

**AFRICAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL
MANAGEMENT (AJEM)**



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Problems and Constraints Facing Women Managers in Nigeria

by

MRS. E. ADENIKE EMEKE

Introduction

A few decades ago, women in Nigeria were traditionally regarded as fragile, and so excluded from taking jobs, only to be left to their biological role to precreate and grace and delight their matrimonial homes when they were finally married. In spite of their being more than 50% of the world population, women do more than two thirds of the world's work and own one tenth of the world's property (U.N.O. 1985). Their contribution to the decisions that affect their lives is minimal. One hardly heard of women in managerial positions.

That women are regarded and treated as a subordinate group has never been in dispute. It has been clearly documented that women within almost every society lack political and economic power (Rosaldo & Lamphers 1974; Levi - Strauss 1971). In Nigeria, they receive less education (in spite of concerted efforts to change the status quo), and are normally relegated to the least prestigious positions in the occupational structure. Women are almost totally excluded from positions of power or responsibility in government, education and big time business. The subjugation of women by men within a particular national context may be understood as one instance of a more general and pervasive pattern of domination. A look at the trends in employment pattern of women in Nigeria will throw more light on the above stated facts.

Table 1 shows that only about 1% (2,479) of the women workers in relation to total number of participants in the labour force were in management (middle and top) positions (08 - 17) in 1981.

Table 1
Established Federal Civil Employee in Posts by Salary
Grade Levels and Sex

Grade Level	Male	Female	Total
01 - 03	111,161	16,613	127,774
04 - 07	94,505	12,901	107,406
08 - 12	16,614	2,305	18,919
13 - 17	2,061	174	2,235
TOTAL	224,341	31,993	256,334

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SOURCE: Federal Civil Service: Manpower Statistics, 1981, No. 14, Pg. 34.

Nwachukwu (1980) and Soyombo (1985) made it clear that though there has been a steady move of women into managerial positions. These women are concentrated in areas stereotyped by society as women's jobs. These include teaching, nursing and secretarial work. Table II throws some light on this issue. Table III which shows the percentage of women in jobs traditionally regarded as belonging to men reveal that the total number of women involved is so small that the number in managerial positions is so negligible to merit mentioning.

Table II
Percentage of Women Managers In Traditionally Female Occupations

Occupations	Female Percentage
Confidential Secretaries & Stenographers	36.5%
Nurses	80.2%
Health Manpower	60.6%
Caterers, Dieticians & Nutritionists	84.0%
Librarians & Archivists	36.06%

SOURCE: National Manpower Board, Federal Ministry of Economic Development, Nigeria's Manpower Requirements, Lagos. 1984.

Table III
Percentage of Women Workers in Traditional Men's Job

Occupation	Female Percentage
Architects	5%
Surveyors	5%
Chemists	3.8%
Engineers	2.7%
Mining & Quarrying	1.4%
Total	16.9%

SOURCE: National Manpower Board, Nigeria's Manpower Requirements, Lagos 1984. Pg 19 - 26

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act weak, which they cannot afford if they must be efficient and effective at work. They are thus left in a dilemma.

(2) *Problems and Constraints Created by Women Themselves*

Some women managers feel deeply within them that they are inferior to men. In an attempt to rid themselves of this inferiority complex they sometimes strive to behave like a man. Because of this inferiority complex some women managers are not assertive enough. Assertiveness is a quality that must either be inherent or acquired by a woman who wants to achieve success in her profession. Because the woman has been made to see the world with a man's eye, and the male culture has been imposed upon her by society, she is besieged by some measure of inferiority complex. Many women managers accept this as true.

As a result of this underlying inferiority complex, women managers are sometimes not courteous. In their belief and experience that they have to behave like a man and work twice as hard to achieve success, they lose their temper often and act tough most times. What they fail to understand is that it doesn't hurt anyone to put on a bit of charm. People, both male and female are always more responsive to a bit of charm. The very man who may be so opposed to a woman pursuing a profession or career to its height, will make things much easier if treated without any antagonism.

(3) *Problems and Constraints Created by the Home*

Another major problem facing women managers is that related to the home. The woman managers has to play the rather unenviable triangular role of wife, mother and career woman. Women managers still have to get married.

The single unmarried woman, or even the single mother, is still largely an anathema to the Nigerian society. Even in the developed countries, where on the surface the status of a single woman appears not to matter, the situation is not just as simple.

A study by Awe, quoted the result of a 3-year extensive in-depth interviews with 25 women who held management positions in U.S.A. in business and industry. She noted that at first glance, the lives of these women appear like success stories, but "more thoughtful analysis reveals the price they paid - until they were married. They were looked down upon and find it a little difficult to find suitable marriage partners and settle down to harmonious marital lives" (Awe, 1987).

In the Nigerian setting, the mothers are usually blamed for the short-comings of the children. It is ironical to note that so much reliance is put on the woman in moulding the child's character be it male or female, yet the woman is also regarded as the fragile and vulnerable sex. It will therefore require a woman with a keen sense of commitment to be able to overcome these obstacles that men are fortunate not to be obliged to contend with.

(4) *Problems Created By Other Women*

Somehow, while men appreciate, help and sustain one another women seem to consider each other as competitors and enemies. The endemic polygamous situation make women consider each other first as competitors for the man's favour, later as competitors for social recognition. In business, civil service and in other areas, a woman's greatest headache is often fellow women. She would much rather have a man as boss, she would rather vote for a man as head of government or legislator than for a woman. In a man's world where women are not appreciated and are denied their rights, they still do not stand together and sustain one another in position of leadership. They allow envy, lack of confidence in themselves and in their capabilities to bring down fellow women. Women's associations which can look at the problems squarely are fragmented and taken up with a great deal of in-fighting. Women are often their own enemies in that they often fail to support their own kind in positions of power. This really should not be. Women should learn to appreciate other women, whether as boss, as co-workers or as workers under them. They should develop love and solidarity and that feeling in a hostile world that every woman's success is also the other's success.

(5) *Problems Created By the Society*

Attitudes, certainly cultural attitudes, also pose problems and constraints to the woman manager. What really is this cultural attitude? It is difficult to define with exactitude, but it exhibits certain notable traits. In most of our societies, except perhaps those which came under muslim influence, the tradition of the woman was that of a self-sufficient woman who contributed substantially to the maintenance of the household, in some societies she was expected to provide in a large measure for herself and her children. Many times she operates in an environment where she is virtually a second class citizen particularly in her marital home and among members of her husband's extended family. She also operates in a society where in spite of her contributions, the society plays down her role and is often unwilling to help her out or to allow her to participate in decisions that affect her.

In many parts of the world and especially Africa women are still held in situations of servitude and near slavery with opportunities only to manage their kitchens and not even their families. The rural women in many parts of Nigeria are denied basic amenities and basic human rights, and are not allowed to develop any management skills. In some parts they are excluded on religious grounds from participating in the management of the economy and society. The situation is changing only very slightly thanks to such nation-wide programmes and drives like "Better Life For Rural Dwellers" Programme.

For most men in our society, it is a bitter pill to swallow, realising that

women at the top are ready, willing and prepared to help others climb the ladder, piloting them and helping them avoid the thorny paths they had walked or are going through at the top. This coming together will also afford a forum for the present crop of women managers to brainstorm the constraints and problems they encounter with the view to finding possible solutions to them. Also, excesses can be corrected and abuses minimized. At the end of the day, the coming together will be a learning venue for the women and a source of happiness, professional satisfaction, and unbottling of pent up emotions which if not put under check in time can explode and lead to regrettable circumstances.

- 5) Women managers in their effort to stay at the top and give credence to ability should not sacrifice the homes for the jobs. A good balance must be struck between these two very important elements of their lives. This calls for a lot of organization and planning on the part of the woman manager. Armed with a keen sense of organization, the woman manager can stay comfortably at the top and also comfortably in the home.

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