



**BARRIERS TOWARDS CAREER DEVELOPMENT AMONG WOMEN EMPLOYEES AT WORKPLACE:  
CASE STUDY KERIO VALLEY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (KVDA)**

**\*Agnes Kurgat and Jacqueline M. Omuya**

Performance Appraisal Process in Organizations, Kenya

**ARTICLE INFO**

**Article History:**

Received 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2011  
Received in revised form  
28<sup>th</sup> August, 2011  
Accepted 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2011  
Published online 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2011

**Key words:**

Career development,  
Barriers,  
Opportunities.

**ABSTRACT**

In recent years, women and gender issues have become a major area of concern. Seminars, workshops and conference are being held over the world to discuss women issues and women advancement in all spheres of life. Although attitude towards the role of women as homemakers is shifting to being career people, a few women have made their way through the narrow corridors of authority to gradually climb up the management and leadership ladders. Most societies in Kenya have emphasized the role of women as housewife's, mothers and unskilled laborers. A survey conducted by strategy and statistics (GOK 2001) in Kenya found out that women inclusion in labour market being blurred by great inequalities that exist between men and women in career development and employment opportunities. The survey noted that women have fewer job opportunities than men and are disproportionately found in lower paid and less prestigious occupations. Women in Kenya have minimal chances to advance career wise and only hold a small proportion of management positions, which are rarely in leadership positions. A case study research design was used in the study, where a case of KVDA was chosen from other public institutions in the country. The target population comprised of 678 general employees of KVDA. Questionnaires were used to collect data from a stratified and randomly selected sample size of 200 employees. The data collected was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative statistics and presented in frequency and percentage tables. From the study it was found out that promotion among women is low and also that training for women employees is minimal. The study found that African cultural practices are a great hindrance to the advancement of women career wise. The study recommends that organizations should strive to ensure that career development programs are set in organizations to enhance career development position of women employees.

©Copy Right, IJCR, 2011, Academic Journals. All rights reserved

**INTRODUCTION**

Globally, a few women make it to the top of their careers as compared to their male counterparts. At corporate level, especially, in the United States of America and United Kingdom while women constitute of 40% of the work force, they only hold less than 2% of the top management positions (Cole, 1997). Experts have offered several explanations to these gender variations, which include the fact that women are being discriminated at work places. Cultural factors have also been cited. For example, most African communities' belief that women are homemakers and have no place in career growth. Consequently, these beliefs reduce women's rise to managerial positions. Furthermore, women do not take managerial positions seriously. Commenting on the rights of women in parliament Ms Njoki Ndungu a parliamentarian women activist noted that women are their own enemies as they do not believe in themselves (Daily Nation, 25th august 2005). She associated this lack of confidence to culture that treat a woman as a lesser human being. Unlike men, women must make career versus family decision.

Since the responsibility of raising children and managing the household still falls disproportional to women, lack of women mentors also make it difficult for women to find role models and protectors who can support their career growth. Men and women today face many challenges as they advance through careers. However, women have reported greater barriers than men and greater difficult in getting developmental assignments and geographical mobility opportunities (Armstrong, 2000). Men have higher chances of getting opportunities for growth than women. In most instances women have to lobby seriously to be considered for job opportunities where they can to perform equally well. Though most top managers are aware of the career grow shortcomings faced by women few organizations have taken up the challenge to initiate a system that could break barriers and ensure both men and women have equal opportunities (Desseler, 2003). It was also noted that women who leave work on maternity leave are unable to return to their jobs because they cannot find adequate and affordable childcare facilities. This is not always the interest of the employers and this undermine the progress which has already been made in establishing better employment rights for women who are on maternity leave. These women may have developed their

**\*Corresponding author:**

agneskurgat@gmail.com, jacqueomuya@yahoo.com,

careers for many years, are experienced employees with skills and training in key areas of organization work, their loss is a major loss to the organization because time and capital spent in training and maternity cannot be recouped if a woman returns to work after having a child (Fennella, 1999).

The plight of African women today cannot be looked outside this context of development and its limited success. With adjustment of work policies for example, women have become victims of these policies such as retrenchment and early retirement. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women have been marginalized more than any other region in the world by development plans. Women do most of agricultural work and yet their potential to higher position or development in career opportunities in all spheres of social, economical and political realms have been ignored. In Kenya, women in organizations are limited in presentation and decision making, over 15 years after the 1985 UN women's conference in Nairobi women have remained disadvantaged in all areas of employment, be it career development promotion or securing higher position in employment (Bushra 1988). The East Africa standard 10<sup>th</sup> October 2005, reported the launching of a new report on Kenyan which noted that women in Kenya today are very poorly represented, especially in most areas of decision making. The report singled out, ownership, governance and leadership as areas where women lag behind in decision-making. The report, which was compiled by (NCAPD) and the UNFPA deputy director, further stated that Kenya faces major challenges in implementing policies and giving women equal opportunities. In Kenya, girls make up 70% of children enrolled in primary schools. Despite free primary education policy, gender disparity exists in secondary schools and higher level of education where only 35% of the universities students are female. Fewer girls than boys actually enroll and attend institutions of higher learning in Kenya (East African Standard, 10th October, 2005).

## **METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING**

The study applied a case study research design. This was an intensive descriptive and holistic analysis of Kerio Valley Development Authority (KVDA) as a single entity. It was an in-depth investigation barrier towards carrier development among women employees. Kerio Valley Development Authority is a government agency formed by an act of parliament No 14 of 1979 to undertake development with Kerio Valley Basin. The KVDA area of jurisdiction covers 8,600km<sup>2</sup> made up of the Turkana, West Pokot, Keiyo, Marakwet, Baringo and Koibatek as well as parts of Samburu and Marsabit Districts (KVDA master plan 1986. The study targeted employees of Kerio Valley Development Authority. The target population comprised of 678 employees. The target population was arrived at after considering the information required to meet the research objects and to answer the research questions. It was not possible to study the whole population and only a sample was selected for the study. The selected sample consisted of 200 employees drawn from all the organization's departments. Probability sampling strategy was used to arrive at the sample this was to ensure that the researcher selected a reasonable number of respondents that provides adequate representation and one that captures variations of the target population. The study applied stratified sampling technique to select employees' sample. Data was

collected using questionnaires, which were both closed and open-ended to enable the respondents' express their opinion on various issues covered by the study. Data collected was analyzed using qualitative and quantitative statistics and presented in frequency and percentage tables.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The findings of the study revealed that women are in a dilemma of not being allowed to advance career wise due to cultural practices/barriers revealed 59 percent of the respondents who agreed to this. This means that cultural practices hinder women's advancement in career. Further, 77 percent of the respondents agreed that women suffer career loss due to roles played at home. This roles include cooking, taking care of children, and taking care of the family farm among others. This role creates a dual role conflict between home roles and work roles and the end of the day the roles which are compromised are the career development related roles such as training which is requisite for promotions in most organizations.

The findings of the study revealed that 64 percent of the agreed that women are employed where they qualify and 62 percent indicated that women are not barred from career development. This means that women in the organization are employed where they qualify and that they are not barred from career development. Further, 56% of the respondents indicated that women are given equal opportunities as men in promotion and 73 percent revealed that women do not fear leadership positions. This implies that when the organization is on a promotion of employee's strategy both male and female employees are targeted and considered since they do not fear leadership positions. The findings clearly revealed that majority of the respondents (72%) disagreed that women like lower cadre jobs, 53 percents disagreed the fact that women are very authoritative and 90 percent disagreed with the fact that women are not interested in promotion. This therefore means that irrespective of gender high cadre jobs should be given to women as men are given since they are not authoritative as some people would believe as they are also interested in promotion. The results further revealed 70 percent of the respondents disagreed that female managers can not work well with male employees. This shows that female managers work extra ordinarily well with male employees. It may be for this reason that 56 percent of the respondents agreed that female managers are very good since they deliver their promises and are prompt in their work. Women would also want to advance career as revealed by 67 percent of the respondents who disagreed with the statements that men are the only ones to advance career wise. Therefore, the organization should give equal opportunities for men and women in all career development issues so that the attitude towards women can be positive. Table 1 shows that African cultural practices have hindered women from advancing career wise. It came out that women in employment are dominated by their male counterparts. Apart from formal employment, African culture has always viewed women as home-makers, wives and mothers. African culture has put educated women in a dilemma because despite of being employed, a woman still has the responsibilities of taking care of her house hold. In the structure of work, men have been viewed as those who need full time jobs and careers as principle bread-winners.

Table 1: Showing employees attitudes towards women at work place

Item	Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Women like lower cadre jobs	40	23	8	4	134	73	185	100.0
Women are very authoritative	84	45	8	4	93	51	185	100.0
Female managers can't work well with male employees	15	8	2	1	168	91	185	100.0
Women are not interested in promotions	48	26	6	3	131	71	185	100.0
Female managers are good	120	57	9	5	56	30	185	100.0
Men are the only ones to advance career wise	54	29	7	4	124	67	185	100.0
Formal Employment is reserved for men only	160	86	18	10	7	4	185	100.0

Table 2: Showing barriers towards women opportunities in career development

Item	Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
African cultural practices do not allow women to advance career wise	29	16	9	5	147	79	185	100
Women suffer lose in career attainment due to family responsibilities	110	59	9	4	69	37	185	100
Women need time to stay with their children at home	100	54	49	26	36	20	185	100
Women lack leadership skills	107	58	10	5	68	47	185	100
Women dislike promotion	32	17	4	2	149	81	185	100

African culture on the other hand supports men's chauvinism and these attitudes have been extended to work place whereby women are relegated to lower positions. Culture deters women from working while for men it is women's role which affects them from advancing career wise. In African cultural practices, it is a taboo for women not to carry out certain jobs such as mending roofs slaughtering animals and so on. This has formed the basis for women to be viewed as objects of free labour in that, a woman toils in the farm the whole day, attends to the children and she is not paid anything. From the study, African culture has hindered women from advancing career wise due to the dual responsibilities a woman has to play that in employment and at home in taking care of households. Women at workplace hardly have time to concentrate on advancing in their careers. Women's contribution to economic and social change has continued to be adequately recognized and greatly under valued; because men dominated cultures have kept them in inferior positions in society, though customs and taboos. This African culture have always kept women subordinate to men and thus according to the findings women have not been given room to advance career wise. Table 2 shows that career attainment is a continuous process of learning and education is a process that takes place through a life span of an individual. Career breakages due to the roles played at woman have affected women from advancing in their careers. From the findings of the study, career development is a continuous process and women suffer a loss in career attainment because of the time taken off to look after children, or to take care of those children when they do not have child care. This from study has contributed to low level of skills and education among women employees. From the study, women have suffered a loss in career attainment due to the dual roles played at home. A part from being in employment a woman is charged with the responsibility of taking care of her household. A woman employee hardly has time to concentrate on one item at a time, when she is at the workplace, or busy focusing on what is happening in her family circle. When training opportunities are made available to these women they are reluctant to take them up because of the family responsibilities.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

- Organizations should strive in enhancing training opportunities for potential women managers, especially in skills such as leadership, assertiveness

and time management. Whilst encourage women in particular to apply for higher training, organizations should provide personal development opportunities to undertake new challenges and extend experience in managerial roles.

- Organizations should develop senior management awareness programs that encourage appointment of qualified women to a merit of managerial positions.
- For women to develop career wise and occupy top management or leadership positions, it requires an explicit commitment of equal opportunities from the top management. The specific contributions that women can make should be identified and communicated to all employees. This commitment also requires investment of sufficient resources including training and development strategies not only for women management trainees but also for the organizations' line male managers.
- From the African perspective, societies should come out and assist women in pursuit of management and leadership positions. Communities should treat both girls and boys on equal footing and provide both with equal educational opportunities at all levels of organization.
- Finally, organizations should train women before promotions and come out with strategic career planning opportunities advancement. Thus for women's. Organizations should always review selection/promotion and appraisal process and carry out audit attitudes towards women.

### Suggestions for further studies

From the study career development has come out clearly as a growth and integral process that include training and development, the role of the organization and its top management in career enhancement of individual employees should be investigated. Since, the success of any training and development depends on the quality of the programmes in place; it would be incisive and interesting to establish how training and development programmes are managed in organizations.

### REFERENCES

- Adams, J. 1979. Women on Top of the World (Success patterns and personal growth). New York: Hawk Thome Books.

- Arun, M. 2000. *Managing Human Resource*. New Delhi: Macmillan Ltd.
- Bruegman, S. 1995. *Women Chief Executive Officers in California higher education influence on mentioning and other factors on career advancement*. California: University of Davis press.
- Burnet, P. and Graham, S. 1993. *Human Resource management*, London: Pitman Publishers
- Bushra, J. 1998. *Women Education in Africa*. Paris: UNESCO, UNICEFF.
- Cole, G. 1997. *Personnel management theory and practice (4<sup>th</sup> Ed)*. Continuum New York.
- Dessler, G. 2003. *Human Resource Management*. London: Prentice Hall International, Inc.
- Elizabeth, L. 1977. *The working women chapter campaigns*. London McGawhill.
- Fanella, P; Iness, Sand Caroline, S. 1999. *Gender Works, Oxfam experience in policy and practice*. London: Oxfam.
- Ivancevich, D.G. 2003. *Management Principles and Functions*. New Delhi: A.I.T.B.S: publishers.
- International labour organization report 1996–2004. <http://www.ilo.org/public/English/region/centerfro/tems/gender/doc/indaw.htm#int>.
- Kofman, E and Youngs, G. 1997. *Globalization Theory and Practice*. London : London printers.
- Lara, K. 1999. *A handbook for paralegal Education*. Lara Konditi.
- Lloyd, L and Rue L.W. 1997. *Human Resource Management (5<sup>th</sup> Ed)*. New York : McGrawhill Publishers.
- McDowell, L. and Court, G. 1994. *Gender Division of Labour in post-Fordissy Economy*. New Jersey: McGrawhill publishers
- Milkovich, G.T and Bodreau, J.W. 2003. *Human Resource Management (5<sup>th</sup> Ed)* Illinois: Richard Irwin Incl.
- Morrison, A. and Von, G. 1980. *Women and minorities in management*. New York: Irwin Publishers.
- Myrdai, and Klein, 1995. *Women Two Roles*. London: Pub Publishers.
- Rao, R.V.1996. *Human Resource Development Experiences and Interventions strategies*. New Delhi: Saage Pub.
- Runyan, A. 1996. *The place of women in trading places*. London: London printers.
- Rusan, A. 1995. *Learning by association Human Resource Development*. London :Irwin publishers.
- Shchlte, J. A. 2000. *Globalisation (A critical introductio)*. London : Pitmouth Publishers.
- Stewart, J. and Mcgoldrick, J. (4ed.) 1996. *Human Resource development; perspective, strategies and practice*. London:
- Tiennery, H. 1987. *Women Studies Encyclopedia (Vol. 1)*. New York: Green Wood Press.
- Tiennery, H. 1989. *Women Studies Encyclopedia (Vol. 1)*. New York: Green Wood Press
- Wayman, J. 1993. *Women in control*. London: Irwin Publishers.
- Welibey, C. 1987. *Work Today*. London: McGrawhill publishers.
- Woodall, J. and Winstanley, D. 1998. *Development Strategy and practice*. London: Blackwell.
- Daily Nation News Paper (August 2005). *Women in Focus*. Nation Media Group.
- Drum Magazine, 1997. *Beyond inequalities (Women in Mauritius)*. Nairobi: Drum publishers.
- International Labour organization report (1996-2004). <http://www.ilo/pub/eng/region/centre/temas/gender/doc/indaw.htm/int>.
- Kenya standard Newspaper ( 8<sup>th</sup> July 2005). *Population World Day report*. Nairobi: standard Media group.
- The Daily Nation (Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> June 2006). *Education the only window of opportunity*. Nairobi: Nation Media Nairobi Kenya.
- The Standard Newspaper (1<sup>st</sup> February, 2006). *Stand tall Women of the World*. Standard Media Group.
- Women magazine, 1999. *Beyond Inequalities (Women in Mauritius)*. Mauritius: Lady Publishers.

\*\*\*\*\*