles and effective leadership persist. Furthermore, there are no facilities or buildings geared toward women. As a result of socio-cultural challenges and male-controlled structures, the working environment for women remains unfavorable at the workplace.

It is possible to conclude that an extremely unattractive working environment has a negative impact on women's career development. The organizational culture is dominated by male leaders,

there are no facilities that target female leaders, and top leaders and subordinates continuously reject the capability of female leaders.

#### **4.2.2.7. Lack of female role models**

According to Table 4, out of 139 respondents, 45 (32.4 %) and 65 (44.8 %) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that there were a lack of female role models, respectively. While 12 (8.6 %) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. The remaining 9(6.5%) and 8(5.8%) of sample respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that lack of female role models respectively. This demonstrates that a lack of experienced female role models who mentor and support other women leaders with less experience has an impact on the advancement of women in leadership positions.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the respondents had high mean (average) scores 3.94 rating consider with lack of women role models. Therefore, those challenges were highly affecting women's career progression in leadership position. This finding corresponds with Latchanah and Singh (2016) that lack of role models and mentorship programs was a major organizational roadblock that limited the female gender from access to more senior posts. This result is inconsistent with the works of Al-Shawi and DAHWI (2010), which indicates that female managers do not perceive the absence of a role models and mentors as hindering their career progression and do not attribute their success.

Two respondents consider the existence of fewer women in leadership positions in the workplace as a barrier to career advancement. Participant 5 said:

In the past, I was one of the organization's first female leaders. As a result, I was unable to share and learn from the experiences of other female leaders.

Another participants from Women's league agreed that a lack of visible female role models is one of the most significant barriers to women's career advancement. She went on to say that because there are fewer women leaders, there is less opportunity for them to share their experiences with one another. As a result, the presence of fewer female leaders in the organization can be viewed as a challenge in and of itself.



Therefore, a lack of role models has hampered women's career advancement and success. As a result, the lack of role models is more likely to be perceived as a barrier to the advancement of women leaders in the study area.

In general, the finding of organizational challenges, a lack of female role models, an uncomfortable working environment, gender-based discrimination, lack of support, absence of capacity building leadership trainings, absence of childcare centers, a lack of organizational networks were the most likely variables influencing women leaders' career advancement.

Table 4. Percentage distribution of respondents' response to organizational challenges of women in leadership position.

Organizational challenges		Level of agreement					Mean
		SA	A	N	D	SD	
Gender-based discrimination	Frequency	33	73	20	4	9	3.84
	%age	23.7	52.5	14.4	2.9	6.5	
Lack of networking	Frequency	39	59	10	17	14	3.66
	%age	28.1	42.4	7.2	12.2	10.1	
Absence of capacity-building training for women leaders	Frequency	31	74	13	12	9	3.76
	%age	22.3	53.2	9.4	8.6	6.5	
Absence of child care services	Frequency	26	76	11	17	9	3.67
	%age	18.7	54.7	7.9	12.5	6.5	
Lack of support from organizations and top leaders	Frequency	28	77	14	14	6	3.77
	%age	20.1	55.4	10.1	10.1	4.3	
Uncomfortable working environment	Frequency	34	78	10	11	6	3.88
	%age	24.5	56.1	7.2	7.9	4.3	
Lack of female role models	Frequency	45	65	12	9	8	3.94
	%age	32.4	46.8	8.6	6.5	5.8	

**Source:** obtained from survey data, 2021

#### 4.2.3. Leadership related Challenges

Holding a position of leadership presents a challenge and, presumably, many sacrifices. People with families may find the work culture of long hours, always active in the workplace, vulnerable to stress. Women leaders in service sectors generally work under extreme work pressure, an inflexible working environment, a huge number of complaint transactions, and frequent customer interactions.

#### **4.2.3.1. Inflexible working hours**

Table 5 shows that out of 139 sample respondents, 23 (16.5 %) and 75 (54.0 %) strongly agreed and agreed that there were inflexible working hours, respectively. While 21 (15.1%) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. Whereas the remaining 17 (12.2%) and 3 (2.2%) of the sample respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that there were inflexible working hours. This demonstrates that inflexible working hours hampered women's advancement to leadership positions.

As finding of the analysis indicate that, the respondents view had the highest score average mean 3.71 rating was that inflexible working hours issues greatly affect women's career progression in leadership position. The findings of this study is concurrent with Wirth (2001), which indicates that women work longer hours than men in nearly every country of the world and they are responsible to care for children, elderly as well as to handle the entire domestic responsibility and active on a time taking occupations such as management and leadership. These experiences made women leaders experience conflict between work and family roles and this conflict put them in stress.

Similarly, interviewee participant shared their experiences with the challenge of inflexible working hours, which impedes their career progression. Participant 4 stated:

I believe we should be more available in the workplace. To compete, you must be available at all times. When you arrive home late, no one is waiting for you. I believe we need to work harder because of this: women leaders in social services work under extreme work pressure, an inflexible working environment, and frequent customer interactions. However, many women find that the time demands of such positions conflict with the demands of their family.

As a result, it can be conclude that inflexible working hours in the study area are a challenge that makes it difficult for women to balance their leadership roles and family responsibilities; this has an inverse effect on their career development.

#### 4.2.3.2. Lack of leadership competency

Table 5 shows out of 139 respondents, 16 (11.5 %) and 59 (42.4 %) of the respondents, respectively, strongly agreed and agreed that there was a lack of leadership competencies among women leaders. While 24 (17.3%) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. Whereas the remaining 26(18.7 %) and 14(10.1 %) of sample respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively that women leaders lacked leadership competencies. This demonstrates that a lack of leadership competencies had a significant impact on women's advancement to leadership positions.

As finding of the analysis indicate that, the respondents view had the average mean 3.26 rating was that incompetency issues moderately influence women's career progression in leadership position.

In addition, during semi-structured interviews, participant 5 stated:

Women lack confidence in taking on more leadership roles because they believe it will be difficult to balance family responsibilities with their leadership roles. Men are more confident in their abilities and make better leaders. Women believe that women are not as competent as men, and men believe that women are inferior to men. Furthermore, women lack confidence in their abilities, qualifications, and experience.

The above result is confirmed by the findings of Artabane *et al.* (2017) since men are often very confident about their abilities, and often apply for positions that they are only partially competent to hold, and since women frequently are under-confident about their abilities this lack of confidence is what would drive women's lesser aspirations to leadership. In contrast, the study of Tomal and Jones (2015) indicates there were no significant differences in the rankings of core competencies between women and men supervisors or women and men managers. In addition, Al-Shawi and DAHWI (2010) shows women and men in management have same principles and actually have similar aspirations and values, personality traits, job related skills and behaviors.

Likewise, participant 8 stated:

In many families, women are expected to maintain traditional family roles independent of existing or new job responsibilities. It is difficult for female leaders to balance their work and family obligations when they obtain or seek positions of leadership. As a result of their combined work and family roles, women prioritize their families and may be less committed to jobs that require more time investments. As a result, these responsibilities frequently cause others to question whether women are capable of being effective leaders.

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the society's beliefs, norms, and values have been established in accordance with masculine ideologies, resulting in negative attitudes toward women's leadership competency. The use of stereotypes to influence women's perceived leadership abilities. As a result, women feel less capable of exploring so-called male territories, inferior, and lacking the necessary confidence to take on higher-level positions.

#### **4.2.3.3. Stress**

According to Table 5, out of 139 sample respondents, 24 (17.3 %) and 67 (48.2 %) strongly agreed and agreed that there was a stress problem, respectively. While 22 (15.8%) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. Whereas the remaining 16 (11.5 %) and 10 (7.2 %) of sample respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively there was a stress problem. This demonstrates that stress hampered women's advancement to positions of leadership.

As finding of the analysis indicate that, the respondents view had the highest score average mean 3.57 rating was that stress issues highly influence women's career progression in leadership position. The finding of this study is concurrent with Muasya (2016), which indicates leadership positions require hard work, long hours and are stressful. For women, this burden is added on to their child-care, home, and family responsibilities. For women who do leadership positions vulnerable to stress.

The participants also mentioned that how leadership position to be stressful. For example, participant 2 stated:

Being in a leadership position is extremely stressful because there are numerous stressors and tensions associated with being in a senior position. Attempting to manage and evaluate

subordinates, family responsibilities, organizational goals, and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, they are stressed as a result of the conflict between family and domestic responsibilities. They stated unequivocally that the stress associated with women leaders' dual roles resulted in errors in performing their duties on time. So women are more impacted because, in general, we are the homemakers and bear the burden of managing staff at work, so we are juggling a lot. As a result, leadership is too stressful, particularly for women. Therefore, in the long run, the burden of both domestic and leadership responsibilities will give rise to women's voluntary termination of leadership positions and let alone assuming top leadership positions.

Participant 6 also shared her thoughts on the subject of stress.

I have four kids. Two of them are in primary school, and the youngest is one year old. My husband is not with us because he is a contractor and has spent all of his time moving from one location to another. When I arrived at my office, I became concerned that my children were not in good health. I could not even make it until lunchtime. As a result, I would like to return home and pay them a visit.

As a result, women bear a greater burden of managing familial responsibilities in addition to their professional pursuits and obligations. It is so harsh that it has an impact on the ability of women leaders to advance to higher positions.

#### **4.2.3.4. Payment dissatisfaction**

According to Table 5, 42 (30.2 %) and 65 (46.8 %) of the respondents, respectively, strongly agreed and agreed that the pay for a leadership position is unsatisfactory. While 13 (9.4%) of the sample respondents were unable to make a decision. Whereas the remaining 12(8.6 %) and 7(5.0 %) of sample respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed that women in leadership positions were paid unsatisfactorily, respectively. This demonstrates that the issue of pay dissatisfaction had a significant influence on women's career advancement to leadership positions.

As finding of the analysis indicate that, the respondents view had the highest score average mean 3.88 rating was that unsatisfactory pay issues highly influence women's career progression in

leadership position. The findings of this study is consistent with Mahfouz (2022), leadership challenges of women leaders include the low salary in comparison with the responsibilities associated with the position, and the long working hours.

In this regard, Participant 1 explained her ideas below:

Holding a leadership position causes me problems, such as economic difficulties such as pay that is not commensurate with efforts, a lack of rewards and incentives, and a lack of adequate working conditions. These obstacles impede women's advancement to higher-level leadership positions. I am always sorry that my responsibility is meaningless. I was never satisfied with my achievements at work; they always wanted me to quit and look for another job. Because the current salary no longer meets the family's needs. As a result, the lack of additional incentives for leadership roles makes it difficult for me to continue with my successes.

Similarly, Participant 4 stated:

A leadership position necessitates long hours, low pay, and stress. My leadership position has an impact on my economy; my position usually requires travel to rural areas, which must cover this expense on their own. The transportation I used was not covered by the organization. Furthermore, the organization lacks support, which leads to job dissatisfaction. As a result, leadership may place a high demand on family life, result in a loss of personal and professional flexibility, and provide insufficient rewards.

The above-mentioned idea was also supported by the *Woreda* head, as outlined below. He stated;

The major challenges that women in leadership positions face are an imbalance between their pay and their leadership responsibilities. In the current situation, the payment is insufficient to meet the family's basic needs. Women leaders move to different areas in addition to their organizational responsibilities, and they bear all transportation costs on their own, which has an impact on their economy. Furthermore, the organization does not attempt to consider this situation and does not provide opportunities such as special rewards or incentives for them. As a result, women leaders faced an unbalanced relationship between their leadership

responsibilities and the pay they received. This also causes women to be dissatisfied with their leadership positions.

As a result, it can be concluded that the economic factor has a significant impact on women's career advancement, as they indicated that their current position and salary do not match their responsibilities. Furthermore, women in positions of leadership find it difficult to obtain additional rewards.

In general, the finding of leadership-related challenges, inflexible working hours, unsatisfactory pay, and stress were the most significant challenges influencing women leaders' career progression.

Table 5. Percentage distribution of respondents' response to leadership related challenges of women in leadership position

Leadership related challenges		Level of agreement					Mean
		SA	A	N	D	SD	
Inflexible working hours	Frequency	23	75	21	17	3	3.71
	%age	16.5	54.0	15.1	12.2	2.2	
Lack of leadership competency	Frequency	16	59	24	26	14	3.26
	%age	11.5	42.4	17.3	18.7	10.1	
Stress	Frequency	24	67	22	16	10	3.57
	%age	17.3	48.2	15.8	11.5	7.2	
Payment dissatisfaction	Frequency	42	65	13	12	7	3.8
	%age	30.2	46.8	9.4	8.6	5.0	

**Source:** Obtained from survey data, 2021

#### 4.4. Opportunities of Women in Leadership positions

The challenges mentioned above have an impact on the career progression of women in leadership positions; however, there are a few opportunities that can help them improve their participation in leadership positions. As a result, the existing opportunities were discussed below based on the data gathered from participants.

#### **4.4.1. Government Initiatives**

The data obtained from participants revealed that the government's action and measurement to ensure women's equal participation with men enables them to compete with men in all aspects of their lives. In an interview with the director of the Women and Children's Affairs Office, she stated that:

The number of women joining leadership positions is increasing over time, this shows that the improvement of government efforts to invite women on an equal basis with their male counterparts. In addition, regarding the best opportunities, I think the government holds the equal share of both women and men in all aspects. All of the best things in encouraging women to hold leadership positions on par with men' by providing special measures such as affirmative action, quota, and empowerment related trainings for women. This is an opportunity to increase the number of women in leadership positions.

The finding is consistent with the work of Amayah and Haque (2017), many governments have been giving encouragement to women and girls to get involved in the work force and in leadership positions. These initiatives include leadership development program, the implementation of affirmative action and quota to support and enhance their participation.

As a result, it is possible to conclude that the government has created a space for more women to move into leadership positions equal to men's by implementing various measures such as affirmative action and various leadership development trainings for women.

#### **4.4.2. Mentoring and Coaching Opportunities**

One of the interviewee stated that mentoring and coaching was one of the biggest supports she received for her career progression. She stated that those mentors and coaches have helped them to new opportunities. Participant two stated her previous supervisors' support as follows:

My past supervisor was my mentor. They are primarily responsible for my current level of leadership. They gave me a purpose for my work before assigning me tasks, and they ensured that I understood the goal. Furthermore, even when I was a junior, they would assign me difficult tasks because they trusted me. There may be a quality issue or an error in the work I



do, but they tolerate it and coach me; this has been a great source of motivation for me to do better. They also understand my family responsibility and we have reached a mutual understanding to have a flexible arrangement. Furthermore, when a problem arises, they do not rush to criticize; instead, they listen to my side of the story. Besides, they share their leadership experience and gave me advice on how to develop myself. They have served as my role models.

Moreover, the finding of the study concurrent with the work of Mattila and Uusilehto (2019) indicates that mentoring is seen to be helpful for women when advancing in a career.

As a result, it can be concluded that access to mentors provided opportunities for women to operate outside of organizational norms, set high performance standards that stimulated personal motivation, increased self-confidence, and increased awareness of and use of skill.

#### **4.4.3. Training Opportunities**

Some of the participants emphasized the importance of training for rising into a better position. Participant 5 said;

Throughout my career, I have had the opportunity to participate in a variety of professional and self-development trainings, which has allowed me to gain new knowledge and gain access to networks. The leadership training in which I participated was extremely beneficial to me. It helped me prepare myself to cope with any challenges I faced.

Furthermore, one participant stated that having access to leadership training improved my presentation and communication skills and facilitated my advancement to a leadership position. According to Northouse (2021), many organizations are helping women advance in their career by involving them in career development programs like give training in leadership and management skills.

As a result, it is possible to conclude that the availability of leadership training opportunities for women is critical for increasing knowledge, skills, and networking.

#### 4.4.4. Networking Opportunities

All participants who had the opportunity to work in various teams and assignments stated that they have a better opportunity to build a network. According to the two participants, participating in networks is important for gaining knowledge and building relationships with various stakeholders within and outside of the organization. Participant 2 said:

For me, the relationships have been built throughout the system. I have more resources and people I can contact. For me, when I was applying for the job that I am in now, I contacted several of those key contacts, asking them to be references. They provided me with information. I am going to ask them what aspects I should be working on in order to be in this role.

Similarly, participant 6 also stated the importance of networking.

As I begin to work in leadership, I have developed strong networks, both within and outside of the organization. Networks can play an important role as places for people to share, learn, grow, and support one another. The importance of knowing the right people and having contacts has helped many female leaders in their careers. Good leaders and other people standing behind you in the beginning of your career create a good base for the future. Later in one's career, the networks also provide a good place for female leaders to guide and support those who are just starting out.

Similarly, Parks (2018), women must become active and participate in such networks because it allows them to stand out, broaden their network, and build relationships with people both inside and outside of their organization. In addition, Mattila and Uusilehto (2019) also stated that informal networks might be helpful for women when advancing in a career.

It is commonly recognized that it is essential for all individuals in senior leadership positions to have strong networks to assist them in their work. These networks can be formal or informal.

#### **4.4.5. Work Commitment**

According to the findings of this study, women leaders are fully committed to their professions and careers, loyal to their organizations, and have a strong sense of responsibility for both their work and their families. In this regard, one of the interviewed participants from the *Woreda* speaker's office shared her experience as follows:

Frankly speaking, women leaders are more committed to their work while also caring for their families. She went on to say that managing their families has given women a broader perspective, which can be seen in their leadership. Commitment to multiple roles broadens opportunities for positive self-experience and competency. Women with more responsibilities have more opportunities to feel good about themselves, their activities, and their accomplishments. Their self-esteem and confidence can promote a high level of overall well-being, which can help defend against life's hardships and struggles.

Therefore, it can be concluded that playing multiple roles is not easy. Women who had an excellent level of competence try to balance their leadership role and raise children. To maintain balance, it will have to work extremely hard.

#### **4.4.6. Empowered Mindset**

Several participants stated that they have an empowered mindset. Participant 1, for example, said;

I have an empowered mindset from the beginning, without the management title. I am passionate and highly committed to my work. I take the initiatives by myself and try my best to finish work on time. I am independent. At the same time, I do like to collaborate and ask for help from others.

In corresponding, participant 3 also pointed out her ideas as follows:

The path to upward mobility is full of obstacles. Everyone may face difficulties at home or at work. All of the difficulties are temporary, and things will return to normal after a while. Even when the road gets rocky, I see all of those challenges as opportunities. I do not want to waste time worrying about the negative. I believe that challenges bring about solutions, and that I

can overcome any obstacle in order to reach my goal. My parents' trust in us plays a big part in this. They believe we can accomplish anything.

Similarly, participant 7 stated the importance of focusing on excellence. She said;

I have never said I am a woman and I cannot do this, she explained. I always focus on exceeding at my job. Throughout my life, I never sat back and dwell on obstacles. If you are stuck with the challenges, you will be crushed. That is what I believe. As a result, I always move on and look for areas for improvement. I think my biggest role model, my father, instilled that in me. My father is encouraging and persistent.

As a result, the participants' experiences confirm that having an empowered mindset greatly helps to aspire more and overcome challenges that women may face in their careers.

#### **4.4.7. Family Support**

Family support plays a significant role in the leadership development process because it buffers some of the stress associated with difficult challenges. In this regard, the interviewed participants they received support from their families or helpers when reflecting on their multiple roles.

For example, Participant 1 got support from their parents. She is currently able to concentrate on their work because her mother is caring for the family. Participant 1 emphasized the importance of family support as follows.

It is difficult for a woman who is a mother and a family leader to work in a high-level commitment position without strong support at home. It does not matter if the help comes from a life partner, family, or strangers. As women, we require this because we bear additional burdens such as pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare. I have a good opportunity in this regard. My mother and siblings have encouraged me to take care of my family responsibilities. My mother encourages and supports me by caring for my children, and my siblings have been living with me and assisting me. This allows me to concentrate entirely on my office work.

Other participants receive a different package of family support. Participant 3 stated:

Because I am single and do not have children, I do not face any significant challenges in balancing work and family life. My mother, on the other hand, is a strong supporter of mine, and she advises me on every major career decision I make, such as moving to the new city for a new position.

This finding is similar with the work of Abdalla (2015) which showed that family support plays a significant role in Arab women career advancement.

Therefore, women can be successful in their roles when partners, family, and friends support them. It is possible to conclude that the presence of family support has a positive influence on women's active participation in leadership positions and attain higher leadership positions.

#### **4.4.8. Leadership Experience**

Participants in this study stated that women with prior leadership experience were more likely to volunteer for leadership positions in their organizations. Participants illustrate their shared leadership experiences. According to Participant 4 stated:

My leadership position provided me with opportunities to advance and demonstrate my abilities. Previously, I mentioned being shy and not feeling comfortable speaking in front of others, but now I am fully confident and fearless when it comes to public speaking. When faced with a challenge, I was inspired by the leadership skills; it took many problem-solving skills. Furthermore, my leadership position provides various leadership experiences such as improving their ability to lead, building capacity, confidence, and strength to succeed in my careers.

Similarly, participant two also supported the above ideas as follows.

I consider myself lucky to have witnessed this event because it broadened my experience and helped me develop the qualities of a good leader. Furthermore, I benefited greatly from the information and experiences gained during this stage because it expanded my ways of knowing things and how to network with other people in more effective ways, aided in the development of my leadership philosophy, and helped to lay out some concrete ideas for moving forward.

Barriers that influence women's career progress to leadership position continues to be a challenge in all spheres of government. The findings in this study confirmed that there are certain challenges that influence women career progression to leadership positions and these include organizational cultures did not do enough to encourage women to participate in initiatives that promote their development. The societal expectations of women's roles as homemakers have not changed, resulting in women experiencing role overload, and leadership related issues like unsatisfactory pay, and long working hours in the workplace; all these have influenced women leaders' career advancement. The study also revealed the opportunities that women obtain in positions of leadership, such as training, networking, and monitoring opportunities, as well as family support, leadership experience, and an empowered mindset.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1. Conclusions**

In comparison to previous years, the number of women in leadership positions has increased in recent years. Even as the number of women in positions of leadership grows, they face a number of challenges during their tenures. While women have the potential and ability to be leaders capable of performing at the highest levels of public life, they are frequently inhibited by a vicious cycle of challenges to their leadership progression. Conflict between work and life issues, a lack of family support, a lack of female role models, an uncomfortable working environment, gender-based discrimination, a lack of support, a lack of leadership trainings, a lack of childcare centers, a lack of organizational networks, inflexible working hours, stress, and low pay have all played a significant role in influencing women's leadership positions.

The study findings confirmed that leadership positions provided an opportunity for women's career development. Among the opportunities are access to mentoring and coaching, training and networking opportunities, and other organizational incentives such as maternal leave and affirmative action during promotion. In addition, other opportunities include family support and to some extent, external networking opportunities are more likely to compete and rise to positions of leadership. According to the women leaders themselves, the major catalysts for their career advancement are an empowered mindset, leadership skill, experience, confidence, and commitment to work.

### **5.2. Recommendation**

Based on the overall findings of the study and the conclusions reached so far, the following recommendations were made to reduce the challenges that women leaders faced in their career progression. This study advises the government, organizations, family members, and women leaders themselves to advance their careers in higher-level leadership positions.

- Regional and federal governments should take a number of steps to improve working conditions for women leaders who want to maintain a healthy work-life balance. This included job sharing, flexible working arrangements, offering on-site childcare and

additional breast-feeding time. This implementation will result in increased job satisfaction and less stress for women.

- Organizations should use various strategies and mechanisms to maintain and increase the participation of women in leadership positions. Women's participation in leadership positions can be ensured by providing continuous capacity building training, facilities, and initiatives.
- In addition, the organization, in collaboration with other sectors, should design and continuously provide effective leadership and management training programs to female leaders in order to make them competent and qualified for leadership positions.
- The administrative bodies of the *Jabi Tehnan Woreda* should invest in women in order to strengthen existing women in positions of leadership and to encourage other women who are not in positions of leadership.
- Recognizing women's roles and capabilities will motivate and encourage new participants. As a result, the administrative bodies of the *Jabi Tehnan Woreda* should implement new attitudes to elevate women to positions of power on par with men. Furthermore, top leaders must be open-minded and willing to appoint competent women.
- Women leaders are encouraged to develop their leadership skills by participating in available leadership and self-development training within and outside of the organization.
- In addition, women must empower themselves through knowledge and skill in order to succeed in their assigned position, and they must demonstrate their true abilities.
- Moreover, women in positions of leadership must concentrate on achieving their objectives rather than focusing on the negative attitudes of some individuals in their organizations.
- Women leaders bear dual responsibilities at home and at work. As a result, their family particularly their husbands should be supportive enough for them to succeed.
- Networking is essential for all women leaders. The organization should develop women's networks. This network enables women to build relationships and networks across functions and levels, increasing the number of communication channels required to complete tasks.



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## **7. APPENDICES**

**Haramaya University**

**College of Social Science and Humanities**

**Department of Gender and Development Studies**

**Post Graduate Program**

Survey questionnaire for subordinates under the supervision of women leaders.

Dear respondents:-

I am a postgraduate student in the department of Gender and development studies at Haramaya University. Currently, I am undertaking a research on “**Challenges and Opportunities of Women in Leadership positions in case of Jabi Tehnan Woreda public sectors**”. You are one of the respondents selected to participate in this study. Thus, I would kindly request you to answer these questions. Please assist me in giving correct and complete information to present a representative finding on the study. Your honesty and kindness would be of great help in many aspects.

The questionnaire related to challenges of women leaders. Please read each item carefully and give your honest response to each item. If you overlook any item without giving response, it will invalidate the study. So, please check that you have given your response to all items. Finally, the information that you will share will be kept confidential and only used for the academic purpose.

### **General Directions:**

☞ Please respond to each question correctly and clearly and return as soon as you finished.

**Thank you in advance for your support and commitment!**

**Appendix Table 1.** Survey questionnaire for subordinates under the supervision of women leaders

Please encircle number (1) if you are strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree based on your level of agreement/ disagreement in the following statements in the context of Jabi Tehnan *Woreda* public offices.

	<b>Challenges of Women in leadership positions</b>	<b>Level of Agreement</b>				
		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
1	Gender based discrimination					
2	Lack of organizational networks					
3	Absence of capacity building trainings for women leaders					
4	Absence of childcare services					
5	Lack of female role models					
6	Lack of support from the organization and top leaders					
7	Uncomfortable working environment					
8	Conflict between work and family responsibilities					
9	Insufficient time					
10	Lack of family support					
11	Less confidence					
12	Stereotypes on women's roles and abilities					
13	Inflexible working hours					
14	lack of leadership competency					
15	stress					
16	payment dissatisfaction					

Thank You in Advance for Your Cooperation!

## Appendix 1. Interview Questions

### Interview Checklist for Women Leaders

The interview questions included general demographic, challenges and opportunities encountered by women leaders during their career advancement.

#### Part A

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Marital status: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Family members/dependents: \_\_\_\_\_

Educational Qualification: \_\_\_\_\_ Job position: \_\_\_\_\_ Work experience in the organization: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Part B

1. What is your current leadership position/title: \_\_\_\_\_
2. As a leader, what are your duties and responsibilities in your leadership position?
3. Is there any challenge you encountered in your leading role in the organization? If yes, what are the challenges that you face when you exercise responsibilities?
4. Which challenges more influence your career development?
5. Does the organization have any contribution to enhance the contribution of women to top leadership level? If yes, what kind of support systems is available to you within the organization?
6. Have you ever attend any leadership trainings?
7. What kind of support systems is available to you within the family? Please explain how you are supported or not supported.
8. How the family pressure, commitment and spouse interest will affect your performance in your senior position?
9. Do you get opportunity for succeeding in your career development to leadership position? If yes, what kind of support and from where do you get the support?

### Interview questions for Supervisor of the Women Leaders

1. Do you think there is a gender balance between women and men leaders in the *woreda*?  
And how?
2. What kinds of positions do women leaders hold? Is their higher level, middle level or lower level leadership positions? And why?
3. What are the challenges that women leaders face from moving up to the leadership position in the organization?
4. What kind of opportunities do the women have to enhance their participation in leadership?
5. Does the organization have any incentive/motivational scheme in promoting women leadership in the organization? Are there any staff development programs (trainings, other capacity development efforts) for women leaders in the organization?
6. Are there any benefit packages that are specific to mitigate the challenges that women leaders face in relation to their positions? If yes, what are they?

**Appendix Table 2.** Background information of the interviewed participants of the study

code	Sex	Age	Marital status	Educational status	Number of family	Job position	Work experience
1	F	29	married	degree	2	Leader of women's league	4
2	F	33	married	degree	5	Social affairs office	5
3	F	28	single	degree	-	Women's association	3
4	F	37	married	degree	4	Women and children affairs office	5
5	F	41	divorced	masters	-	House of the speaker's office	8
6	F	38	married	degree	2	head of Technique, vocational and enterprise office	4
7	F	43	married	degree	6	Group leader	5
8	F	39	married	degree	3	Culture and tourism office	4

9	M	45	married	degree	5	Head of <i>woreda</i> administrative office	8
10	M	43	married	masters	3	Head of the <i>woreda</i>	10
11	M	47	married	masters	4	Head of the organization	13