

Full Length Research Paper

Gender equity and executive management in tourism: Challenges in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region

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Tourism is a major employer of women. However, women experience gender discrimination with regard to attaining executive management positions. The paper reports on the study of gender and executive management in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries. The aim of the study is to investigate the extent at which gender equity is being practiced in the SADC tourism sector. The study used a survey design and mixed methods for data collection and analysis. The findings showed that the majority of CEOs were male. The other finding was the need to facilitate the attainment of executive management positions by women. It was found that gender mainstreaming policies within SADC countries have not yet yielded positive results in the tourism sector. The study recommends that the region engender national tourism policies and implement national executive management training programmes targeted at female managers.

Key words: Executive management, gender equity, tourism, gender mainstreaming, SADC.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growth sectors of the world economy. In terms of global exports, the sector ranks fourth after energy, fuels and food. It accounts for 5% of the GDP of the world economy and 6-7% of global employment (United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2012). International tourist arrivals increased from 882 million in 2009 to 1035 billion in 2012 with tourism receipts improving from US\$940 billion in 2010 to US\$1030 billion in 2011 (UNWTO: Press Release January 28th 2013).

In both developed and developing countries tourism has emerged as a major driver of economic and social development. It is a major creator of employment and a fast entry vehicle into the workforce for low-skilled and semi-skilled workers with a bias towards women and the

youths in both urban and rural areas. In a large number of developing countries tourism is being used as a major vehicle for achieving the Millennium Development Goals especially MDG 1-Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and MDG 2-Promote gender equality and empowerment of women.

Within the SADC region tourists arrivals have grown from a total of 20.6 million in 2006 to 21.5 in 2010 with tourist receipts standing at US \$ 12.76 billion in 2009. The sector accounted for an estimated 1.25 million direct jobs in 1999. By 2010 the figure is estimated to have reached 1.92 million (World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) 2011). The continued growth of the sector in the region offers major employment opportunities for women at all levels of the industry.

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The gender composition of the executive managers of the different subsectors of the tourism industry in the SADC region differs depending on operational needs of the subsector. Given the size of the tourism industry in the region it is not possible to cover adequately in a single study the challenges that each subsector is facing. The key objectives of this paper are therefore as follows:

1. To establish the bottlenecks that inhibit female managers in the tourism industry to attain executive management positions in the SADC region.
2. To assess the gender mainstreaming policies of the SADC member states and their effect on the tourism sector
3. To explore and explain the nature and characteristics of gender inequality in executive management positions
4. To propose recommendations that facilitate the attainment of executive management positions by women within the tourism sector

The paper starts with a background on global gender discrimination in management positions in the work environment including the tourism sector. It then outlines the methodology utilised to gather data in the SADC region and presents the findings of the study. This is followed by a discussion of the findings and a conclusion. A set of recommendations aimed at gender mainstreaming in the tourism sector in the region are offered. It is hoped that the recommendations will give policy makers a basis for putting in place programmes that are aimed at improving the ability of women to attain executive management positions in the tourism sector.

Background to the study

Globally research shows that fewer women than men become executive managers over their careers; earn less throughout the period compared to men, hold more junior positions, and exit the occupations at a faster rate than men (Thornton, 2011; Gayle et al., 2011).

Over the past 20 years, a majority of both developing and industrialized countries have initiated programmes aimed at promoting gender equity in executive management in all major sectors of the economy. However, within the tourism sector women are still underrepresented at executive management positions. Although the presence of women in the middle and lower levels of management of the tourism sector is perceived to be widespread, the development of women for executive management positions is rarely prioritized at both national and organizational levels. For example, Madzara (2011) in a study entitled "Economic Empowerment of Women Tourism Sector Study" asserts that in Zimbabwean tourism jobs occupied by women follow the "gender pyramid" found in other sectors – where women tend to be in occupations with low career development prospects whilst managerial positions are

male-dominated.

Few examples exist where government policies have given systematic and strategic training support for executive management development of women in this sector. Furthermore, limited data exist on the number of women in executive management positions in the tourism sector. In particular, few gender equity and executive management studies in tourism sector have been undertaken in SADC. For this reason, field research was undertaken to provide more detailed information on gender equity and executive management in the SADC region, with an eye toward providing policy prescriptions that would help develop capacity building programmes that enhance the growth of gender equity and executive management in the tourism sector.

Gender ordinarily means the fact of being male or female. But in this paper it will be used to refer to the social and cultural constraints which while based on the biological sex of a person, define his or her roles in the society. Therefore, gender and executive management is taken to mean the management position that is given to a person because of his biological sex. In this study the concept of gender equality was taken to refer primarily to the full equality of men and women to accessing executive management positions in the tourism sector. Therefore, the study sought insights on how far gender equity is being practiced in the SADC tourism sector.

Most SADC governments are signatories to various regional and international conventions, treaties, declarations and protocols that seek to promote and create an enabling environment for the attainment of gender equity and women's attainment of positions of decision making in all areas of the SADC economy. These include, the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW) (1991), the Convention on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR); the Global Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration (1995). In 1997, these countries signed the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development as well as its addendum on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women and Children. South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe are some of the SADC countries that have crafted and implemented National Gender Policies that provide guidelines and the institutional frameworks to engender all sectoral policies, programmes, projects and activities at all levels of the society and economy. In these countries, gender focal points have been established in all ministries and parastatals to spearhead gender mainstreaming. However, despite the significant progress made in the area of policy and legislation reform, the status of women in executive management positions in the tourism industry remains relatively low.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, tourism is a major employer of women. They make up 46% of the labour force (Vargas and Aguilar,

Table 1. Gender composition of employees in Zimbabwe's three major hotel groups in 2011.

Level	No of females	No of males	% of women
Directors and CEOs	4	7	36.4
General managers	5	21	19.2
Senior managers	76	119	39.9
Front Office managers	78	143	35.3
General Workers	1225	1829	40.1
Totals	1388	2119	36.9

Source: Government of Zimbabwe: Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development.

2004). There is a noticeable difference in terms of the percentage of the women employed in the sector, depending on size and scale of the industry, religion and socio-political characteristics of the country (Prichard, 2005). In countries like the United Kingdom the proportion of women employees in the tourism sector can be as high as 70% (Hemmati, 2002).

Although the number of women employed in the tourism industry has risen in relationship to the growth of the sector, there are a number of problems that they face in every country. Vargas and Aguilar (2004) point out that gender segregation in tourism has both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Horizontally, women are employed as waitresses, chambermaids, cleaners, travel agencies sales persons, tour operators' sales persons, receptionists and flight attendants, whereas men are employed as gardeners, barmen, chefs, drivers, pilots, construction workers and hunters. Vertically, women are concentrated in the lower levels of occupations with very few being able to break the "glass ceiling" giving rise to a typical gender pyramid.

Ferguson (2009) in her study argues that one of the major problems facing women in tourism is a prevalence of "gender-blind" tourism policies. In her review of the literature on the feminist approach to gender and development she traces the various approaches that have been advocated since the 1970s. She concludes that "making 'gender' visible in development policy does not necessarily lead to gender equity and women's empowerment" (Ferguson, 2009). Whilst the point raised is valid it is important to note that without specific policies aimed at mainstreaming gender in tourism management the status quo will remain in both the developed and developing countries.

Similarly in a study of hotel managers in Egypt, Kattara, (2005) found out that women were unable to attain senior managerial positions in five star hotels due to gender discrimination, relationships at work, lack of mentor support and lack of network access.

However it is important to point out that where there is deliberate company or national policy to mainstream gender in management of tourism enterprises the results are significant (Madzara, 2011). The study by Madzara

(2011) indicated that the three main hotel groups in Zimbabwe had made significant advancement in engendering management position in the sector as is shown in Table 1.

These developments are reflective of the positive policies that the government of Zimbabwe has adopted with regard to gender mainstreaming in a number of sectors. For example the National Tourism Policy clearly spells out what the government hopes to achieve with regard to gender mainstreaming in the sector which includes the following:

1. Promoting the respect for the dignity of women in the development, marketing and promotion of tourism and ensuring equality in the conditions of employment of women
2. Giving due consideration to equality of accessing funding for tourism development to women (Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality Industry, 2012).

At the international level the UNWTO has taken a major policy shift to focus on gender mainstreaming in the tourism industry. It launched a programme of action "Empowering Women through Tourism" in 2008 at the International Tourism Bourse (ITB) in Berlin, Germany (UNWTO 2008). The plan entailed undertaking a number of activities including:

1. Establishing a multi-sector taskforce
2. Putting in place a data collection system including desk research and case studies
3. Building international awareness about opportunities for women in tourism
4. Calling on UNWTO members to take vigorous steps to support gender mainstreaming in national development processes so as to achieve women's equality in the tourism sector (UNWTO, 2008).

A recent outcome of the programme of action is the 2010 Global Report on Women in Tourism. The overarching vision of the report is "to promote women's empowerment and protect women's rights through better tourism work" (UNWTO, 2010). With regard to leadership in tourism in

both public sector and private sector the study makes the following conclusions:

“Women hold more ministerial positions in tourism than in any other field. Nevertheless, only one in five tourist board (NTAs) CEOs are women and only one in four tourism industry associations have a women chair” (UNWTO, 2010).

There is a general consensus by researchers that gender discrimination is prevalent across all levels of the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2010; Ferguson, 2009; Prichard, 2005; Madzara, 2011). Women find it difficult to secure executive management positions which are presently dominated by men. The SADC study highlights the bottlenecks that women employed in the sector are facing in their bid to attain executive management positions within the tourism industry.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers used a survey design and mixed data collection methods to undertake the study. The questionnaire was the main instrument used to gather data from the sample population.

Interviews and document analysis were used for triangulation (Olsen, 2004). The triangulation was done for validation as well as for deepening and widening researchers' understanding of the issues affecting attainment of executive management positions by women in the sector. The documents read included country reports as well reports from organizations like the United Nations World Tourism Organization for purposes of triangulation of methods and data. Given the size of the tourism industry in SADC it was decided to use a stratified sample to gather the data. The researchers used the stratified purposeful sampling technique to capture the views of the core stakeholders in the industry. The sample was therefore composed of national tourism organizations, ministries of tourism, airlines, hotels, tour operating companies, car hire companies and travel agency companies.

With regard to the ministries of tourism and national tourism authorities the researchers send questionnaires to the total population (14 ministries and 14 national tourism authorities). The sample population for the airlines, hotels, tour operators, car hire companies and travel agencies was chosen using the probability random method. The researchers used the official lists of the national tourist organization of each member state as the sampling frames to pick the participating organizations were the questionnaires emailed. The introduction letter specifically requested that questionnaire be answered by someone in a senior management position.

The first phase of the survey entailed emailing out questionnaires to the sample population. The second phase entailed conducting telephone interviews with some of the respondents to the questionnaire. The third phase involved undertaking face to face interviews with a selected sample of exhibitors at the Sangana/Hlanganani World Travel Fair held in Harare; Zimbabwe during the period 18th-21st October, 2012.

In all a total of two hundred questionnaires (n=200) were sent out to the sample population. A 28% response rate was achieved after several follow ups were made by the researchers. According to Jennings (2001), the best response rate for mail survey questionnaires is between 25-30%.

A total of ten telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of the participants who had responded to the questionnaire in order

to get an in-depth understanding of some of the issues they had raised in their responses. The researchers were also able to conduct five face to face interviews with a sample of tourism executives who were chosen through the convenient sampling method during the Sangana/Hlanganani travel fair that was held at International Conference Centre in Harare, Zimbabwe during the period 18th-21st October, 2012. The face to face interviewees gave the researchers an opportunity to interrogate in more details issues which they were unable to discuss fully during the telephone interviews due to cost and time constraints.

The data from the questionnaires were analyzed using the SPSS technique whilst data from the interviews were analyzed using content analysis technique. Data from the questionnaires were presented through charts and graphs (Figure 1).

RESULTS

The majority of the respondents to the questionnaire (80%) were above the age of thirty one years. The views expressed in the questionnaires were therefore based on a mature analysis of the issue of gender mainstreaming in tourism in the region (Figure 2).

Males made up more than 50% of the respondents to the questionnaires reflecting the general composition of management employees in the tourism sector in the region.

Figure 3 shows that more than 50% of the respondents attained degree level education with 14% of them reaching a Masters level education.

The majority of the respondents were managers who had attained higher national diplomas or MBAs as is indicated in Figure 4.

Figure 5 indicates that the majority of the respondents, 64%, were people in senior management position with 14% being Chief Executive Officers of organizations.

Figure 6 shows the responses to the question “Is the CEO of your company or organization male or female?” Males are the dominant captains of the tourism industry within the region as clearly depicted in Figure 6. This is despite the fact that the majority of the workforce in the sector are women.

There was an over whelming affirmation (92% of the respondents) on the need to do something to facilitate the attainment of executive management positions by women as is portrayed in Figure 7.

Figure 8 shows how the respondents rated their organization's practices for preparing women for executive management positions. The majority of the organizations in the tourism sector in the region have not yet prioritized gender mainstreaming as part of their workplace policies (Figure 9).

The majority of the respondents believed that tourism organizations in the region are supportive of women who compete with their male counterparts for attaining senior management positions (Figure 10).

Over 50% of the respondents agreed that there was a need for compulsory management training for women within the tourism industry in order to assist them in attaining senior executive positions.

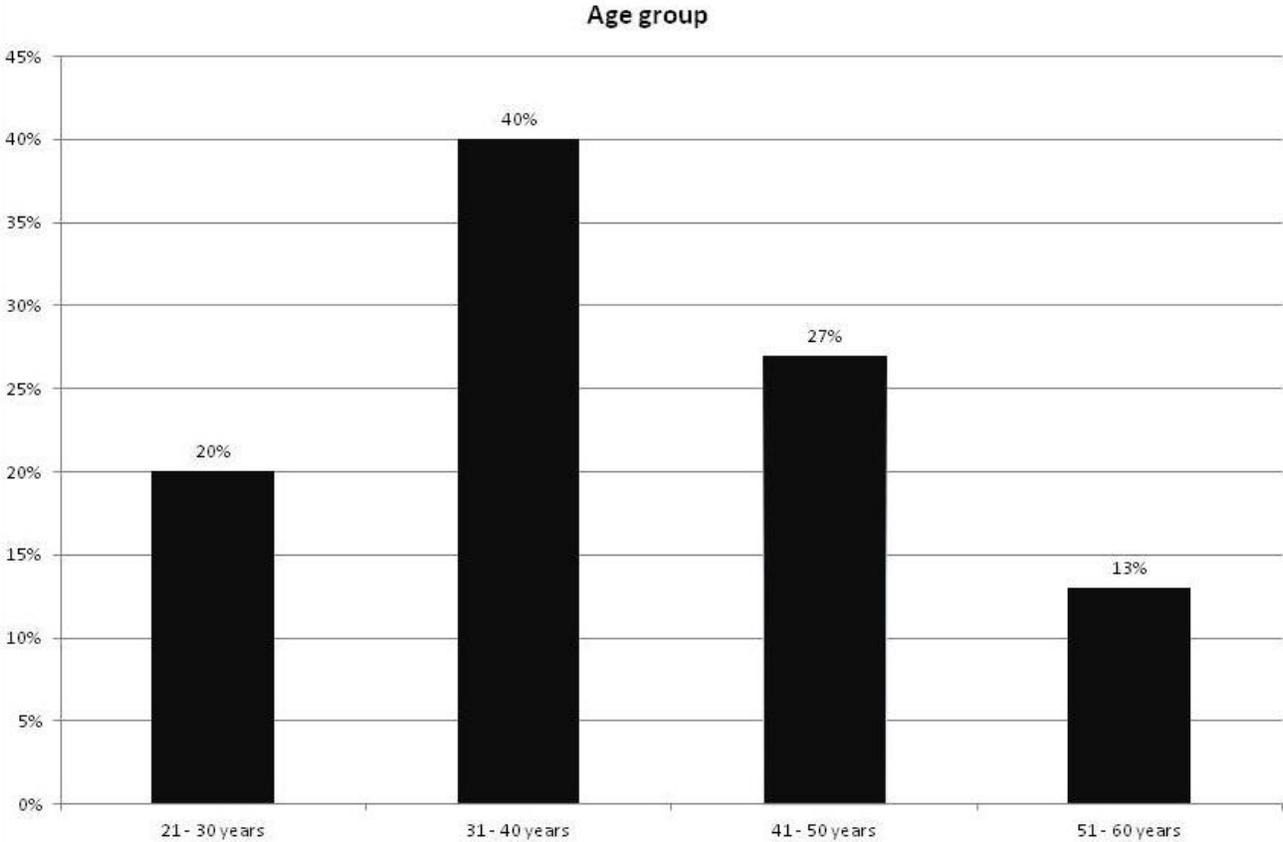


Figure 1. Age composition of respondents.

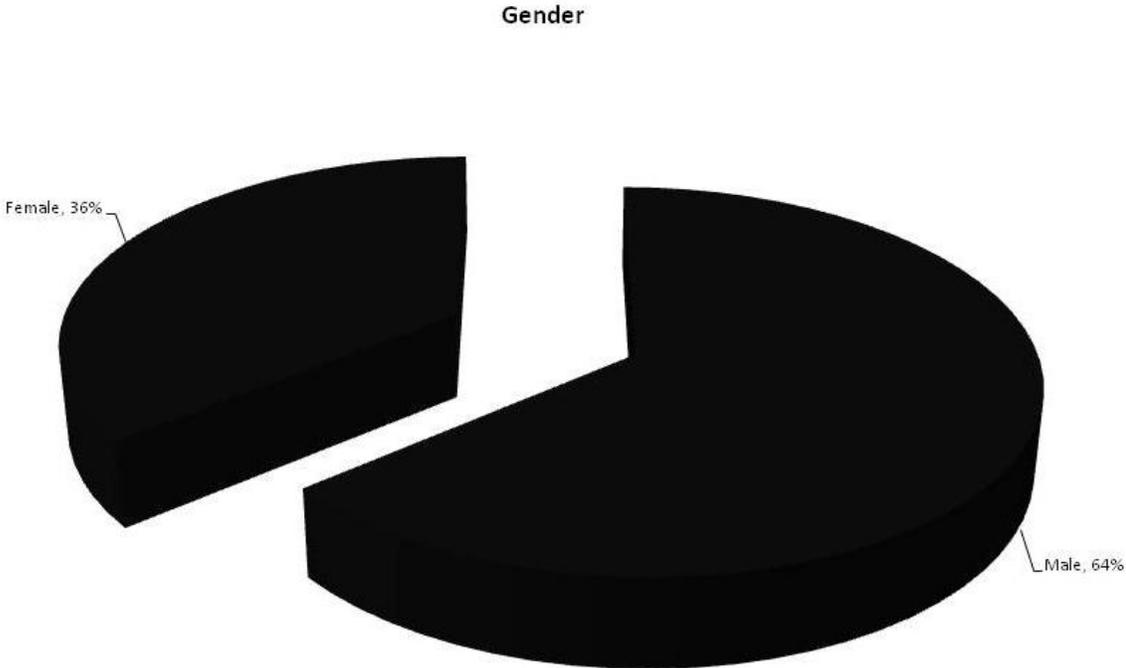


Figure 2. Gender composition of respondents .

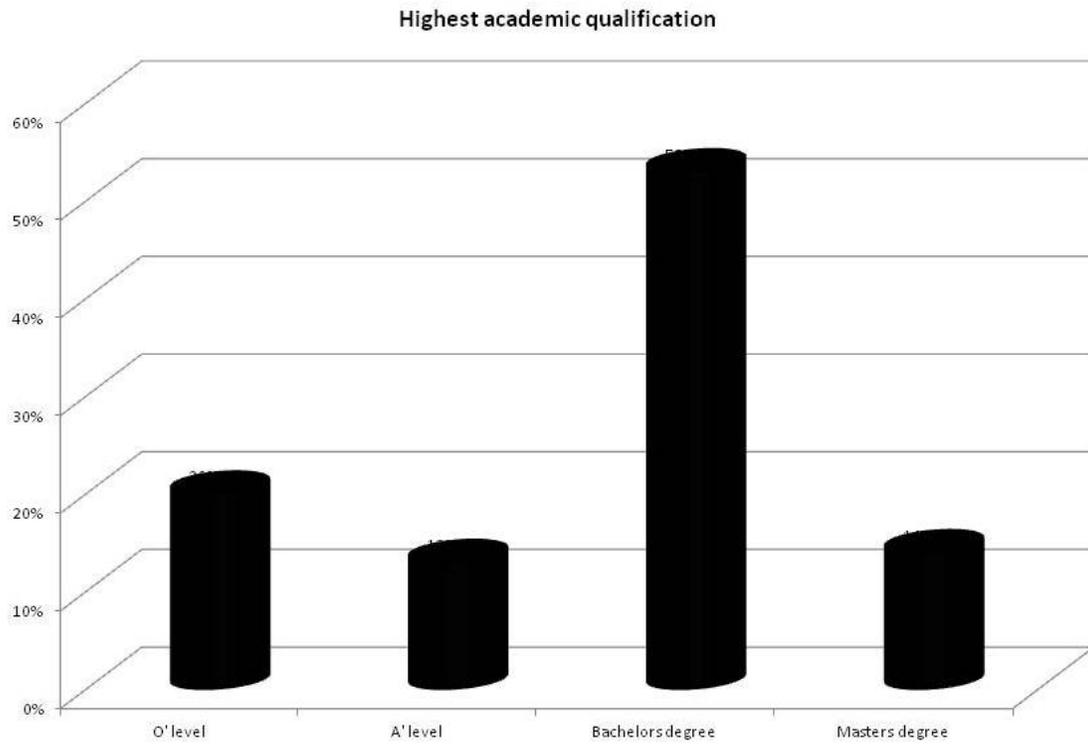


Figure 3. Highest academic qualifications attained by respondents

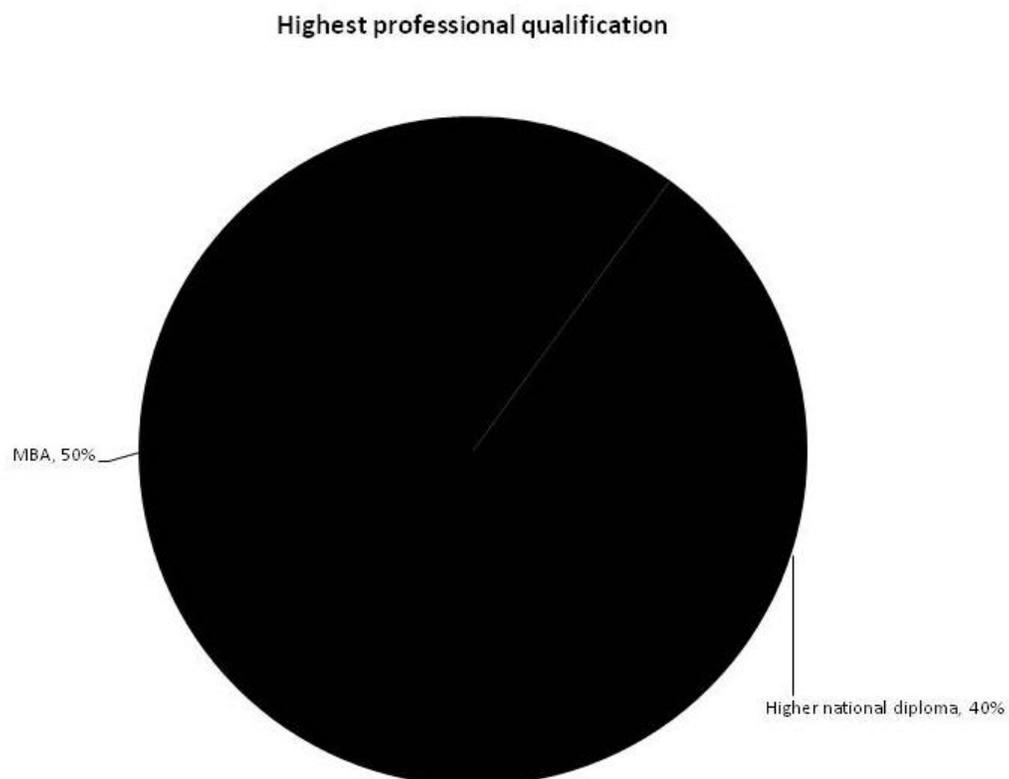


Figure 4. Highest professional qualifications attained by respondents.

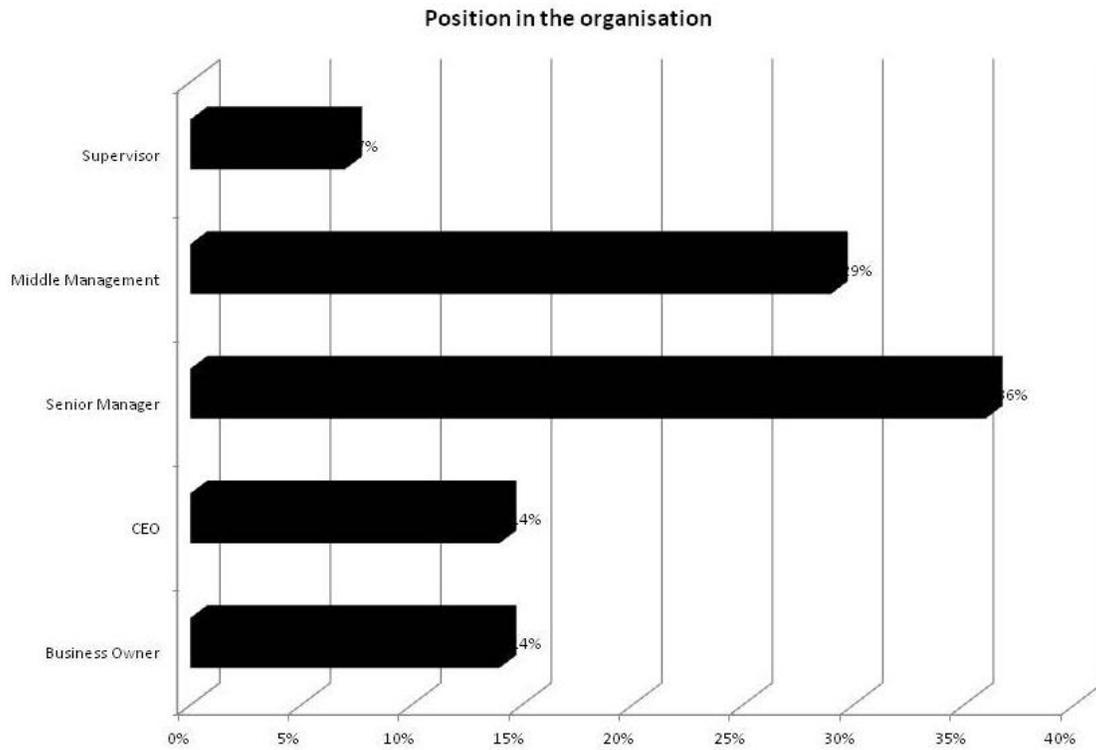


Figure 5. Positions of the respondents in the organization.

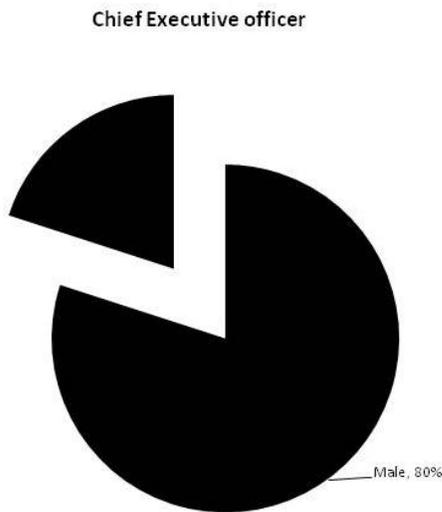


Figure 6. Gender of the organizations' chief executives.

making up a very small proportion of the management team in both public and private sector. Women face a range of hurdles in their bid to attain executive management positions. During the face to face interviews female participants pointed out a number of barriers that inhibit them in attaining executive positions within the tourism sector. These included among others cultural biases, anti-social working hours and general negative societal perception of the working environment in the sector. A large number of women were therefore afraid to apply for executive management positions as these were seen as men's jobs. One participant said:

"In our airline if the position of the CEO is advertised you hardly see an application from women; although there have been women financial directors and human resources, there has never been a woman CEO not even applications that I know for the past thirty two (32) years".

The research also revealed that women lack mentors and role models to guide and encourage them to aspire for higher office in the sector. This issue was clearly articulated by one of the interviewees who is employed in the human resource department of a private sector organization in the region who said:

"I am yet to see women who are very keen to head the

DISCUSSION

Executive management positions in the tourism sector in the SADC region are dominated by males with females

Do you think more needs to be done to make women in the tourism industry attain executive management positions

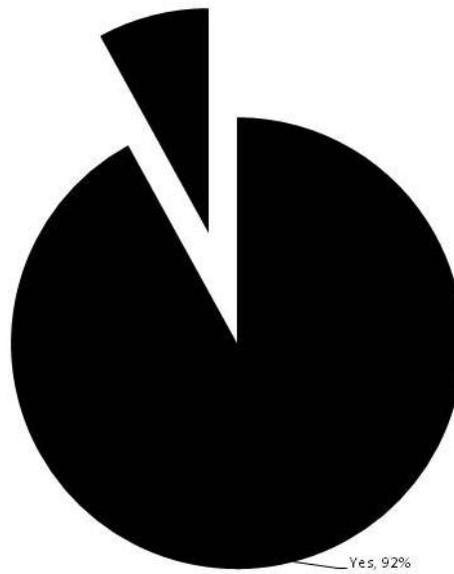


Figure 7. Respondents' views on the need to assist women to attain executive positions.

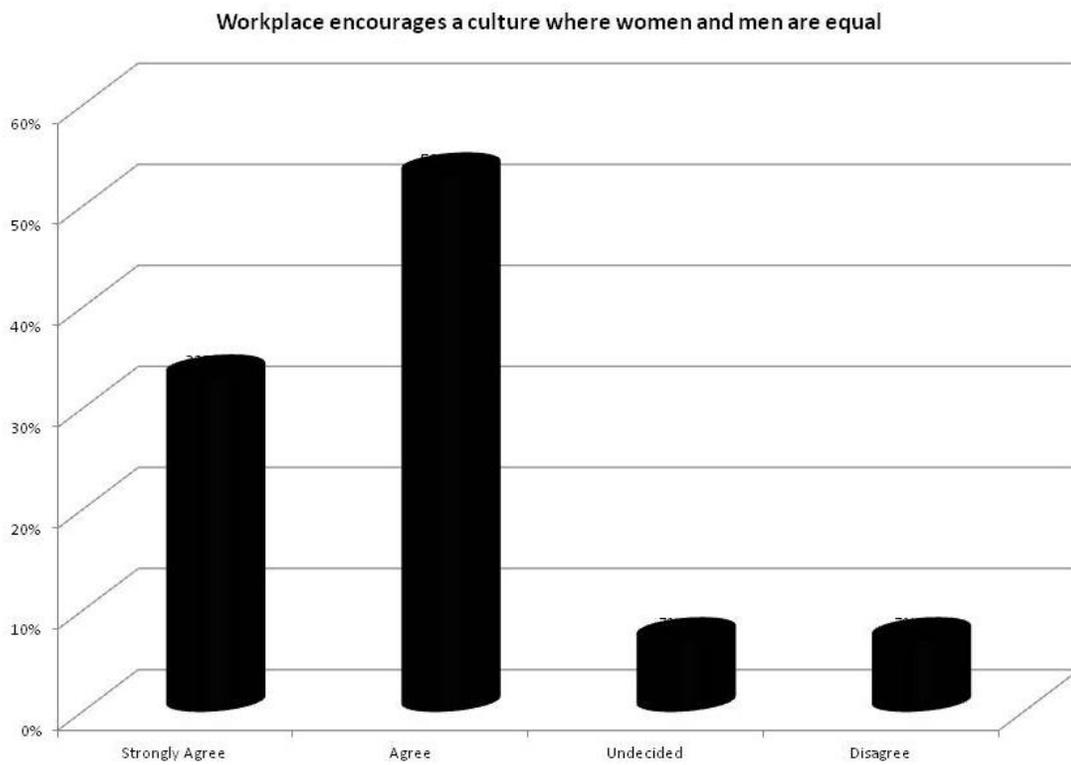


Figure 8. Respondents' views on workplace culture of gender equality.

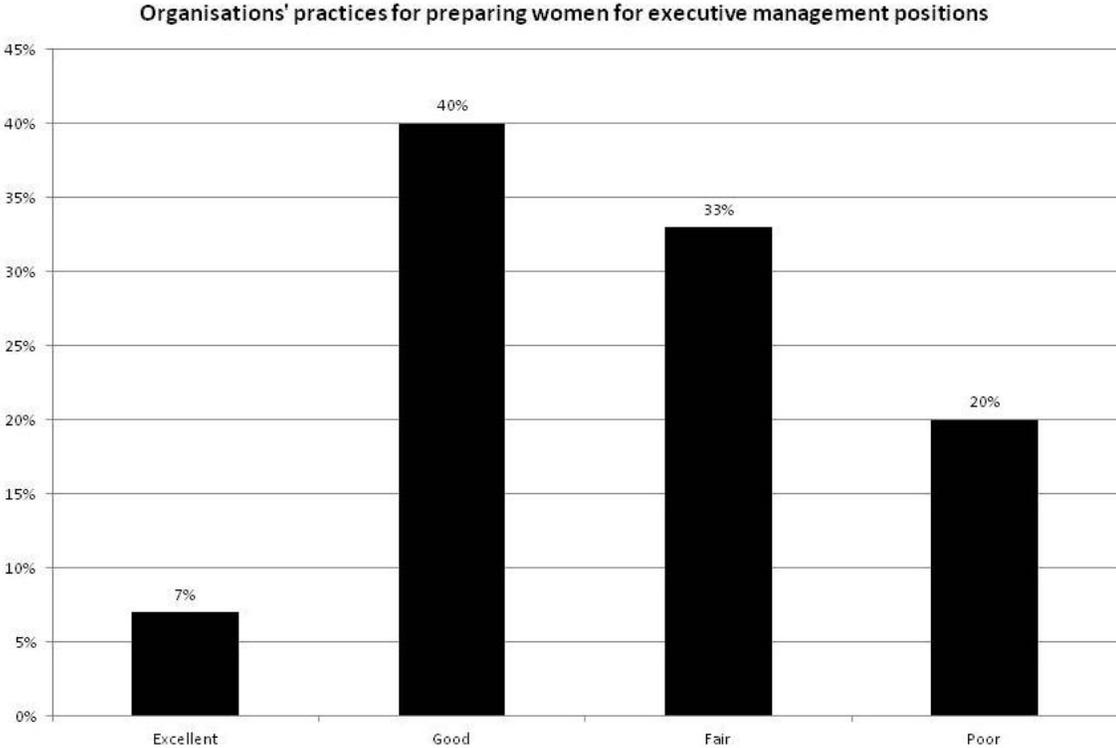


Figure 9. Respondents' views on institutional practices for preparing women for executive positions.

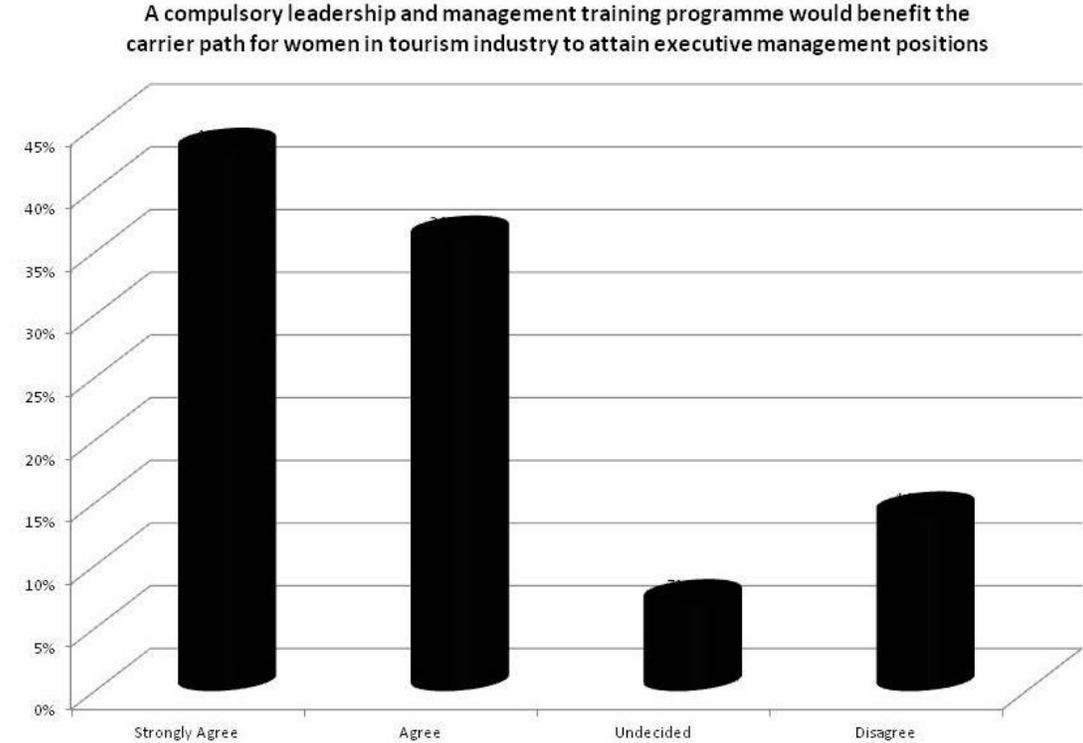


Figure 10. Respondents' views on the need to provide compulsory management training for women managers.

international group of holiday resorts. Maybe it is because there are very few women who are CEOs for groups of hotels such as Africa Sun. I have also noticed that there are very few women on boards of such groups of hotels. So you see women do not have role models in these areas where they can get mentors if at all they apply for such positions”

There is therefore a general fear by women who have the potential of taking up the executive management positions to venture into an area where there are very few role models to guide them on how to break the glass ceiling in the sector. These problems are exacerbated by the fact that the women who have made it in the sector do not seem to be keen to help other women to attain the top positions. Some interviewees indicated that there is a general tendency by successful women in the sector to want other women to follow the hard route they endured in their journey to top positions. This tendency discourages women in middle management to seek guidance from those that are the senior executive positions. Women are therefore unable to network as effectively as men and assist each other to climb the corporate ladder in the sector.

The current culture of most SADC countries expects women to focus more on the needs of their children than their careers. Balancing the demands of the family and that of a senior management position is a challenge that discourages a large number of women to aspire for high positions in the organizations they are employed. It was indicated during the research that a substantial number of women prefer to sacrifice promotion to executive positions than the welfare of their families. The cut throat competition that is characteristic of these positions was a further disincentive for women who have aspirations for higher office.

Whilst the study indicated a consensus on the need to do something to facilitate the attainment of executive management position by women in the sector, responses differed widely when it came to the issue of organizations developing a workplace culture where women and men are equal. Whilst 53% of the respondents agreed that their workplace encouraged a culture where women and men are equal 7% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. This contradictory state of affairs points to a more complex problem with regard to the issue of gender equality in executive management positions within the SADC member states. On the one hand there are cultural and traditional nuances that have discouraged women to gunner for executive management position within the sector. On the other hand, there are work place factors like lack of mentor support, lack of network access and blatant gender discrimination which hinder women's ability to attain senior management positions in the sector. Women have therefore to work harder than their male counter parts and be star performers in order to have a chance of attaining executive management

positions in the sector.

It was interesting to note that whilst 79% of the respondents believed that tourism organizations in SADC are supportive of women who seek executive management positions equivalent to their male counterparts this claim is not evident at the operational level. As was indicated above women made up only 20% of chief executives of the organizations of the respondents. Women are still unable to break the “glass ceiling”. It is a natural human instinct to hold on to what you have hence the majority of the men will not willingly go out of their way to open up the flood gates of competition from women for the top positions in the sector. A clearly thought out and well coordinated programme will need to be put in place if women are to enjoy a more level playing field in attaining executive management position in the sector in the region.

The research revealed that a large number of current top executives in the industry are people who have migrated from different sectors of the economy, for example manufacturing, banking and finance and even mining. The main driving force for these executives to migrate from sector to sector is the perceived benefits being offered by the new position and their propensity to take risks with their careers. Given the cultural traditions of most countries in the region, women have a lower propensity for risk taking than men in terms of their careers. This goes some way in explaining the dominance of men in executive management positions in the sector. The situation is buttressed by the fact that the tourism industry is a new business area in which many executives have limited knowledge of. Therefore, both men and women executives have to think twice before they apply for a job in the sector.

In order to ensure gender equality in management positions in the tourism sector in the SADC region it is essential to implement gender mainstreaming policies at both national and organizational levels.

Conclusion

The study concludes that very few women in the tourism sector in SADC attain executive management positions. It also concludes that policies which are aimed at the economic empowerment of women in the majority of SADC member states have not yielded the desired results in the tourism sector. Female managers still find it difficult to attain executive management positions. Both the public and private sectors need to implement policies and programmes that are specifically targeted at facilitating the attainment of executive management positions by female employees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that policy makers and

organizational board members need to consider the following recommendations in order to improve gender equality in the attainment of executive management positions in the sector.

1. Member states should engender national tourism policies by ensuring that all regional and international conventions, treaties, declarations and protocols that seek to promote and create an enabling environment for the attainment of gender equality in all areas of the SADC economy cascade to national tourism policies

2. Ministries of tourism should implement national executive management training programmes for junior and middle female management staff. The programmes should be undertaken in partnership with the private sector so that their content is in line with the realities that are prevalent within the tourism industry. Further the ministries will need to encourage the private sector to put in place policies that encourage gender mainstreaming in all workplace positions.

3. SADC member states should identify successful female executive managers in the sector and showcase them at various fora. For example outstanding women executives can be given specific awards during World Tourism Day celebrations in recognition of their achievements in the industry. Countries can also appoint some of these achievers as tourism ambassadors. These activities will go a long way in building the confidence of women in middle management positions as they become aware that it is possible to break the glass ceiling in the sector.

4. The SADC region through RETOSA should develop a databank of female Executive Managers who are willing to mentor other women executives in the different member states. Effective mentoring can be carried out through the virtual platform and short term visits for face to face contacts organized in different countries. The mentoring programme will improve the promotion chances of female executives to senior management positions as it gives them an opportunity to learn some of the strategies used by those who were able to attain senior executive management position in the sector.

5. The SADC region should identify one institution of higher learning and designate it as a centre of excellence for implementing executive management programmes for female tourism managers. The programme if properly funded and implemented will help in bridging the management knowledge gap that female managers in the industry have which contribute to their lack of competitiveness in attaining executive positions.

6. Member states in the region need to develop bilateral exchange programmes with both developed and developing countries that have successfully implemented policies and programmes that have enabled women in the tourism sector to enjoy equal opportunities with man in attaining executive management positions. Female managers with the potential of being promoted to

executive positions should be sent to these countries where they will spend some time being attached to women in executive positions. The experience will increase their self confidence as well as improve their management skills and competences.

ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW, Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Violence Against Women; **CCPR**, Convention on Civil and Political Rights; **MDGs**, Millennium Development Goals; **RETOSA**, Regional Tourism Organization of Southern Africa; **SADC**, Southern Africa Development Community; **UNWTO**, United Nations World Tourism Organization; **WTTC**, World Travel and Tourism Council.

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