

Abstract

Limited research is available about the role of women as managers in less developed countries. Using Benin, Africa, as a case study, the paper sets out to explore the opportunities and obstacles for native female managers. Male and female managers of public and private enterprises were surveyed about their attitudes toward women as managers. While limited managerial opportunities currently exist for women in Benin, many of the obstacles identified by the respondents are also present in more developed countries. The findings show an unexpected similarity in the attitudes held by men and women in the United States and in the current Benin Sample.

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Managerial Opportunities for Women in Less Developed Countries: The Case of Benin

by

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MANAGERIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES: THE CASE OF BENIN

Women in developed countries have attained significant upward mobility into managerial and professional positions in the public and private sector. In developing societies and particularly in less developed countries, however, the role of women in the managerial world is much more restricted. Though women in these societies have made major contributions to economic development, they have not done so in a managerial capacity.

A number of studies indicate that women in developing countries play a vital role in marketing and other economic activities related to manufacturing. For instance, Trager (1976) discussed the role of women as intermediaries in moving goods from rural to urban centers in Nigeria. Watts (1984) studied rural women as food processors and traders in the same country. Ardayfio (1985) reported that women wholesalers in Ghana have effectively distributed foods to urban areas. Many women also engage in the manufacturing process; the women garri makers in Ghana help create employment and add to the multiplier effect in the local economy, without much recognition and assistance by the government (White 1983). Women also take part in the production and marketing of beer and sorghum in rural Burkina Faso (Saul 1981).

Little research has been conducted on women's economic contributions as managers in developing countries. It may be that women as managers, administrators, or decision-makers are still insignificant in number and, therefore, do not merit extensive research attention. Whereas men with training have been recruited into modern occupations and urban centers, women have traditionally remained in rural sectors, uneducated, and with primitive technology (Bossen 1975). Women have tended to specialize in domestic service, including childbearing and rearing, and to serve as a surplus labor force. On the other hand, due to the potential contributions female managers can make to economic development, it is surprising that so little research has been conducted on women's opportunities and the obstacles that hinder their upward mobility. The purpose of this paper is to discuss a study which explores attitudes toward women as managers in a less developed African country, Benin, and which identifies key obstacles and opportunities facing female managers.

Role of Women in Least Developed African Countries

Wheeler (1967) maintained that it is difficult to generalize about the social position of African women since they live ambivalent lives that fluctuate between traditional and contemporary patterns. Women's primary role, however, seems to be defined within the context of the family, where the woman commonly

assumes a subordinate position in caring for her husband and children. The good conduct and early teaching of the children and the education of girls in domestic duties is typically the primary responsibility of women. African women stress that motherhood is all-important and that traditionally a mother is highly committed to, and invests all in, her children (Wheeler 1967).

The need for expanded participation of women in the labor force in developing African countries had been recognized for at least three decades. A comment was made at the First Congress of West African Women in 1959 that, "The woman's place has always been in the background. We need a reevaluation of our position and participation in life and progress of our people" (Wheeler 1967). The Final Report of the U.N. Conference on the Development of Education in Africa (United Nations 1961) similarly identified an urgent need for the increased use of job-educated "women power" in the working life of the community. The report identified a need to expand employment opportunities and encourage greater participation and leadership by women in community affairs and public life (Wheeler 1967). The need for women to assume leadership roles in less developed countries such as Benin still remains today.

The Case of Benin

Benin is an independent country in West Africa, located on the Atlantic Ocean, and according to the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI), is the 14th least developed country in the world. Formerly called Dahomey, it came into being as the People's Republic of Benin in 1975. It is a relatively small country, covering slightly over 43,000 square miles (112,622 square km.). Its population is 4.1 million with an average annual growth rate of 3.1 percent. The country had a labor force of 1.5 million in 1982, of which 70 percent was in agriculture and less than 2 percent was industrial (Central Intelligence Agency 1986).

Benin has had severe problems in socio-economic development and is currently undergoing slow economic growth. Three reasons have been identified for these development problems: a poor economic infrastructure, poor economic planning, and inadequate human resources. In particular, the country is suffering from an acute lack of high-level and middle-level technicians, skilled workers, and middle-level management in all branches of the economy (United Nations 1984).

The lack of human resources is felt to be due in large part to the structure of Benin's education system (United Nations 1984). The literacy rate is currently 20 percent (Central Intelligence Agency 1986). The lack of educational opportunities is particularly striking for women. Only 42 percent of the relevant age group of females are in primary school and only 10 percent are in secondary school (United Nations 1984). Moreover, the

educational program for females emphasizes the areas of child care, cooking, and the art of trading. Thus, education for females is seen as preparation for homemaking and childbearing roles (Wheeler 1967). Hence, women constitute a undertapped and underutilized pool of human resources for economic development in Benin.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

In the summer of 1986, managers nominated by their organizations attended a training seminar on management development in Cotonou, Benin. The seminar was sponsored by the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration and taught in French. The purpose of the seminar was to introduce basic human resource management principles to public and private sector managers. Effective leadership, motivation, and control strategies were addressed in the seminar.

A six-page questionnaire, prepared in English and translated into French by a Senagalese student, was administered by the principal author (who was one of the trainers) on the next to the last day of the two-week training session. The questionnaire explored attitudes toward women as managers, religiosity, traditionalism, and perceived opportunities and obstacles for women as managers. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it to the researchers the following day. Any questions that respondents had concerning the survey and its general purpose were addressed at the time of administration. Of the 54 questionnaires distributed, 43 (80%) were returned.

Table 1 summarized the socio-demographic data of these respondents. Four fifths (79.5%) of the participants were male. Three-quarters of the males and three-quarters of the females were married. Twenty-eight (67%) of the respondents identified themselves with a particular ethnic group, including different tribal identifications. The most common tribal affiliations were Fon (Five respondents), Yoruba (four respondents), and Goun (four respondents). Over half (56%) of the respondents had studied abroad. France was the most frequent foreign study location (12 respondents); other locations were Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Russia, Switzerland, Italy, the Philippines, Germany, and Canada. Others pursued training the nearby countries of Togo, the Ivory Coast, and Nigeria.

The respondents worked in 27 different organizations and had been employed for an average of 4.5 years. Most were currently working for public enterprises (84%) and the remainder for domestic private organizations (15%). Organization size ranged from eight to 3,230 employees, with an average of 352 employees. Of the organizations, 50% had 121 or fewer employees.

Measures

Attitudes Toward Women as Managers. The Attitudes Toward Women as Managers Scale (ATWAM) was developed by Herbert and Yost (1977) to measure attitudes toward female managers while controlling for social desirability and other possible response biases. The ATWAM instrument consists of ten items, with three possible responses for each item. For each of the ten items, the respondent is instructed to choose the one response that is most characteristic of himself or herself, the one that is least characteristic, and to leave one blank, (See Appendix A for the full instrument). An example of one of the ten items is as follows:

- a. It is acceptable for women to assume leadership roles as often as men. _____
- b. In a demanding situation, a woman manager would be no more likely to break down than would a male manager. _____
- c. There are some professions and types of businesses that are more suitable for men than for women. _____

To discourage any mental set on the part of the respondents and to make the instrument less transparent, two additional items are introduced for response, but not scored. The instrument is self-administered and instructions are self-explanatory.

The ATWAM scoring system yields a possible score range of 10 to 70. Low ATWAM scores are associated with positive or favorable attitudes toward women in the managerial role and indicate that the respondent does not hold negative sex-role stereotypes. High scores are associated with negative or unfavorable attitudes toward women in the managerial role and indicate that the respondent holds negative sex-role stereotypes. Thus, the lower the ATWAM score, the more favorable the attitudes; the higher the score, the more unfavorable the attitudes.

The psychometric properties of the ATWAM scale have been shown to be stable and internally consistent; test-retest reliability in one sample was .77 ($p < .001$), odd-even split half reliability was .81 ($p < .001$), and first-half/second-half split half reliability was .91 ($p < .001$) (Yost and Herbert 1985).

Religiosity. Religiosity (degree of religious commitment) was measured by adapting a scale developed by Putney and Middleton (1961) to measure the influence of religions on one's life and the role of religion in one's upbringing (see Appendix A). In family sociology, religiosity was found to affect marriage and marital adjustment (Filsinger and Wilson 1984; Bahr and Chadwick 1985), and child-rearing and socialization (Acock and Bengtson 1978; Cherlin and Celebuski 1983; Hoge et al. 1982). As many religions prescribe

roles considered proper for women within the family and society, this variable may influence attitudes toward women as managers.

The religiosity score on the four-item scale can range from 4 (low) to 20 (high). In the present sample, the overall mean was 13.7, the mean for females was 16.9, and the mean for males was 12.9.

Traditionalism. A five-item scale was developed to measure the extent to which respondents are willing to accept or adopt new values and new ways of life, and how much they adhere to their traditional values. (See Appendix A.) The more traditional they are, the less likely they are to have positive attitudes toward women as managers.

The traditionalism score can range from 5 (low) to 25 (high). The overall sample mean was 17.5, the mean for females was also 17.5, and the mean for males was 17.46.

Perceived Opportunities and Obstacles. Finally, using an open-ended response format, respondents were asked what problems and opportunities they saw for women as managers in the future.

FINDINGS

Representation of Women Employees and Female Managers

The number of women in the organizations represented in the survey ranged from 1 to 1,400, with a mean of 86. Approximately 50 percent of the firms employed 20 or fewer women. An average of 21 percent of all employees in these organizations were female, with a range of 3 percent to 74 percent female. The number of female managers in the organizations ranged from 0 to 400, with a mean of 20. Approximately 50 percent of the firms had either none or only one female manager. Of the 718 total female managers employed in the survey organizations, 156 (22%) were in lower level managerial positions, and 70 (10%) were in higher level managerial positions.

As the number of employees in an organization increased, the number of female employees also increased ($r=.85$, $p<.001$), as did the number of female managers ($r=.82$, $p<.001$), the number of intermediate level female managers ($r=.81$, $p<.001$), and the number of higher level female managers ($r=.78$, $p<.001$). As the number of women in an organization increased, so did the number of female managers ($r=.99$, $p<.001$), the number of intermediate level female managers ($r=.92$, $p<.001$), and the number of high level female managers ($r=.90$, $p<.001$). As the number of female managers increased, the number of intermediate level female managers increased ($r=.90$, $p<.001$) as well as the number of high level female managers ($r=.89$, $p<.001$). Finally, as the number of intermediate level female managers increased, the number of high

level female managers also increased ($r=.96$, $p<.001$). Essentially, as the organization experiences personnel expansion, women have a much greater opportunity to become part of the labor force and to occupy a managerial position.

Attitudes Toward Women as Managers

In a United States industry sample of 289 respondents (Yost and Herbert 1985), the means ATWAM score reported for respondents was 35.13 (SD=8.09). When broken down by gender, the mean score for males was 37.89 (SD=7.93) and for females, 31.64 (SD=6.88). In the sample of respondents from Benin, the means score was 37.63 (SD = 5.43), with a range of scores from 28 to 48. In terms of gender, the mean score for males was 38.66 (SD=5.09) and for females, 34.25 (SD=4.83). Compared with United States respondents in Yost and Herbert's study, Beninois respondents have only a slightly more negative attitude toward women as managers. And, as expected, the ATWAM score does appear to vary with gender ($F=4.80$, $p=.04$), with males having a higher score than females. However, there appears to be no significant difference by religious affiliation, ethnic group, public or private employment, outside training or study, marital status, level of education, or age. In addition, neither the religiosity scores ($r=-.02$, $p=.45$) nor the traditionalism scores ($r=.11$, $p=.45$) for males and females were significantly different.

Perceived Opportunities and Obstacles

The obstacles that respondents perceived for women as managers could be grouped into three categories: personal characteristics, role-related factors, and tradition. In terms of personal characteristics, three respondents asserted that women have an inferiority complex and that they cannot separate their emotions from their professional obligations. Two contended that women lack the necessary education for managerial positions, that there are few women overall who are educated, and that school does not encourage women to continue their studies. One respondent alleged that the only way to bring more women into management was to make education obligatory for all children of school age. Further, some trades (especially those with physical energy demands) were perceived by one respondent as presenting too much risk and employment insecurity for women.

In terms of role-related obstacles, respondents claimed that women have a conflict between their responsibilities in the workplace and at home. Five respondents saw role conflict as the major obstacle for women in seeking to occupy managerial positions, because they continue to be primarily responsible for children and housework. With their marital and familial responsibilities, women are viewed as having limited time available outside the home. Two

respondents pointed out that being pregnant creates problems for women, later to be coupled with the lack of quality day care for children. As a consequence, married women were generally perceived to be absent more frequently than married men. One respondent summarized the situation by stating that women would never be effective managers until they could handle their household problems. Nonetheless, three-quarters of the female managers in the study were married--which suggests that marital responsibilities are not insurmountable obstacles.

Role conflict between the homemaker and professional roles is not unique to women in Benin. According to Minai (1981), the most universal obstacle to career women's progress in Islamic countries can be found right in their own homes. Moreover, Minai maintained that balancing a profession and marriage has grown more difficult in recent years, with the disintegration of the extended family eliminating childcare opportunities. Further, while younger men in Islamic countries are happy to see their wives bring home paychecks, they consider participation in housework beneath their dignity. Frozen foods and labor-saving devices remain luxuries. Also, there is a lack of nurseries in many Islamic countries (Minai 1981).

Finally, four respondents identified tradition as an obstacle for women in management. They remarked that existing sexist attitudes set up obstacles for women. They alleged that men consider women to be inferior simply because they are women and that they do not even acknowledge their competence of "intellectual baggage." According to these four respondents the major obstacle is thus a mental attitude problem on the part of men, and women will be confronted with an inhospitable environment caused by perceived inequality between the sexes. One respondent maintained that because women have been perceived as inferior to men for a long time, this attitude toward moral worth will take a long time to change. Another respondent pointed out that the women's movement in Benin is weak, with men dominating it. Thus, for some respondents, the issue of women in management approached a "non-issue." However, while tradition and personal characteristics were identified by many respondents as obstacles to the advancement of female managers, more respondents stressed role-related factors as obstacles over any other.

The opportunities that the respondents saw for women as managers were contingent upon women's personal characteristics and upon social progress. In terms of personal qualifications, the respondents collectively described women as steadfast, rigorous, honest, effective, and able to maintain themselves in difficult positions. One respondent stated that since women have the necessary qualities and aptitudes for managerial positions, they cannot be held back and therefore should be able to enter into most of the same trades as men.

Anticipating modernization, several respondents saw women playing a larger role in managerial ranks in the future. Four respondents felt that in time women will occupy high posts. One respondent contended that the evolution of ideas permits the hope that women will assume important roles as managers; but, the respondent added, this is limited to women who have opted to remain single or those who have made an agreement with their husbands to help with domestic work.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

One of the most striking findings in the study was the similarity in the ATWAM scores to those of the U.S. sample collected by Yost and Herbert (1985). Not only were the absolute values similar (a mean of 35.13 in the United States versus a mean of 37.63 in Benin), but the difference between gender scores in both societies was also similar (6.2 points higher for males in the U.S. and 4.4 points higher for males in Benin). (For the Benin sample, the gender differences in ATWAM scores was statistically significant.) Another surprising finding was that religiosity and traditionalism were not significantly correlated with scores on the ATWAM scale for either gender.

Finally, a surprisingly high percentage of employees in private and public organizations were female (an average of 21% of the workforce represented in the sample was female). As expected, over half of the firms had no women in managerial positions. While the number of female managers in the United States and other developed countries was also low. A study by Korn/Ferry International (1982) estimated that women hold 18 percent of U.S. management and administrative jobs. The United States Bureau of Census (1986) offered a higher estimate and reported in 1984 that 33.6 percent of all persons in executive, administrative, and managerial positions were female.

Most of the female managers in the Benin organizations were not in lower level managerial positions, but rather in intermediate level and high level managerial positions. It appears that women in Benin find greater managerial opportunities in large organizations. As an organization grows in size, more women are apparently able to move into upper level (intermediate and high level) managerial positions.

As anticipated, the obstacles facing female managers are perceived to be more numerous than are the opportunities. Of the three general categories of obstacles, the role-related variables were most frequently mentioned. However, it may very well be that traditional attitudes are the source of women's role-related difficulties (for example, the assumption that women should have full responsibility for children and housework). While some respondents saw the forces associated with social progress as

opening doors for women as managers, the majority of the respondents saw sexist attitudes as strong enough to keep doors tightly closed to women in the near future.

It appears that many of the obstacles facing women, especially those related to the lack of sufficient education and skills, can be greatly reduced through formal and informal training for women. Improving the status of women has been unquestionably associated with improving their access to higher levels of formal education (Robertson 1984). School curricula can be designed to minimize sex-role stereotyping and to encourage women to enter into traditional male-dominated occupations. In addition to the skill development associated with higher levels of education, the degree and status associated with such training will open up doors of opportunity for women.

Once women are perceived as being qualified (that is, well-trained and educated), they will undoubtedly face other obstacles in attaining managerial or administrative positions as do women in developed countries (that is, sexist attitudes and role conflicts). A change in the basic values regarding the role of women in developing society is clearly a very difficult task. Yet, the inclusion of a significant number of well-trained women into the managerial labor pool may be an important factor in the economic development of Third World countries. To facilitate the growth of industry, Third World countries need to utilize the human resource pool to its full potential. Under-utilization of women in the managerial ranks is clearly not an efficient strategy for long-term, sustained economic growth.

Table 1
Respondent's Profile
(n=43)

	Total Respondents* (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Marital Status			
Married	29 (74)	23 (74)	6 (75)
Single	10 (26)	8 (26)	2 (25)
Religion			
Moslem	6 (16)	5 (17)	1 (13)
Christian	30 (79)	23 (77)	7 (87)
Other	2 (5)	2 (7)	0 (0)
Age			
Less than 25	1 (3)	1 (3)	0 (0)
26-30	5 (13)	4 (13)	1 (13)
31-35	18 (46)	15 (48)	3 (38)
36-40	7 (18)	5 (16)	2 (25)
41-45	4 (10)	3 (10)	1 (13)
46-50	3 (8)	2 (6)	1 (13)
51 and older	1 (3)	1 (3)	0 (0)
Education			
High school or less	3 (8)	2 (6)	1 (13)
B.A. equivalent	9 (23)	8 (26)	1 (13)
M.A. equivalent	21 (54)	17 (55)	4 (50)
Ph.D. equivalent	6 (15)	4 (13)	2 (25)
Study Abroad			
Yes	22 (56)	19 (61)	3 (38)
No	17 (44)	12 (39)	5 (63)
Type of Employing Organization			
Public	36 (84)	29 (83)	7 (87)
Private	7 (16)	6 (17)	1 (13)

*Percentage reflects only those responding to the question.

Appendix A

1. Attitudes Toward Women as Managers (ATWAM) Scale (Yost and Herbert 1985).

From each set of three statements below, select the one statement with which you most agree and place a M (for "most agree") in the blank to the right of that statement. For each set, also select the one statement with which you least agree and place an L (for "least agree") in the blank to the right of the statement. Note that one statement in each set will not be chosen at all.

1.
 - A. Men are more concerned with the cars they drive than with the clothes their wives wear. _____
 - B. Any man worth his salt should not be blamed for putting his career above his family. _____
 - C. A person's job is the best single indicator of the sort of person he or she is. _____
2.
 - A. Parental authority and responsibility for discipline of the children should be divided equally between the husband and the wife. _____
 - B. It is less desirable for women to have jobs that require responsibility than for men. _____
 - C. Men should not continue to show courtesies to women such as holding doors open for them and helping them with their coats. _____
3.
 - A. It is acceptable for women to assume leadership roles as often as men. _____
 - B. In a demanding situation, a women manager would be no more likely to breakdown than would a male manager. _____
 - C. There are some professions and types of businesses that are more suitable for men than for women. _____
4.
 - A. Recognition for a job well done is less important to women than it is to men. _____
 - B. A woman should demand money for household and personal expenses as a right rather than a gift. _____
 - C. Women are temperamentally fit for leadership positions. _____

5. A. Women tend to allow their emotions to influence their managerial behavior more than men._____
- B. The husband and the wife should be equal partners in planning the family budget._____.
- C. If both husband and wife agree that sexual fidelity is not important, there is no reason why both should not have extramarital affairs._____
6. A. A man's first responsibility is to his wife, not to his mother._____
- B. A man who is able and willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding in whatever he wants to do._____
- C. Only after a man has achieved what he wants from life should he concern himself with the injustices in the world._____
7. A. A wife should make every effort to minimize irritations and inconveniences for the male head of the household.

- B. Women can cope with stressful situations as effectively as men can._____
- C. Women should be encouraged not to become sexually intimate with anyone, even their fiances, before marriage._____
8. A. A "obey" clause in marriage service is insulting to women._____
- B. Divorced men should help to support their children but should be required to pay alimony if their wives are capable of working._____
- C. Women have the capacity to acquire the necessary skills to be successful managers._____
9. A. Women can be aggressive in business situations that demand it._____
- B. Women have an obligation to be faithful to their husbands._____
- C. It is childish for a woman to assert herself by retaining her maiden name after marriage._____

10. A. Men should continue to show courtesies to women such as holding doors open for them or helping them with their coat._____
- B. In job appointments and promotions, females should be given equal consideration with males._____
- C. It is all right for a wife to have an occasional, casual, extramarital affair._____
11. A. The satisfaction of her husband's sexual desires is a fundamental obligation of every wife._____
- B. Most women should not want the kind of support that men traditionally have given them._____
- C. Women possess the dominance to be successful leaders. _____
12. A. Most women need and want the kind of protection and support that men traditionally have given them._____
- B. Women are capable of separating their emotions from their ideas._____
- C. A husband has no obligation to inform his wife of his financial plans._____

2. Religious Commitment Index (Putney and Middleton 1961)

Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements: (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree)

- A. My ideas about religion are one of the most important parts of my philosophy of life._____
- B. I find that my ideas on religion have considerable influence on my views in other areas._____
- C. Believing as I do about religion is very important to being the kind of person I want to be._____
- D. I very often think about matters relating to religion. _____

3. Traditionalism Scale

Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements: (1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree)

- A. I like to conform with the traditional values of our country._____
- B. My culture is worth conserving._____
- C. Younger people should adopt new values from other countries._____
- D. I want to see my loved one behave consistently with our traditional values._____
- E. People shouldn't mix other cultural values with our own cultural values._____

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