Building Pathways for Female Leaders' Economic Empowerment

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Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) is defined as a transformative process whereby females experience transformation in power, agency, and economic advancement (Gupta & Roy, 2022; Pereznieto & Taylor, 2014). It aids females to transcend from limited choice, power, voice, and freedom in the economy and household to have the required skills, resources, and opportunities to compete equitably with their male counterparts in markets and the agency to control and reap economic gains and profit. WEE can only be achieved if a change is witnessed on three levels: (a) the individual's self-esteem, knowledge, and capabilities, (b) communities' norms and behaviors, and (c) economic opportunities, political resources, and legal environment (Pereznieto & Taylor, 2014). The benefits will then seep into their communities, children, and households resulting in foundational health outcomes (i.e., investment in the children's education and delayed marriage).

After all, empowering women would lead to achieving the UN women's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2030, especially SDG5, gender equality, and SDG10, decent work, and employment for all (Manandhar et al., 2018). Still, women are constrained worldwide from achieving leadership and senior positions, where females hold about 5% of CEO poitions(Cook & Glass, 2016; Hassan et al., 2017; Hurt et al., 2020). Moreover, women born outside the United States (US) are severely underrepresented, whereas white straight males have a prominent presence as CEOs of major companies (Cook & Glass, 2016). Therefore, this study aims to identify barriers to leadership development faced by women in non-western societies and whether these obstacles are prevalent in western societies or if they are considered opportunities in the latter. The research question of "is the barrier to female leadership development varied by

the country's economic environment?" will guide the study. Subsequently, the researchers will construct a literature analysis relying on secondary data to answer the research question.

Literature Review

In ascending order, the following section will discuss potential barriers and enablers for female leadership development and economic empowerment in primarily non-western countries and will compare with developed countries. The main barriers to female leadership development and economic empowerment consist of (a) unpaid labor/care economy and (b) gender harassment- lack of security and safety (Cantillon & Teasdale, 2021). At the same time, mentorship was the focal enabler of female leadership development and economic empowerment in western and non-western societies bound in the literature (Mate et al., 2019).

Economic Environment Between Eastern and Western

Western economics is well-researched, and globalization is closely related to western economics. The development of the Western economy is viewed as more robust and more developed than its Eastern counterparts, and its economic environment is more regulated. However, the economic environment in Western countries is still important for its practices in fostering justice conversations in workplaces (Williamson, 2012). The economic environment in Western countries also affects women's employment decisions. It was found that gender regime, economic situation, and economic environment are significantly related to women's decision to start their businesses (Ferrín, 2021).

Most literature discussing the economic environment in Eastern countries focuses on Russia (Sandberg, 2003) and China (Xinbo, 2016; Shen & Tsai, 2016; Huang et al., 2015; Sun et

al., 2015; Allen, 2010; Warner & Zhu, 2010). The literatures highlight the political environment's impact on the economic environment of business activities (Sun et al., 2015; Allen, 2010; Sandberg, 2003); international relations and the economic environment (Xinbo, 2016); leadership style and the economic environment (Shen & Tsai, 2016; Huang et al., 2015); and how the economic environment affects people's behavior (Masikane et al., 2020). It is noticeable that in Asia, the government is highly involved in the business or economic environment and can have a good or bad influence. China has been initiating reform and opening up starting on specific regions since 1978; however, there are vast stratifications in its domestic economic development (Allen, 2010), and the current system requires heavy national intervention in the economy compared to other political systems, which may be stiff and unable to keep up with changing business practices (Sun et al., 2015). A similar issue has been noticed in its labor management and unions, where its development is guided by an overarching goal such as a "harmonious society." This policy or leadership vision has the most impact on economic practices as well (Warner & Zhu, 2010). The government might be detrimental to the economic environment, but it has been reported that criminal conduct is ubiquitous in Russia's business and government. Government officials at the highest levels are known to be corrupt; most Russian firms pay a 10–20% protection fee, which subsequently provides personal security and connections to affable government officials (Sandberg, 2003). The economic environment is also affected by international security and national interest. According to Xinbo (2016), the United States political, economic, and geographic presence in the Asia-Pacific region has a significant impact on China's geopolitical and geoeconomic environment, and China must pay close attention to the US element in the design and implementation of its neighboring strategy, which may include economic policy. Additionally, the border economic environment influences

people's behavior in a country; this economic environment can alter a country's migratory pattern and contribute to xenophobic feelings in the host country (Masikane et al., 2020).

Under the aforementioned economic conditions, leaders must adapt to overcome the challenges differently, and their leadership style and strategy can lead to different results. Shen and Tsai (2016) observed distinct patterns of regional development, such as in Suzhou, Wenzhou, and Dongguan, that have emerged in China's political economy since the beginning of economic reforms in the late 1970s; however, these patterns responded differently to changing economic conditions in the broader domestic and global economy. Additionally, the institutional adaptability of those regions determines their economic performance. Moreover, research by Huang et al. (2015) discovered that authoritarian leadership is ideal for Chinese corporations because it produces better results in a rather harsh economic environment. Skaggs et al. (2012) suggest that women make up 9.3% of corporate executive positions and slightly less than 10% of corporate boards of directors on average, which indicates women in leadership positions are underrepresented.

Potential Barriers to Female Leadership & Economic Empowerment

Unpaid Labor

Female scholars and activists affirm that unpaid work is a central barrier to female economic empowerment and social development (Cantillon & Teasdale, 2021). Unpaid work, most frequently called women's work, consists of household and childcare responsibilities.

In rural Guinea, women dedicate an average of 25.6 hours per week to domestic labor compared to men's 7.2 hours (Bardasi & Wodon, 2010). In Guatemala, women commit 3.3 hours per day to unpaid labor compared to men's 0.9 hours (Gammage, 2010).

Similarly, it is the norm that women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) Region are considered the caretakers, and men are perceived as the breadwinners (Cantillon & Teasdale, 2021). Additionally, women dedicate approximately 30% less time to paid work and learning and often resort to part-time jobs and unemployment to cater to their dependents (e.g., the elderly, their children, or partners). In significantly wealthier and developed countries, unpaid work is often handed to other women from minority/underrepresented and low socioeconomic status (SES) groups (Cantillon & Teasdale, 2021; Kofman, 2012). While this has led to women's economic empowerment from wealthier and privileged countries, it is often at the expense of other women and not men. For that reason, it is even more challenging for women in non-western societies to climb the corporate ladder and capitalize on leadership opportunities and senior leadership positions.

Lack of Security and Safety at the Workplace

Gender harassment, the most prevalent type of harassment, pertains to verbal and nonverbal behaviors that convey hostility, objectification, exclusion, or insulting and degrading behavior toward women (Edelman & Cabrera, 2020; Mansour et al., 2021). Discrimination, gender harassment, and the glass ceiling have fostered a hostile work environment for female employees. Studies have shown that sexual harassment harms women's psychological well-being and causes workplace deviant behavior (Jung & Yoon, 2020). It is not limited to the physical workplace, as online gender harassment is also a critical and worldwide issue that requires

attention (Chen et al., 2020). Additionally, even with regular employment, a study conducted in Korea reveals that women in the upper middle quintile are more severely affected by the glass ceiling effect (Jung & Cho, 2020). Sex-based harassment, which consists of gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion, also impacts the female victims' coworkers and career prospects (Edelman & Cabrera, 2020).

Consequently, female leaders tend to stick to middle-level management even though they have the academic qualifications and professional background necessary for career progression (Mansour et al., 2021). It is even more evident in non-western societies where cultural, political, and environmental barriers are more significant than in developed countries and widens the gender equality gap further (Cantillon & Teasdale, 2021). Another case in point is the lack of security and protection for female journalists in conflict zones such as Syria (Porlezza & Arafat, 2022). Female Syrian journalists have claimed that male journalists are preferred when hiring over female journalists (Porlezza & Arafat, 2022).

Potential Enabler to Female Leadership & Economic Empowerment

Mentorship

Whether it be in non-western (e.g., Vietnam) -or western countries (e.g., Australia), the common denominator and central enabler for female leadership development is mentorship (Mate et al., 2019). Female employees expressed that professional relationships with senior managers could assist in career and leadership development and promotions. It is important to note that the female employees from Vietnam said they need patrons and not mentors exclusively, yet the words are semantically related. The female workers from Australia added that networking opportunities and professional relationships aid them in fostering resilience in

facing obstacles to leadership development, such as workplace harassment (Mate et al., 2019). A systematic review of the literature indicates that mentorship program designs for women frequently achieve high levels of satisfaction and increase the retention rate in academic medicine; more mentorship programs should be developed and implemented to facilitate women's professional success and development (Farkas et al., 2019).

Literature Gap/Problem

After conducting a thorough literature review, it was deduced that few literature review studies address barriers and enablers for women leaders in non-western societies compared to the extensive research on western societies. Additionally, the literature on non-western countries was localized and limited. For instance, while the current study by Maheshwari (2021) filled the gap by discussing barriers and enablers faced by women leaders in Vietnam compared to developed countries, we have identified two limitations. These limitations are: (a) the study only addressed barriers and enablers faced in Vietnam and disregarded other non-western societies, and (b) it only considered females in higher education rather than other careers contributing to the economy. Therefore, this study seeks to address these limitations and encompass enablers and barriers female leaders seeking to advance in non-western societies face.

Another study in Vietnam examined the perceptions of female leaders in the academic realm, such as Deans and university leaders (Nguyen, 2013). Nevertheless, some limitations were addressed. The study was limited to one university in Vietnam, and it only captured the experience of a small sample of deans and university leaders. Furthermore, a future recommendation by Nguyen (2013) was to research other Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, the common barriers women leaders face in other non-western societies and other career paths

are what we sought to explore in this paper. Research by Franzke et al. (2022) addressed that gap that there are not many studies on Asian culture identifying culture and religion as barriers to female entrepreneurs' and leaders' advancement.

While the study by Franzke et al. (2022) mentioned that female entrepreneurs contribute significantly to economic growth in Asia, there is vast and significant heterogeneity between western and non-western societies. For example, in developing Asian countries, female entrepreneurs are not usually well-educated and often work in the informal sector due to economic necessity. However, in developed or transitioning Asian countries, female entrepreneurs are highly educated and work in high-growth industries. Still, Franzke et al. recommend that future research explore what opportunities should arise in an environment that inhibits women's entrepreneurial activities, advancement, and empowerment. Concerning female economic empowerment, a recent quantitative study situated in Indian villages sought to investigate how political participation would lead to economic empowerment and mitigate the obstacle suggested above- harassment (Deininger et al., 2020). This study found that women are underrepresented in political participation, especially in non-western societies. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) seeks to provide the poor with the right to work. Deininger et al. (2020) claim that the NREGS program aids women by providing them with the resources and social skills to participate politically and contribute to the economy. As a result of the national workfare program in India, NREGS, there has been an apparent increase in females' demand to work and enhanced participation in electoral activities and, ultimately, overall economic empowerment. The research article by Deininger et al. makes significant contributions to the literature by discussing how potential female leaders guiding the national workfare program lead to less bribery, unpaid labor, and discrimination. Still, it fails to consider

women from other rural areas in different countries and whether a similar program would be mutually beneficial or a mentorship program would be a better route.

A study by Bullough (2013) administered in Thailand, China, and Vietnam contradicted past research and the notion that females only face obstacles by finding that indigenous women are perceived by their male counterparts as capable of leading a business in non-western countries. Despite that, the study acknowledges that women need mentorship and training programs to advance since they are still not perceived as "equal to men" and can hold their own in senior positions and recommend future research to examine the advantages of such programs. For that reason, mentorship was included as a potential and central enabler for female leadership development in the literature review, especially since this finding was recapitulated in various studies.

Research by Haile et al. (2016) indicated that women face barriers internationally, especially when pursuing global jobs and expatriate positions, citing discrimination and violation of human rights. They add that while female employees from the United States are protected by Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) regulations, those from the Middle East and Africa often have to get pay cuts after they return from global assignments. Haile et al. offer numerous recommendations and implications, such as (a) investment in training and development programs, (b) empowering women since they lead to organizational effectiveness and diversity in the workplace (e.g., Ursula Burns, the first African American woman to become CEO of Xerox). Therefore, this study mentioned Indra Nooyi, among many other talented and diverse females, as an example of how mentorship would lead to economic empowerment and leadership development.

Findings

After conducting the literature review and identifying the gap, an apparent overlap was discerned. The economic environment in their prospective countries influenced the development of female leaders. Women still face difficulties achieving leadership or high positions in the workplace in both western and non-western countries. While most studies were based on one non-western country such as China, Vietnam, India, or Bangladesh, the majority had common barriers that contributed to the gender equality gap, which are harassment and unpaid labor (Deininger et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2013; Maheshwari, 2021).

Consequently, the literature review tackled this problem and discussed generally various career paths female leaders pursue and numerous non-western societies where three common themes were distinguished: (a) Unpaid Labor, (b) Lack of security- gender harassment, and (c) need for mentorship programs. The first finding, related to unpaid labor, asserts that due to gender stereotypes, necessity, and discrimination, women need to do much more unpaid housework and informal sectors than their male counterparts (Franzke et al., 2022). Therefore, the time women spend on their careers is far less than their male counterparts.

Secondly, the absence of rules or laws in non-western countries to protect females has prevented them from advancing to higher positions or even stepping into toxic workplaces due to constantly feeling a lack of security and facing discrimination and harassment, such as the cases in Bangladesh and India (Edelman & Cabrera, 2020; Porlezza & Arafat, 2022). The third finding suggests female workers in non-Western and developed countries have expressed an eagerness to have female mentors holding senior positions during their vocational pathways (Haile et al., 2016; Mate et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Significance of the Study

In short, there are evident barriers to female leadership development specific to non-western societies. This study sought to address the need for more research on the overall experience of women seeking leadership development in non-western societies in general and found two common themes. These themes entail two barriers: unpaid labor, lack of security and safety at the workplace, and a universal enabler of mentorship programs. The all-inclusive literature review included various non-western countries such as Syria, Vietnam, China, and Bangladesh, among many others, and included various careers such as politics, education, and finance.

Recommendations & Limitations

A future recommendation would be conducting a mixed methods study. An online survey would collect the perspectives of numerous female leaders in non-western societies from diverse professional backgrounds on how leadership development practices could be catered to their aspirations and promotion capabilities. On the other hand, in the grounded theory, a qualitative portion would be reserved for women in a non-western region with limited Wi-FI access. They would participate in face-to-face interviews to collect their experiences and perceptions. As for a limitation, while the study did identify mentorship programs as an enabler for female leadership development and economic empowerment, it did not discuss how legal frameworks, acts, and statutes such as the NREGS and EEO would benefit non-western and developing countries as a whole.

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