

**Female Underrepresentation in Top Leadership and Decision-Making  
Positions in Botswana's State-Owned Enterprise Sector**

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## Author's Declaration

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## List of Abbreviations

Chief Executive Officer	CEO
State Owned Enterprises	SOEs
International Labour Organization	ILO
United Nations	UN
United Nations Development Programme	UNDP
Member of Parliament	MP
Labour Force Participation Rate	LFPR

## Abstract

Gender gaps remain evident in different sectors of Botswana's labour market which negatively affects the progress on attaining Sustainable Development Goal 5 adopted by the United Nations in 2015 which aims at achieving gender equality by 2030. Despite the efforts by the Botswana government to advance women's participation and empowerment, gender equality is still a challenge as women remain less represented in top leadership and decision-making positions in the country's labor market. This thesis aims to explore the challenges that women are faced with in advancing into high-ranked positions in Botswana's State-Owned Enterprise sector. The study collects data through desktop research and elite interviews with women in executive management positions and non-governmental organization representatives, it uses the qualitative method of research to gain perspective on the experiences and existing literature on the topic. The findings and discussions of the research are important for contribution to existing literature and as future research on the progress of female representation in Botswana.

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## Introduction

Even though Botswana is cognizant of the importance of women's empowerment, participation, and inclusion in decision-making positions, gender inequality remains a prominent problem in different sectors of its labour market. The consensus in the literature review is that Botswana has made substantial progress in women ascending to senior and middle management positions, however there remains room for improvement. Existing literature by Pheko (2014) titled “Botswana Female Managers’ Career Experiences and Perspectives on Corporate Mobility and Success” and Modesto (2016) study on “Women in Management: The Case for Botswana”, recommend that future investigation should consider a broader study on stakeholder organizations and the use of different designs to enhance further research on this topic.

Studies by Pheko (2014) and Modesto (2016) reveal the experiences and gender proportion of Botswana women in management, however there remains a gap that requires in-depth analysis in exploring the challenges that act as barriers to the advancement of women into Chief Executive Officers and Board positions in Botswana’s State-Owned Enterprise sector by exploring other factors such as women in politics, culture, norms and tradition and legislative framework. According to Modesto (2016) although “governments across the world have put in place policies to regulate women's preferment, research has shown that the equation is still in favour of males”. Furthermore, Modesto (2016) argues that the social misconception of women and biological determinants are contributing factors to less representation of women in management. The study by Pheko (2014) reveals strategies for entering and succeeding in managerial positions for Botswana females as an essential component to be considered for future research. Pheko focuses



on women's experiences and the consequences of success for female managers while navigating their careers.

Other country-specific studies show that key policy changes in improving gender equality in top leadership positions have been boosted by legislation. As an example, a study by Kelan & Wang (2013) reveals an increase in the representation of women in CEO and board positions in Norway following the enactment of the Norwegian gender quota.

As a measure of data collection for this study, journals, articles, and books were used to contextualize the phenomenon that is female representation in top leadership and decision-making positions. To expand into these elements thoroughly, interviews are conducted with key personnel to better understand the research area's status. In the literature review, the study compares ideas and theories that contribute to the global topic of gender equality and women's leadership in top positions. The discussion interchangeably uses the phrases top leadership, decision-making positions, Chief Executive Officer, and Board member positions to define the positions women in parastatal organizations are less represented.

This is a single case study based on Botswana's State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) also described as parastatal organizations throughout the study. This study presents data collected by using the inductive thematic analysis approach to further explore the challenges that contribute to less women representation in top leadership and decision-making positions. The research aims to answer what barriers deter women from advancement into top leadership and decision-making positions in parastatal organizations.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to present information that analyses existing research on female underrepresentation in top leadership and decision-making positions. It compares theories that contribute to seeking an explanation as to the reasons women are less represented in high-ranked positions in organizations, challenges, and barriers faced by women in the workplace. Furthermore, this section considers the role of culture, norms and practices, gender equality, representation of women in politics, work balance, and legislative frameworks that govern the employment and conditions of work.

The number of women in middle management and senior positions in Botswana has grown significantly over the past years. With government initiatives and efforts to promote women's empowerment a scarcity of female CEOs is still a cause of concern in the formal sector. This section unpacks contributing factors to women's participation in top leadership positions. It highlights the notion of gender equality, culture and norms, women in politics, women in board positions, and legislative and theoretical frameworks.

According to Hearn and Husu (2016), gender equality advocates for equal rights between women and men within the current gender order. Hearn and Husu (2016) suggest that gender equality goes beyond the scope of not only political representation and political leadership, but also through women inclusion and participation across all sectors of society, including economic participation, decision-making, behaviors, aspirations and needs of women, men, and further genders, and freedom from violence.

The International Labour Organization (2019) mentions that there has been a steady improvement and growth in the proportion of women in managerial positions across the world, however, the growth rate has been relatively slow in other regions of the globe such as Africa and the Middle

East. Regions that have recorded a steady upward trend are Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Central Asia (ILO, 2019). The United Nations for Women mentions that although women are scaling up in education attainment, females remain underrepresented in managerial positions in the workplace (Hanna et al., n.d). A study undertaken by Martorano et.al (2021) in Botswana investigated gender equality and women's empowerment in public administration, the study revealed that women form most positions in middle management, however, men remain overrepresented in policy-making positions emphasizing power over men in making decisions and legislation to a large extent.

According to Kulkarni & Mishra (2022), women's leadership in the organization is a phenomenon that other authors in the late 80s and 90s theorized with the intent of grouping ideas into theories. In 1986 Hymowitz and Schellhardt introduced their article 'Glass Ceiling Theory', in the Wall Street Journal, defining the glass ceiling as a transparent barrier that kept women from rising above certain positions in corporations (Morrisson et.al. 1987). Another theory by Eagly and Karau (2002) defines women's leadership through the role congruity theory which argues that female gender roles and leadership roles form prejudice on account of women being perceived as less favourable in ascending to top leadership positions than men.

Botswana at the 65<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women through the Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs stated that the country is cognizant of the fact that women's leadership and increased participation in decision-making is an important cornerstone to sustaining democratic values (Mmusi and the Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs 2021). Furthermore, as part of the country's strategy, the National Development Plan emphasizes the relevance of gender mainstreaming through its National Policy on Gender

Development prioritizes political power, democratic governance, and decision-making (Mmusi and the Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs 2021).

Sustainable Development Goal 5 adopted by the United Nations in 2015 is aimed at achieving gender equality by 2030 and one of its targets, namely Target 5.5 seeks to “ensure full participation in leadership and decision making”, emphasizing women’s full participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life (“Goal 5: Gender Equality- the Global Goals” 2024). Target 5. 9 further places a demand by advocating for the adoption and strengthened policies and legislation for gender equality (“Goal 5: Gender Equality- the Global Goals” 2024). Botswana’s vision 2036 themed “achieving prosperity for all”, recognized that gender equality is an essential component in society, and the aim is for women and men to access equal rights and opportunities in all areas of society to enable full participation for them in national development (Vision 2036 Presidential Task Team 2016). Despite targets and strategies to promote gender equality, female representation in Chief Executive Officer and decision-making positions still lag, which poses a threat to the development of the country and attaining the set targets and goals.

Statistics Botswana reveals that Botswana’s total population is estimated at 2,359, 609 with the female population at 1 209 001 while the male population is 1,150, 608 (“Demography” n.d). A report by Statistics Botswana shows that the population is skewed towards females with a sex ratio of 95 males to 100 females. According to Statistics Botswana Quarterly Multi-Topic Survey (2023), the total estimated employment for 2023 Q3 was 788,616 of which 403, 717 (51.2%) were males while 348,899 (48.8%) were females accounts for 2.4% employment by sector with a total of 19,012, of which males are 11,032 and females 7,980 (Statistics Botswana Quarterly Multi-Topic Survey 2023). In the formal sector employment by occupation and sex finds males in

managerial positions accounting for 20.5% while females are at 13.1% (Statistics Botswana Quarterly Multi-Topic Survey 2023). Quarterly Multi- Topic Survey (2023) the total estimated employment for 2023 Q3 was 788,616 of which 403, 717 (51.2%) were males while 348,899 (48.8%) were females accounts for 2.4% employment by sector with a total of 19,012, of which males are 11,032 and females 7,980 (Statistics Botswana Quarterly Multi- Topic Survey 2023). In the formal sector employment by occupation and sex find males in managerial position accounting for 20.5% while females are at 13.1% (Statistics Botswana Quarterly Multi- Topic Survey 2023).

According to Statistics Botswana Quarterly Multi-Topic Survey (2023) “labor force participation rates reflect the extent to which a country’s working age group is economically active”. Labour force participation rate is the proportion of a country’s working-age population that engages actively in the labour market, either by working or looking for work; it indicates the size of the supply of labour available to engage in the production of goods and services, relative to the population of working age group (Statistics Botswana Quarterly Multi-Topic Survey 2023). The total LFPR was estimated at 63.6 percent, with males recording 67.2 percent compared to 60.3 percent recorded for females (Statistics Botswana Quarterly Multi-Topic Survey 2023). The total LFPR was estimated at 63.6 percent, with males recording 67.2 percent compared to 60.3 percent recorded for females (Statistics Botswana Quarterly Multi- Topic Survey 2023).

### 1.1 Culture, Norms, and Tradition

According to Oakley (2000), “explanations for the extremely low numbers of women in the position of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and other senior management positions go beyond corporate policies and practices and also embrace the impact of gender-based behavioural dynamics”. Oakley suggests that behaviour and culture play a significant role in demotivating women from taking up positions in top-ranked roles, this is fueled by the stereotypes and beliefs

that often emanate in society. Oakley (2000) further states that it is to this degree that women are less attracted to top positions such as CEO and executive management due to the discomfort that comes with behavioural dynamics. Barriers to female advancement are driven by stereotypes that come from leadership style and appearance, the author mentions that often a woman's tone and pitch of voice and dress code impede female progression in the workplace (Oakley 2000). In the arguments of Oakley what is unique is the element that opens discussion on culture and its dynamics on a broader scale and further accounts for the role behavioural dynamics play in contributing to the phenomenon of gender-based barriers faced by women in top leadership roles.

According to Lekorwe (2011), Botswana gained independence in 1966, following which it was conferred with a constitution, which gave individuals equality of status and the right to participate in decision-making. Lekorwe (2011) argues that although the constitution is equal to all, women have yet to enjoy their constitutional rights much like men. Certain customs, traditions, and laws limit the participation of Botswana women, and subjects' subordination to their male counterparts (Lekorwe 2011). As an example, Lekorwe (2011) mentions that in Botswana the institution of marriage favors men more than women. As tradition men are obliged to pay the bride price culturally known as "lobola" which signifies the beginning of marriage (Lekorwe 2011). He suggests that once a woman is married, she is most often treated as the property of a man and that it such traditions that have reduced the capacity of women (Lekorwe 2011).

A report by the United Nations Development Programme mentions that one factor that limits female acceleration is the patriarchal society that is characterized by customs, norms, beliefs, and practices that perpetuate gender inequalities in Botswana. According to Von Rueden (2024), patriarchy is a "form of social organization in which men maintain greater influence over political decision-making and greater control over resources, relative to women". Phoko (2014) argues that

the continued gender parity may also be a result of the notion that patriarchy reproduces organizational structures that give dominance to men and traditional male values.

In many communities it is of common belief that women belong at home to tend and care for the household and not pursue any career or hold job positions (Sunaryo et.al 2024). This perspective in society is a condition that hinders women from advancing and excelling in their respective career journeys. Von Rueden (2024) shares that “gendered division of labor is a central pillar of patriarchy, and an example of how evolved gender differences interact with subsistence practices, socially transmitted norms, and institutions”.

## 1.2 Chieftainship

Botswana before independence known as the ‘Bechuanaland Protectorate’ relied on a political system that depended on the appointment of a Kgosi also known as a ‘tribal chief’ whom total power was vested (Ifezue 2015). According to Mooketsane (2019), Botswana’s two-fold legal system which includes customary and common law remains discriminatory to women, and the traditional approach by the majority of people hinders the progress of gender inclusivity in the country. Lekorwe (2011) argues that historically women have been denied their rightful place in decision-making positions which has been because of several traditions, laws, and customs that have left women vulnerable to discrimination. Unlike their male counterparts, women have been disadvantaged in ascending to power in Botswana, as they have no legitimate hereditary power according to tradition and custom (Lekorwe 2011). In the event a woman would be required to assume their role as chief it would only be in the unlikely case of a male heir being too young or some reason that a male would be unable to take office at the time (Lekorwe 2011).

### 1.3 Women's participation in Politics

Botswana ranks at position 157 out of 181 amongst countries globally in the number of seats held by women in parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2024). According to Martorano et.al. (2021), only 7 women out of 65 MP seats are occupied by women in the Botswana parliament. This reveals that women remain under-represented in political decision-making positions and political participation (Martorano et.al 2021). Martorano et.al (2021) suggest that Botswana's Constitution is inactive in advocacy for the leadership of women in political movements instead it regulates non-discrimination. Furthermore, Botswana's electoral system first past the post' strengthens and re-emphasizes exclusion in politics, with no condition for a quota, it continues to disadvantage women in access and full participation in politics (Martorano et.al 2021).

Mooketsane (2019) argues that the government of Botswana has demonstrated anti-affirmative action sentiments, with no legal framework that implements and entrenches gender representation in political leadership. Although legislative quotas remain a challenge in enactment, the author has observed a pattern by Botswana's former Presidents, that involves the use of their discretion in appointing women into parliament as specially nominated members (Mooketsane 2019).

### 1.4 Women in Board positions

Although the population of females in most African countries is relatively high, female representation on corporate boards is still low (Sotola 2019). Botswana is amongst the countries that have recorded low female representation in Boards with the percentage of female corporate board members standing at 16.9 percent from the period 2016-2019 (Sotola 2019). Sotola further argues that there exists a gender gap that can be related to culture and societal norms, often deeply rooted creating a barrier for female advancement. The author categorizes the barriers in three forms 'glass ceiling' and the 'queen bee' (Sotola 2019).



The European Union considers gender equality as one of the founding principles of the European Pillars of Social Rights and its gender equality strategy prioritizes the participation of women in senior management positions, recognizing that women's access to the Boards of Directors and decision-making roles is one of the most important goals for pursuing overall gender quality (Poma and Pistoresi 2024). The International pressures to improve gender equality have led to the adoption of mandatory quotas on company boards in various countries such as Germany, Austria, France, and Italy, with Norway as the first country to introduce the mandatory quota in 2003 (Poma and Pistoresi 2024).

### 1.5 Work balance and family responsibilities

“As women come to be increasingly defined as workers, care activities are alternatively presented as an obstacle to women's employment and a burden for families squeezed between the demands of the workplace and home” (Ciccia and Verloo 2012). The girl child from an early age childhood is assigned household duties that carry a high level of responsibility while the male counterparts are not exposed to such duties (Maundeni 2018). This can shape the mindset and positioning of where a woman is placed in society, in this case, it would suggest women belong in the kitchen. Gender stereotypes stem from the gender division of labor within society, in which women are often assumed to be at home, whereas men are often assumed to be outside of domestic responsibilities (Eagly 1987). This assumption emerges from stereotypes associating agency with men and communion with women, and the social role theory suggests that gender stereotypes arise because men and women act according to social roles (Eagly 1987). Within an organizational context, social role theory explains how managers expect individuals to behave and act according to social role theory (Eagly 1987).

With more women attaining higher education in Botswana, the balance between work and family responsibilities becomes even more complex. Women's roles at home have not changed much as they still shoulder the bulk of household work such as cooking and tendering to the family members, this leads to women finding themselves over-tasked with multiple roles that they must juggle and manage daily (Maundeni 2018). According to Maundeni (2018), studies indicate that many women in the world work between 40-45 hours per week coupled with this at home they must put another 15 more hours in a week than men which has led to women to struggle in achieving work and family life balance.

### 1.6 Theoretical framework

According to Sunaryo et.al (2024), women in the workplace are still finding it difficult to attain high-level managerial positions, which remains a universal phenomenon considering the barriers they often encounter. Scholar Morrison et al., (1987) argue that barriers that prevent women from ascending to senior management positions in big corporations have often been described by the metaphor 'the glass ceiling', an invisible barrier that prevents women from scaling up the corporate ladder past a certain point. Oakley (2000) mentions that the glass ceiling is seen most dramatically in the statistics on the percentage of women in senior management positions in big corporations. In all parts of the world, female senior executives, especially female CEOs are extremely rare in big corporations (Oakley 2000).

A definition of the glass ceiling theory is that it is an invisible barrier that excludes most women from senior management positions by enabling women to see but not reach elite corporate positions (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission [FGCC] 1995; Heilman, 2001). The workplace's glass ceiling has been categorized by researchers in many ways, for example by discrimination, bias, and insufficient mentoring and networking (Cook and Glass 2014). Other categories that have

been associated with the glass ceiling are psychological factors such as impediments to women's advancement, personal impediments, organizational impediments, and social impediments which are often driven by culture and society (Powell and Butterfield 2003). Gender stereotypes often lead decision-makers to perceive women as less competent and capable of performance, while in-group favoritism causes males to select others for promotions and appointments to higher positions (Glass and Cook 2016).

According to the International Labour Organization (2019), chief executive-level positions are less represented by women which can be associated with notions such as the glass ceiling, leaky pipelines, and glass walls that seek to demonstrate that women are often left behind in advancing into high-level positions of power. A survey undertaken revealed that globally 78 percent of enterprises report having male CEOs which places women in less possession of power (ILO 2019). The domination of men in these key positions affects the progression of gender-inclusive policies, the ILO further states that when more women are in CEO positions this culminates as a positive effect that creates more female representation in the workforce (International Labour Organization 2019).

Other theories highlighted by authors Eagly and Karau (2002) include the social role theory and role congruity theory. According to Sunaryo et.al (2024) based on the social role and role congruity theory “when group members perform social roles that are more closely related to gender than context, women often experience difficulties in their career journeys, known as the glass ceiling”. Maundeni (2018) shares a similar outlook to the social theory by emphasizing the upbringing of the girl child. Often household responsibilities are assigned to females from an early stage of their childhood, which tends to shape their outlook in life regarding the role they play in society (Maundeni 2018). The unequal distribution of work between women and men from an early

childhood age can be classified through the social learning theory (Maundeni 2018). In organizations, as a practice, the theory unfolds when some managers expect women and men to act according to their social roles (Skelly and Johnson 2011). Viviers et.al (2017) are of the idea that the ‘queen bee’ metaphor that explains the reluctance of other women in top leadership roles to assist those in the low barrel to advance poses a challenge in the corporate field.

## 1.7 Institutional framework

This section looks to introduce the concept of a legislative framework on gender equality that governs Botswana’s employment sector and facilitates the action of laws thereof. It explores the policies and laws in place that govern employment and seeks to extract articles that address gender and to what extent they are effective in implementation.

Recognizing the importance of gender equality Botswana although with no gender-sensitive policies uses the below legislation to recognize gender. This section outlines the key articles and legal frameworks often used to boost and empower women in employment.

### 1.7.1 Gender mainstreaming

To advocate for gender-inclusive policies, gender mainstreaming advocates for the implementation of legislative framework and policy-making that advance laws that aim to obtain gender equality worldwide (United Nations Women, 1995). This outlook on gender inclusivity<sup>1</sup> remains widely accepted as the most practical means to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women. According to Schulz and Enslin (2014), career planning and advancement in different forms such as training and development opportunities are needed to elevate women in organizations. Schulz and Enslin (2014) argue career planning is multifaceted as it includes individual measures taken in career advancement through networking, setting career goals, and utilizing educational and

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developmental opportunities. Career planning is an opportunity that women can use to overcome barriers to advancement in organizations by individuals gaining self-awareness to make the right career choices (Schulz and Enslin 2014). Engaging in career planning is beneficial to organizations as it can promote programs, policies, and procedures that target advancing gender equality in the hiring and recruitment process (Schulz and Enslin 2014). and Enslin (2014) argue career planning is multifaceted as it includes individual measures taken in career advancement through networking, setting career goals, utilizing educational and developmental opportunities. Career planning is an opportunity that women can use to overcome barriers to advancement in organizations by individuals gaining self-awareness to make the right career choices (Schulz and Enslin 2014). Engaging in career planning is beneficial to organizations as it can promote programs, policies and procedures that target advancing gender equality in the hiring and recruitment process (Schulz and Enslin 2014).

According to Ciccia and Verloo (2012), parental leave regulations often produce positive outcomes and influence on employment, this often allows women to feel comfortable and less distracted by the idea of quitting their jobs because of childbirth. Ciccia and Verloo further state that, it has become evident that the more women participate in the labor market, the more care activities present as a challenge to the employment of females, as growing demands of work and home responsibilities collide. The implementation of leave regulations allows females and males to participate equally in the care of children as well as in their respective work areas, this model ensures the equal distribution of roles and shapes the social outlook of gender roles in society (Ciccia and Verloo 2012).

The Constitution of Botswana (1966) in article 15 recognizes the protection from discrimination on the grounds of race, subsection (2) states that “subject to the provisions of subsections (6), (7)

and (8) of this section, no person shall be treated in a discriminatory manner by any person acting under any written law or in the performance of the functions of any public office or any public authority”. Subsection (3) continues to state<sup>2</sup>that “in this section, the expression "discriminatory" means affording different treatment to different persons, attributable wholly or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, tribe, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex whereby persons of one such description are subjected to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of another such description are not made subject or are accorded privileges or advantages which are not accorded to persons of another such description”. According to Mooketsane (2019), although the Constitution builds as a framework guarding against discrimination it remains silent in promoting gender-inclusive actions for the improvement of women's representation. that “in this section, the expression "discriminatory" means affording different treatment to different persons, attributable wholly or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, tribe, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex whereby persons of one such description are subjected to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of another such description are not made subject or are accorded privileges or advantages which are not accorded to persons of another such description”. According to Mooketsane (2019), although the Constitution builds as a framework guarding against discrimination it remains silent in promoting gender inclusive actions for the improvement of women representation.

The Employment Act of Botswana (1984) does not have a provision in the Employment Act for equal pay. However, s23 (d) of the employment act recognizes ‘gender’ as it states that an employment contract cannot be terminated on grounds of the employee's race, tribe, place of origin, national extraction, social origin, marital status, political opinions, sex, colour or creed. Section

112-119 of the act recognizes maternity leave and allowance but does not guard the full pay of females during the period of confinement. Furthermore, the act does not obligate the enforcement of any rules on gender equality in the workplace. Furthermore, the act does not obligate the enforcement of any rules on gender equality in the workplace.

The Trade and Disputes Act (1982) is a legislative act that provides for the settlement of trade disputes generally and for the settlement of trade disputes in essential services, for the control and regulation of industrial action, and matters incidental thereto.

The Trade Unions and Employers Organizations Act (1984) is a legislative tool that seeks to regulate and enforce employment laws that exclude Management from Trade Union representation, which could be a loophole that closes off bargaining for better work conditions and representation/ appointment in managerial positions. Section 48 (3) of the TUEOA states that “member of management means an employee who has authority, on behalf of his employer, to employ, transfer, suspend, lay off, recall, promote or terminate employment of, reward, discipline or deal with grievances relating to the employment of any fellow employees or effectively to recommend any such action or how such grievances out to be deal with”. relating to the employment of any fellow employees or effectively to recommend any such action or the manner in which such grievances out to be deal with”.

### 1.7.2 Gender Quota

According to Revillard and Tuffy (2023), gender quota is a phenomenon that acts as a tool in public policy aimed at addressing issues of gender inequality, and is often in the world enacted in the political sphere. Although the phenomenon has first been seen in the electoral sphere, the tool has gradually expanded into other spheres such as those of socioeconomic and recent corporate boards (Revillard and Tuffy 2023). The idea of gender quota as the tool is to ensure the

representation of women at a certain percentage in areas where equality poses a challenge (Revillard and Tuffy 2023). As an example, in 2017 Panama introduced a new law on quota, which placed a demand on public and private entities dictating that a threshold of thirty percent of the board of directors must be women by 2020 (ILO 2019). According to Kelan & Wang (2013) “In Norway, a gender quota was mandated on 9 December 2005, and applies to all public limited liability companies”. Companies were mandated to comply which in the following years found a rapid increase in the proportion of women directors (Kelan & Wang 2013).

In conclusion, this section has presented desktop research that reflects different authors' perspective to the idea of female participation and narrows the scope to the factors that contribute to female representation in the workplace. Emphasis is placed on multiple factors that contribute to the phenomenon of gender equality in the labour market.



## Chapter 2: Methodology

This research aims to identify factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions within State Owned Enterprises (SOEs). Furthermore, to establish the barriers faced by women in top leadership positions and strategies that the Government can incorporate to achieve gender equality in this sector or entity.

According to Bailey et.al (2020) one of the most distinctive features of qualitative research is that the approach allows one to identify issues from the perspective of the research participant and understand the meanings and interpretations that they give to behavior, events, and objects. The study adopts a qualitative analysis approach that allows for in-depth analysis of literature, research plan, collection of data, and methods.

### 2.1 Research plan

I used the definition and criteria of management from Botswana's legislative act TUEOA of (1984) s48 (3) which defines a member of management as an employee with the power to hire, discipline, and dismiss another employee in their capacity or position as <sup>3,4</sup> Interviews targeted women in high-ranked positions (i.e., executive management) and personnel in advocacy organizations holding key positions (trade union and women's movement NGOs). Through this criterion, it can be stated that the study focused on a group of women in state-owned enterprises who are currently employed in executive manager positions.

The research adopts a thematic analysis approach, which according to Naeem et.al (2023) is defined as a process of qualitative data analysis that involves identifying patterns of data to develop

themes and interpret meaning through codes from research. This method of qualitative data analysis can be inductive and deductive wherein the inductive approach allows the data to unfold themes and the deductive approach has an element of imposing themes as analyzed by the researcher (Naeem et.al 2023). According to Naeem et.al 2023, “inductive coding refers to the process of gathering keywords with the purpose of creating an organized list of codes” and allowing patterns and themes to emerge thereof from the collected data. In my empirical analysis and discussion, I incorporate the method of the inductive approach to analyze the data set collected through the semi-structured interviews with the intent of validating themes and patterns of common ideas and interests among the respondents.

## 2.2 Elite interviews

According to Harvey (2011), elites are defined as those who occupy senior management and Board level positions within organizations. In my research, I recognized the ranking of the interviewees and prepared and structured the interviews to suit the research participants. As a method of data collection, interviews were conducted online and face-to-face. The face-to-face interviews were in the offices of the interviewees. The workplace of the interviewees was the modern-day office setting with privacy to conduct the interview, which reflected the ranking, i.e., executive management. The online interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams where recording and transcribing were done by the application. Further transcription was done by the researcher to accurately capture the statements made by the interviewees, as well as translation of the native language to the English language for ease of reference.

## 2.3 Sampling

Method of sampling interviewees were identified utilizing personal contacts obtained from the researcher’s network, referrals from the interviewee’s friends, and professional networks (e.g.,

LinkedIn). The sample comprised five organizations of which women in executive management positions were represented by three and key personnel in policy making (non-governmental organizations) were represented by two to respond to questions. For easy access and cutting down costs, the researcher sampled participants in the capital city of Botswana, for face-to-face interviews while others were conducted online. The technique used in this research is referred to as ‘snowballing’, which is a popular method of sampling in qualitative research characterized by networking and referrals (Geddes et.al 2019).

Participants all have a minimum qualification of a bachelor’s degree, having completed their bachelor's in their respective fields. Interviewees were all in executive management positions for the current roles they hold in the respective organizations. The female interviewees had at least one child as each mentioned motherhood in their interviews, the exact number of children was not recorded as it was not of interest to this study.

Before the interviews, formal correspondences were shared with the research participants via email to maintain professionalism and research etiquette. A brief description of my research was shared with the interviewees, which later attracted five interviewees who honored the request. Thereafter, those participants who agreed to face-to-face interviews would proceed to invite me to their offices to conduct the interviews.

## 2.4 Data collection methods

This research conducted face-to-face and online interviews to collect data on the research topic, note taking during the interviews and the use of MS Word was the style of data collection used. Furthermore, open-ended questions were asked, which allowed space for the interviewees to express themselves while the time limit of forty-five minutes was also managed to ensure progressive discussion. The following open-ended questions were posed to the participants to

understand their experiences and perspectives: (1) Can you share your professional background throughout your career journey? (2) Growing up are there any female role models who inspired you? Please tell me more about that.

To investigate the challenges faced by women in the workplace, the following questions were asked (1) How do you balance work life and family responsibilities while pursuing to advance in your career and work? (2) In your opinion, are there any challenges that you have encountered as a female progressing in your career?

To establish the role of education in career advancement and improvement of policies, the following questions were asked: (1) Has access to higher education influenced your advancement in your career? Please elaborate (2) What do you think could improve the participation of women in the labor market in Botswana?

Interviewees who form part of Botswana's non-governmental organizations that advocate for better work conditions and labor issues had a set of questions to understand the views on gender mainstreaming from actors. The following open-ended questions were asked: (1) Can you share your professional background and current position and role? (2) As a representative of your organization what is your opinion on female representation and participation in Botswana?

To investigate the role that culture, norms, and organizational practices play in women's advancement the following questions were asked: (1) Do cultural norms and organizational practices hinder women's advancement to top leadership positions in Botswana?

To establish the active role and participation of non-governmental organizations that contribute to the labor market the following questions were asked: (1) What strategies do you believe could effectively help gender diversity and facilitate greater female representation in leadership positions

within Botswana's parastatal sector? (2) In what ways does your organization cooperate with other entities such as the government, or other non-governmental organizations, in the advancement of best practices in addressing gender inequalities?

Finally, to ensure that no other important components of research were left behind by the research, the interviewees were asked the following question: (1) Would you like to add or share any other important aspect that is significant to you that I may not have covered in my set of questions? The idea of the question was to allow respondents to share more of their experiences and preferences to the idea of gender equality and female representation in Botswana.

Before their interview, participants were requested for formal consent and a document was issued for their signing. The interviewer recorded the online interviews with Microsoft Teams and made notes for the face-to-face interviews. To ensure accuracy the interviewer verified responses with the participant to ensure the correct information was recorded. The participants were well informed that once the research was completed the recordings would be discarded.

## 2.5 Ethical Considerations

During the interviews, I was sensitive to take into consideration the emotions that the female interviewees could find themselves in while discussing their career journey. The interviewees were reassured that their anonymity throughout this research process would be observed. At the interview's beginning, participants were asked to agree or disagree with being recorded. Furthermore, the interviewees' consent was requested, and a consent form was issued to them. The interviewees were informed that should they wish to retract their statements this could be communicated and information from them would be discarded from the compilation of this research. The interviewees were informed that should a question be deemed too sensitive to answer then they could ask to skip it and progress with the next set of questions. This was to be cautious

in case of past workplace discrimination the participant could have faced. Interviewees were well informed of the nature of the research and the purpose that which the information would be used, additionally informed that once the research paper was submitted the recordings would be discarded as they are for the sole purpose of this research.

## Chapter 3: Empirical Analysis and Discussion

In this section, I use the technique of inductive thematic analysis approach in identifying and analyzing data from desktop research and elite interviews. The focus of the analysis is to discuss the underrepresentation of females in top leadership and decision-making positions: Chief Executive Officer and Board member positions, and culture in organizational practices as barriers to female advancement. Under this section, the research study discusses all findings related to challenges faced by women in the workplace, career development, affirmative policy action, culture, norms, and tradition. The study identifies four (4) themes developed from manual codes deducted from the interviews. The codes used to create themes are similar words found from the interviewees such as “glass ceiling”, “daycare”, “development”, “mentorship” and others. The codes and patterns were then grouped into the following themes: (1) barriers faced by women in top leadership and decision-making roles, (2) career development and progression, (3) culture, norms, and tradition in organizational practices, and (4) affirmative policy action.

### Theme 1: Barriers faced by women in top leadership and decision-making roles

Common responses from female respondents indicate no discrimination or challenge personally faced in the career advancement to their current roles. Respondent A mentioned that “it is more of ambition and hard work that advance women in their career, and that government has done a lot to empower women to take up positions”. Respondent C strongly believed that for gender equality to progress, men are needed and should be brought on board into the conversation to raise awareness in society at large.

Although women respondents did not explicitly state that they face barriers or challenges in their respective fields, their responses to the interview question on “how women in their current

executive positions manage to balance work and family life” indicated common hurdles faced in balancing work with family responsibilities. Maundeni (2018) states that with the intensifying hours of work in today’s world together with women's responsibilities in the home, work and family life balance remains visible and is more problematic even to date. Women find themselves juggling hours of work while on the other hand managing the duties of a female in the household (Maundeni 2018). The author further submits that, despite notable changes in both the workforce and gender equality, women are still tied to the traditional gender roles that include cooking at home and taking care of the family (Maundeni, 2018).

These points articulated by Maundeni (2018) are reflected in Respondent A mentioning that at some point in her career journey, she had to quit her job twice to tend to her family and step into the role of a wife and woman, to quote the respondent she stated: “I decided to quit, we always take those decisions as women fortunately or unfortunately”. This demonstrates the responsibilities that women are often faced with in households. Furthermore, the respondent states that having child-friendly policies would be a welcome development as it would make work and family life balance more flexible. Also, Respondent B suggests that having a daycare would be a welcome development in making work and family life balance more efficient as often the responsibilities of motherhood disrupt the flow of office duties. This, however, was only for the period when the children were young and now as adults, it is easier, said the respondent. Both respondents (A and B) share the sentiments of flexibility in work, which seemingly avers the arguments of Thornton (2024) on the significance of different styles of working which include home-based, flexible, hybrid, and office in encouraging and retaining female talent in the workplace.

Theme 2: Career development and progression



Schulz & Enslin (2014) argues career planning is multifaceted as it includes individual measures taken in career advancement through networking, setting career goals, and utilizing educational and developmental opportunities. This argument aligned with Respondent A as she mentioned “I believe in employee development, I believe that is one way of getting people to ascend in their career life so I have always enrolled in programs that I believed would enhance my career even at the technical level and soft skills that I acquired along the way”. Additionally, Respondent B further asserts the significance of development by mentioning that “training should be continuous” having attended programs in the United Kingdom and executive leadership training in Stellenbosch has improved and contributed to her current position.

At the beginning of the interview questions, female participants are asked to share their career journey, roles, and responsibilities in their current positions. Common responses indicate that all women are educated as they have a minimum qualification of a bachelor's degree, and some hold a master's degree signifying the impact of education on their career advancement.

The aim was to examine if women are influenced by other women in higher positions, especially women in politics. According to Mooketsane (2019), Botswana has a low ranking of females in parliament which is detrimental to realizing gender equality. Respondent E points out that it is unrealistic to expect women in top leadership roles such as CEOs and Board positions when women are not even represented in parliament. The respondent noted that if women are not represented in those high-level positions those who should be leading in state-owned enterprises are likely not to gain recognition as per those in parliament.

Female respondents did not place much emphasis on the significance of women in politics in their own advancement careers but did acknowledge the significance of the role this notion may play for other women.

### Theme 3: Culture, norms, and tradition in organizational practices

Respondents D and E as representatives of non-governmental organizations assert that the norm “ga di etelelwe ke manamagadi” (men lead not women) is still prevalent even today and posits that much of our problems and their root causes stem more from societal values and norms than from the legal or legislative framework of the land. Respondent D emphasized that for significant change and a shift to gender-equal representation, at the societal level empowerment and awareness must be strengthened. There is resistance to female leadership, as an example respondent D recalled an incident where a female executive was rigorously challenged by both male and female colleagues as she sought a high-ranking position. Respondent D mentions that the female was challenged by both women and men who attempted to dethrone her positions, which eventually led the highest courts to resolve the matter leading up to her reinstatement.

Similar sentiments are shared by respondent E who noted the “bogosi” chieftainship that still exists in the country also native to Botswana as “bogodi” is still a major concern and challenge in contemporary society. Women are looked down upon and questioned when they assume their high-ranking roles and rise to positions of power, respondent E said. They are undermined and their credibility, qualification, and competence are frequently called into question, a phenomenon not commonly experienced by their male counterparts (Respondent D and E). Respondent D affirms this claim by noting “If you take issues of chieftainship, it's a taboo to have a woman as a chief, they will always find a man when a woman has to ascend to the position culturally, we just can't accept and believe that women lead”.

By these findings, it is evident that culture, norms, and traditions embedded in Botswana's society shape the organizational work culture and contribute significantly to the exclusion of women in the participation of high-ranked positions. The phenomenon relates to the arguments by Oakley

(2000) that the glass ceiling as a metaphor describes the invisible barriers that face women and deter them from scaling up the corporate ladder past a certain point. By these findings, it can be concluded that a prominent invisible barrier that fits the description of the glass ceiling is the cultural perspective of Botswana's society in addressing issues of women's representation in top leadership and decision-making positions.

Another element that reflects on cultural belief that Respondent D emphasized was that when women ascend to top leadership roles it is important that society celebrate, and hundred percent convincingly acknowledge their rise. Respondent D said recently the Botswana Government appointed a female police Commissioner, a significant change as no woman has been appointed to this position before, however following the announcement she was questioned by society on her capabilities and competence for the post via social media platforms. This reflects much more on the mindset of Botswana's society to the acceptance of female leadership and participation.

#### Theme 4: Affirmative Policy Action

Botswana's legislative framework on female or gender-sensitive laws is vague. It has always been in certain cases where Presidents use their power to elevate women, a pattern Mooketsane (2019) emphasizes began with the second President of Botswana, Masire, then Mogae, Khama, and current President Mokgweetsi Masisi who have always appointed specially elected Ministers as women. A common response from all respondents was that women's empowerment is at the forefront of the Government's initiative, however, policy action is required to attain gender parity in the workplace.

Respondent D asserts that affirmative action and legislation are needed to advance females. More of what is needed is clear and unquestionable laws that implement gender equality. This point was

also emphasized by Mooketsane (2019) when observing the silence of the legal framework of Botswana as well as “anti-affirmative action sentiments” by the State in improving women's representation.

Respondent D points out that “we don’t have firstly deliberate policies that give women that space, you know, I’m not saying they should be given things on a silver platter, but there are no deliberate policies” and also highlights that parliamentarians do not actively advocate for affirmative action in terms of favoring women, consequently, expecting this lack of advocacy to translate into increased employment opportunities for women is unrealistic. Achieving change and progress requires “being deliberate”, in other words, intentionality and proactive measures.

Another Respondent E posits that gender quotas that are in other countries may be what is needed to help the advancement of women into top leadership roles and positions thereby leading to the increase of female representation in high-ranked positions in Botswana.

Respondents A and C shared a common response that for the development of policies target should be inclusive of both men and women, this helps keep the male counterparts in the discussions of gender equality.

Reflecting on the Botswana country statement at the 65<sup>th</sup> session to the commission on the status of women the country endorsed a priority theme titled “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” (Mmusi and the Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs 2021). The Botswana National Policy on Gender and Development prioritizes political power, democratic governance, and decision-making. By these findings, it can be concluded that although there is intentionality on the part of the Government of

Botswana the priorities set by the policy are aimed at reaching and impacting women's representation in other sectors like SOEs as it tends to focus more on the political representation of women than a holistic approach to women in all sectors of its labour market. This asserts the arguments of this paper that suggest that much attention is shifted toward the low representation of women in politics rather than a holistic approach to women's representation across all sectors.

### 3.1 Limitations

Ideally, I would have representation from all the parastatal organizations in Botswana, which are estimated at fifty-four however it is not realistic in the scope of this thesis. An invitation to ten interviewees was sent, however, only five honoured the interview request, and data was collected thereof. The interviews were with women and lacked male representation to the idea and connotation of gender equality and female underrepresentation in top leadership and decision-making positions. The study conducted interviews with a specific sector with a specific number of individuals, which makes it difficult to generalize the results across the board.

The lack of data on the proportion of women in Chief Executive Officer and Board positions limited the arguments of the study. Lack of research on women in top leadership positions in Botswana was not enough therefore the paper would rely on other countries to expand on topics for discussion. Limited time to carry out this research was also a challenge. Some of the interviews requested did not materialize, which limited the perspective or ideas to be solicited from other individuals.

### Conclusion

It will take more than affirmative policies and actions to realize gender equality in Botswana. The findings reveal that much work is needed not only by the government in implementing the right policies, but also through fostering awareness from the grassroots that is societal level to bring on

board every individual for the realization of a gender-equal society, that places women in a better position of being accepted and ascend to top leadership and decision-making positions.

The findings indicate that females are less affected by the representation of women in politics, but rather hold good character and competencies in high praises in advancing women into top leadership and decision-making positions. It further discovers that explicit and affirmative gender-inclusive policies at the National level are non-existent, which has adverse effects on women in both formal and informal sectors. Additionally, it reveals that culture, norms, and traditions that devalue women are found as part of organizational practices in the workplace. This practice is associated with the historical male-dominated tradition and patriarchy in the country's advancement. Although women assume managerial roles in Botswana, advancement to high-level leadership and decision-making roles is still a concern specifically for women in Botswana's parastatal organizations.

Women are not influenced to excel in their careers by the number of female representations in politics, however, the significance of representation in Parliament does set a tone and boost aspirations to excel in top leadership and decision-making positions. What propels excellence and advancement is hard work and great ambition fueled by self-determination. Flexible working hours and child-friendly policies are suggested developments that can contribute to the ease of women participating in the labor market. The policy would allow women to compete with their male counterparts with no overarching women's responsibilities in the household and allow fair competition in the labor market. Women empowerment is evident in the actions taken by individual Presidents in the reign of their presidency to include women even in politics as a way of advancing female representation.

Additionally, barriers and challenges faced by women in the workplace are not only categorized by lack of affirmative policy action and women's responsibilities in the household but by lack of male counterparts' involvement in gender equality discussions and by other women pulling down others in advancement. This indicates that a holistic approach to society and involving both men and women in discussing issues of gender equality is imperative to attaining equal representation of gender in top leadership and decision-making roles.

Patriarchy remains dominant in Botswana's culture, the roles of women and men are defined by society and culture which ultimately is found with men and women in organizations and is adopted as practices. The findings further reveal that non- governmental organizations are present in the field and support women, however much of their advocacy is impeded by invisible barriers that come in the form of culture and tradition. The themes of discussion reveal that women are faced with invisible barriers that exist in society, therefore this study reveals that the glass ceiling theory as a theoretical framework best describes an aspect of what challenges impede women into advancement.

The future researcher could approach the idea by taking a mixed method approach to the proportion of women in CEO and Board positions to verify the qualitative analysis and actual figures to demonstrate the proportion. Additionally, interviews with male personnel to gain perspective on how they perceive the notion of gender equality and the labor force participation of women. This element is lacking in my current research as well as in the literature review as scholars identified that most of the interviewees with females and lacked an element of male inclusion to assess the topic in a broader context.

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## Appendix

Data on the executive female interviewees and non-governmental organization representatives

<b>PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>GENDER</b>
Respondent A	Parastatal	F
Respondent B	Parastatal	F
Respondent C	Parastatal	F
Respondent D	Trade Union	M
Respondent E	NGO	F