

THE REPRESENTATION AND TENURE OF FEMALE PRINCIPALS IN PUBLIC ENTERPRISES IN EMERGING MARKETS: A PROTRACTED DEARTH?

Ralph Marenga *

* Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia
Contact details: Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Namibia, 340 Mandume Ndemufayo Avenue, Pioneerspark, Windhoek, Namibia



Abstract

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The reduced representation and tenure of women as public enterprise (PE) principals in Namibia as an emerging market and developing country are concerning (Mboti, 2014; Menges, 2020). The contributing factors are an element literature fails to address explicitly in the Namibian case. This paper, therefore, aims to consolidate evidence on whether the underrepresentation and limited tenures of female principals in Namibian PEs signal a protracted dearth of women in such positions. Methodically, a desk review is used to analyse the literature. Key findings of this paper identify the absence of top-down hands-on leadership; legal and policy implementation gaps; failure to declare gender diversity as imperative in the public sector; failure to focus on helping women gain broad line experience early on, among others, as contributing factors that have disadvantaged female principals in Namibian PEs. The challenges women face in being appointed or completing their tenure as PE principals over the years signal a protracted dearth of women in positions of PE principals in Namibia. Understanding these dynamics is relevant for enhancing Namibia's policy efforts to curb the further proliferation of patriarchy as nuanced in the glass ceiling. This paper recommends the robust implementation of existing anti-patriarchy legislation.

Keywords: Representation, Tenure, Principal, Dearth, Public Enterprises, Namibia

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant contemporary discussions in the field of public administration centers on the representation and tenure of women in the management of public enterprises (PEs) as principals. A principal, also known as a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Managing Director (MD) is a key position that predominantly shapes and implements the strategic direction of a PE (Lin, 2014). Over the past century, women have unsuccessfully attempted to penetrate and occupy

principal positions within PEs. As a result, there has been an increased scholarly interest (Oakley, 2000; Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018) on why women find it difficult in becoming principals, or why they do not last long in such positions. Literature (Einarsdottir, Christiansen, & Kristjansdottir, 2018) further highlights the barriers that prevent women from occupying or completing their terms as principals. For instance, pioneer authors, Morrison, White, and Van-Velsor (1987) indicate that quite often the barriers that stop women from rising into senior management positions have been identified as

a metaphor referred to as the “*glass ceiling*”. This metaphor became apparent as the major obstacle towards the ascendancy of women in becoming a principal in PEs.

The *glass ceiling* is a gender bias multifaceted barrier that often manifests itself through covert and overt means (Auster, 1993). To women directly affected by this metaphor, it becomes inadvertently visible, as obstacles are often prevalent in their pursuit of career development and advancement. Normatively, the proliferation of the *glass ceiling* becomes evident in light of statistics on the ratio of women vis-à-vis men in senior management or principal positions within large institutions such as PEs. Oakley (2000) further buttresses this and indicates that, globally, the occupation of women in senior executives or CEO positions is a rare occurrence in both private and public corporations. It, thus, becomes essential to consider the underlying questions put forth by feminists on the limitations placed on women in all spheres of life. This approach of inquiry laments on the power dynamics that exist in changing or maintaining the status quo, as well the underlying factors that prevent women from expressing themselves and their values.

The above could be a part of the contributing factors to what appears to be the protracted dearth and demise of women in their appointment and tenure as principals within organisations. In light of the above-mentioned there arises an explanatory gap on why women do not last, much less appointed into positions of principals. In addition to the above-stated, there is a growing body of literature (Barsh & Yee, 2012; Denti & Hemlin, 2012) that recognises the importance of women’s empowerment into these positions of principals in corporate organisations. This is particularly in reference to the various international and regional statutes and policies that aim at improving gender equality and representation in the workplace. For instance, this includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – Goal 5 and 16 and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, amongst others, that Namibia is a signatory. Indeed, these international and regional policies pave the way in which all signatory countries are expected to improve their gender equality and representation laws to ensure women are equally represented in the workplace, particularly at the senior management and principal positions level.

Namibia has done this through laws and policies such as the Namibian Constitution, the Labour Act No. 11 of 2007, and the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act No. 29 of 1998. As will be demonstrated in later sections, these laws have had a minimal effect of redressing and ascending women into top management positions, particularly the CEO or MD (or equivalent) position in PEs and the public sector in general. As a result, there arises an intricate need to ensure women ascend to principal positions within the public sector. Osituyo (2018) suggests that the *glass ceiling* is linked to the challenges women face in climbing the corporate ladder within the public sector in developing countries, such as Namibia. iKnow Politics (2019) agrees and problematises the effects of the *glass ceiling* that:

“In many countries, public institutions continue to be male-dominated and patriarchal, perpetuating harmful and sometimes violent, attitudes and practices. Although there is no global baseline on women’s participation in public administration... women are under-represented, especially in leadership and decision-making roles”.

While numerous studies (Ratanya, Mukulu, & Sakwa, 2019) find that the number of women in senior management has increased, the rate of this increase is inadvertently slow for meeting the associated targets of the SDGs in 2030. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that this increase has only been noted in the occupation of women in management positions, and even less significantly in positions of organisational principal. The rate at which women occupying principal positions remain extremely low and the few that make it to such positions do not last (Ratanya et al., 2019). Zheng (2015) supports that there exists a significant disproportion in the pattern of men vis-à-vis women in the occupation of principal positions in public institutions such as PEs. Indeed, women face a host of challenges in advancing their careers in pursuit of institutional principal position, a situation experienced in both developing and developed countries. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2014) fittingly buttresses that:

“Instead of being a driving force behind the implementation of internationally-agreed goals on gender equality and human rights standards and principles, in many developed and developing countries, public administration often remains a patriarchal institution, perpetuating gender-biased traditions, attitudes and practices. Women do not yet participate equally in public administration, especially in leadership and decision-making roles” (p. 8).

As an emerging market and developing country, Namibia is not immune to the host of challenges women face in pursuing top positions within public sector institutions. The above-described status quo by the UNDP (2014) appears to be prevalent in Namibia. Shilongo (2011) suggests that, since the attainment of Namibia’s independence in 1990, women continue to experience the effects of the *glass ceiling* despite legislative and policy pronouncements by the government to redress this. In Namibia, women vying for the position of principal in PEs have faced increased challenges in getting appointed or completing their tenure in such positions. Women, who were able to make it to the position of a principal, are increasingly at more risk of being dismissed than men in similar positions. A report stated that female CEOs had a higher share of those leaving office due to being forced out of office compared to their male counterparts (38% of women vis-à-vis 27% of men) (New Era, 2014). This is true and resonates with the case of Namibian PEs, where the proliferation of the *glass ceiling* appears to be devastating for women in this regard. A report by Chiringa (2017) finds that women in Namibia continue to be dismally underrepresented in positions such as that of CEO/MD, and those that make it often do not complete their tenure. Further emphasising this finding, the below reports tell and demonstrate the extent of the problem in Namibia.

A report by the New Era (2014) asserts that:
“... female CEO's have been placed on suspension and another almost muscled out of her job”.

Chiringa (2017) reported on the extent of this problem in Namibia and indicated that:

“Most of the female chief executive officers have lost their jobs a few years after appointment. There was the former Air Namibia boss Theo Namases and former TransNamib chief executive Saara Naanda Katiti. Both were unceremoniously kicked out of their jobs, while another female boss, NSFAF Hilya Ngiwete is holding onto her job by a thread”.

Another periodical in 2019 found that the:

“... suspension of Namibia Wildlife Resorts NWR managing director Zelna Hengari has once more resuscitated the intense debate on whether women within SOEs and the public sector at large are punished harsher than their male counterparts - even if the offences are of the same nature... female technocrats still have more hurdles to jump compared to men on their way to the top. Most strategic and top positions in the SOE sector are occupied by men and this is despite the fact that over the years there has been more female graduates than males at local universities” (Haufiku, 2019).

In 2020, the former Namibia Students Financial Assistance Fund CEO, Ms. Hilya Ngiwete, was reported to have taken the institutions' board of directors to court over her suspension and dismissal. In reference to these events in 2020, it was reported that:

“... the decision of the fund's board of directors to axe her from her post after she had been on suspension for nearly two years was cruel... The board's decision, taken on 6 February this year, to dismiss her from her post was “wholly unfair and invalid”, as she was not given a fair hearing before that decision was taken...” (Menges, 2020).

Other female principals of PEs have faced similar challenges as Haufiku (2019) asserts that:

“In the past, the suspension of female parastatal bosses such as Saara Naanda (TransNamib), Theo Namases (Air Namibia) and Maria Rukoro (Namibia Training Authority) to mention a few, have left a bad taste amongst gender equality activists”.

Indeed, the above coincides with the latest available report from the Commission for Employment Equity (CEE) which indicates 1008 men and 260 women at the executive director level (the equivalent of PE principal) in the public sector (Commission for Employment Equity, 2019). The representation of women at this level amounts to a meager 26%. What is even more interesting is that women comprised 51.6% of the total population in 2011 (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2013) and further reported 50.3% in November 2020 (Countrymeters, 2020), yet remain severely underrepresented in major positions such as principals in PEs. Furthermore, Namibia's ruling political party, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in 2013 applied a 50/50 gender policy within its structures to allow women equal leeway to political positions as accorded to men (Mongudhi, 2013; SWAPO, 2013). Interestingly, Haufiku (2019) indicates, “female technocrats do not enjoy the same treatment” as seen with women in SWAPO. It, thus, becomes evident that women aspiring for the position of a PE principal in Namibia are often confronted with challenges that prevent

them from being appointed or completing their tenure. This phenomenon could be attributed to the *glass ceiling* metaphor.

As part of the main research subject on institutional patriarchy in Namibia, the current paper aims to consolidate evidence to provide insight into whether the current status quo on female representation and tenure as principals of Namibian PEs signals the protracted dearth of women in principal positions. The purpose of the current paper is framed in this context. The intention is to further inform efforts at levelling the playing field for women aiming to climb the corporate ladder to leadership. This element is germane for furthering the scholarship on institutionalised public administration patriarchy. While numerous studies and reports (Mboti, 2014; New Era, 2014; Mwetulundila, 2019; Haufiku, 2019) have attempted to explain the underlying factors that prevent women from ascending to the top positions of organisations in Namibia, none has explicitly addressed the underlying dynamics that women face in vying for a principal position of a PE, thus, preventing them from being appointed or completing their tenure. Furthermore, these underlying dynamics have not been considered in light of the relevant theories such as the representative bureaucracy theory, the role congruity theory, and the social role theory in the Namibian context. The current paper, thus, deviates from the tendency that has created this scholarly gap by taking a different approach to fill this scholarly gap, and to theoretically explain and normatively further existing literature on issues affecting prospective or appointed women principals by drawing focus on Namibian PEs. This paper further consolidates evidence to highlight whether the status quo on the representation and tenure of female principals in Namibian PEs signals the protracted dearth of women in the top leadership positions. As an element other studies and reports have not been able to cover, the practical and normative contribution of this paper permeates by illuminating the underlying dynamics confronting women vying for the position of principals among Namibian PEs, thereby allowing policy and legislative reforms to reverse the effects of public sector institutional patriarchy.

The prevalence of women failing to occupy principal positions in Namibian PEs and much less to complete their tenure in such positions is at an alarming rate and an all-time high. It is against this background that the current paper is framed. It provides a scholarly analysis of some of the underlying dynamics that influence the lack of appointment and limited tenures of Namibian female principals in PEs. The current paper is composed by borrowing from extant research to lend scope and understanding on the underlying factors and dynamics that influence the tenure of female principals among Namibian PEs. To satisfy the normative contribution of this paper, the specific conclusions derived herein will aid public sector organisations and more specifically PEs in re-formulating institutional policies to encourage, foster career growth of female employees, and excel into becoming principals within PEs with successful tenures. To further unpack and understand the core issues of this paper, the structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature.

Section 3 analyses the methodology that has been used to conduct the current research. Section 4 presents the results and discussion, while Section 5 provides a conclusion to the paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical framework: What are the theoretical inclinations?

Several theories exist that lend scope and understanding to the appointment and tenure of women principals within institutions. For instance, the feminist theory provides some insights into understanding the crux of this paper. Founded on the principle of equality, the feminist theory advocates for the inclusion of women and men within various political and socioeconomic settings with a greater bias on equality (Bell, Meriläinen, Taylor, & Tienari, 2019). This is in lieu of the historical dispensation that assumes the subjugation of women as part of a "natural system of existence" rooted in patriarchy. Macionis (2012) refers to patriarchy as a set of ideas and beliefs that exist to explain and justify the superior dominance of men over women. However, it should be noted that the differences between men and women in this context are not innate, but because of a social end product as influenced by societal gender roles that influence the power dynamics of men over women. In the Namibian setting, patriarchy has established itself in the social, legal, political, religious, and economic spheres of society since the pre-independence era (Ambunda & De Klerk, 2008; Tshivoro, 2018). Although this is not expressed in legislation and policy documents, patriarchy exists through invisible metaphors like the *glass ceiling*. Patriarchy is present and being practiced, but no one speaks of it.

Stamarski and Hing (2015) and Verniers and Vala (2018) support that the historical oppression of women still permeates into the current workplace setting that sees women being unduly subjected to conditions that prevent them from occupying positions of principals, or much less lasting in such positions within organisations. Resonating with patriarchy, the social role theory asserts that essential leadership traits such as assertiveness are often associated with men from a societal perspective as opposed to women. Further buttressing the earlier crux of the paper, the social role theory finds that women cannot be promoted to positions of principals as they lack the essential traits only found in men (Skelly & Johnson, 2011). The metaphor of the *glass ceiling* manifests itself in this context. Feminists have argued against the separability of women and men, but rather for an inclusive approach, that characterises all genders as ultimately human in a society (Bell et al., 2019). This is the context in which feminism, as premised on the values of equality, has been problematised within the workplace (Harding, Ford, & Fotaki, 2012). These are the specific gaps in the literature that the current paper fills. While patriarchy and feminism are broad concepts that explain the prejudice women face and the sought-after equality for women, these are generally for the context of the current paper, hence, more specific theories are discussed below to lend scope and understanding on the challenges

women face in getting appointed and completing their terms as PE principals in Namibia.

The theory of representative bureaucracy posits two dimensions of representation, that is, passive and active representation (Mosher, 1982). Passive representation denotes the degree to which a public institution such as a PE deliberately recruits or appoints persons from previously disadvantaged designated groups such as women into the institution (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011). However, passive representation alludes to the degree public bureaucracy shapes its civil service employees to be representative and proportionate of the country's population demographics (Ricucci & Sidel, 1997). From this, it becomes clear that for active representation to take place, passive representation needs to exist. Bureaucrats responsible for the appointment of women should resonate, consciously consider the previous subjugation of women by society, and ensure their higher representation in various public institutions, at all levels of the hierarchy. Socialisation and consultation with affected groups (that is - women) should steer bureaucrats towards heeding their interests and implementing them in public administration (Pitkin, 1967). According to Meier and Nigro (1976), bureaucratic attitudes and values towards designated groups such as women are determined by their social setting. National policy and legislative commitment are important for shaping the orientation and values of bureaucrats in light of designated affected groups that are often underrepresented in the bureaucracy. Because of common values among bureaucrats and the populace, bureaucrats become inclined towards undertaking initiatives in favour of affected citizens (Meier & Nigro, 1976). It, thus, becomes important for the government to broadly make a commitment towards protecting designated groups against unfair treatment within the public sector and ensure all sections of the population demographic are proportionally represented. This requires existential political commitment and robust implementation.

Another theory of relevance is the role congruity theory, which was developed by Eagly (1987). This theory has been used in various studies to explain the comparative dearth of women in positions of principals in institutions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This theory is based on, amongst others, the prejudice women principals are subjected to in preventing them from getting appointed or completing their tenure in positions of principals. To support this, there are two forms through which prejudice manifests itself against females. Firstly, there exists a stereotypical belief that the character and agentic traits associated with women does not equate to the leadership requirements and roles of principals. Secondly, these agentic traits that have been presumed as a major requirement for one to occupy positions of principals have been ascribed to males, characterised by an assertive and controlling behaviour type (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Indeed, the essence of this theory resembles that of the social role theory discussed elsewhere.

Forming the edifice of the role congruity theory, the prejudice women are subjected to in occupying and lasting in positions of principals has been explained by Ratanya et al. (2019). Ratanya et al. (2019) explain that the dearth of women in positions

of leadership such as those of PE principals is rooted in “a perceived incongruity between the female stereotype and the attributes deemed necessary for effective leadership” (p.18). At this juncture, it becomes evident that the role congruity theory provides some indication that the ascendancy of women into positions of principals is treacherous as compared to men. It is against this background that there emerges a need for a refocus towards looking at a person’s aptitude fitness for a role as opposed to stereotyping along the lines of gender. Notwithstanding this, there are various underlying factors and dynamics that can be linked to the role congruity theory and beyond, that explains the causes and underlying dynamics women are confronted with in vying and lasting in positions of principals in Namibian PEs. To provide an understanding of the dynamics involved, the following section interrogates these causes and underlying dynamics in greater depths.

2.2. What are the causes and underlying dynamics?

The challenges women experience in being appointed in positions of principals or completing their terms within Namibian PEs has been described as regressive and suppressing for women (Chiringa, 2017). These challenges are rooted in dynamics that have largely been founded in prejudice and stereotyping against women, which have labeled them as unsuitable for principal positions within PEs. As earlier highlighted, the *glass ceiling* metaphor has been directly linked and serves as the avenue through which various dynamics and challenges have prevented women from being appointed or completing their term as principals. More specifically, Oakley (2000) identifies:

“... corporate policies and practices in training and career development, promotion, and compensation are often identified as major components of the glass ceiling that prevent women from making it to the top. The experience that women need in areas such as operations, manufacturing, or marketing is often not offered to young women managers” (p. 323).

The deprivation of the above-identified components to women often serve as essential stepping stones towards their appointment of women as principals. Essentially, what this means is that women are set up from the onset in a pathway that would render them unsuitable for CEO/MD positions in PEs. Often these policy problems are not redressed in the lower ranks of management where more women are found within PEs. In providing further understanding of the *glass ceiling* metaphor, this paper draws focus on the factors through which this metaphor permeates from a workplace and societal perspective against women’s current and prospective PE principles. This is done by analysing factors such as broad career barriers, training, and career development, promotion policies, as well as behavioural and cultural underpinnings of the *glass ceiling* (Oakley, 2000). These are discussed in greater depths in the subsections that follow.

Glass ceiling

The overarching dynamic: As highlighted in earlier sections, the *glass ceiling* is a metaphor that has been described as a barrier that is so faint and

transparent while at the same time prevalent in its presence preventing women from moving up the management hierarchy. The strong presence of this metaphor has been explained in the context of women that are in pursuit of moving up in an organisational structure and becoming managers and principals (Jamali, Sidani, & Safieddine, 2005). Lending further understanding to this metaphor in the context of the current paper, Victor and Shamila (2018) explain that the *glass ceiling* is an “invisible barrier that impedes the career advancement of women” (p. 4). This barrier manifests itself against female employees that attempt to advance their careers through, e.g., promotion, an appointment to senior/principal position, etc. For the case of Namibia, Haufiku (2019) fittingly explains that:

“... there is a lack of equality of opportunity for male and female workers. Men tend to have more opportunities thrown their way compared to women simply because the work system is still structured in an unbalanced manner which makes it easier for men to occupy top positions”.

Glass ceiling further penetrates organisational structures when a person (often, woman) who is duly qualified is halted from progressing into higher organisational hierarchy due to discrimination on, amongst others, gender (Afza & Newaz, 2008). This is the context in which the gendered organisational structure (GOS) model has emerged to explain the type of challenges women are confronted with in progressing with their careers as created by the *glass ceiling* in organisations. The sustenance of the *glass ceiling* has been largely pegged against female physiology and how that defines their social existence. Literature (Thusi, 2014) broadly supports this. This is the edifice upon which stereotyping in the scope of gender and leadership is framed against women in pursuit of principal positions or general career advancement. Further analysis of literature found that there exists a strong prejudice against women rooted in the belief and perception that women are innately subordinate to men. Osituyo (2018) supports this in an investigation on gender stereotyping in South Africa, which exposes:

“... a mutuality in the belief of women as naturally subordinate to their male counterparts, which includes the perception that female employees do not have the capacity of facing challenges of managerial roles” (p. 174).

The above points to the context in which the advancement of women’s careers stems to be disproportionately narrow in countries like South Africa (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Thusi, 2014) and many others in sub-Saharan Africa (Gyekye, 2013). Indeed, this resembles the trajectory of the social role and role congruity theories that, together, speak to the suppressive and subdued position and role of women that is seen as inferior to that of men. This prejudice appears to have trickled over into the corporate world in Namibia as evidenced by the New Era (2014), Chiringa (2017), Haufiku (2019), and Menges (2020).

Career barriers

The barriers that have been identified as leading factors against the career progression of women are classified into internal and external categories. However, this is in light of very limited literature (Gyekye, 2013; Osituyo, 2018) that has explored the

specific limitations women have experienced in advancing their careers. External barriers are those pertaining to the environment women find themselves in, whereas internal barriers have been identified as psychological in nature (Watts, Frame, Moffett, Van Hein, & Hein, 2015). Further supporting the context in which these barriers manifest themselves against women, Osituyo (2018) illustratively explains that:

“These barriers are believed to create a lack of confidence and self-esteem with respect to the self-perception of an individual to personal abilities resulting in frequent loss of opportunities and advancement in career” (p. 177).

In light of the above explanation by Osituyo (2018), one would turn to the work of Albert Banduras through his social cognitive theory that lends some theoretical understanding to career barriers. Banduras enlightens that the continuous subjugation of women decreases their morale and drive in pursuing leadership positions, i.e., CEO and MD of institutions. Indeed, this resonates with the social role and the role congruity theories discussed in earlier sections. From an individual female perspective, a patriarchal environment internally and externally deters women from becoming principals or completing their terms as principals of PEs as observed in this paper in this context.

Training and career development

The lack of line skills, expertise, and experience has been attributed as the major impediment that prevents women from being appointed or promoted to the position of CEO/MD (Oakley, 2000). By virtue of this, women often find themselves in subordinate positions that provide support to male principals. The context in which training and career development serve as a barrier for women arises in a two-fold manner. Firstly, one has to be in a senior management position to be in line for a principal position of an organisation. Secondly, such senior managers usually require years of extensive experience in fields such as marketing, operations, finance, or human resources management. However, it would appear that history predicted that significant time should have surpassed before more women saw themselves in principal positions of organisations such as PEs. For instance, the Glass Ceiling Commission in 1995 produces discouraging results that indicated that numerous decades will pass before any major changes are observed within organisations that see more women occupying principal positions. As it would appear, Namibia as an emerging market and developing country has yet to undergo this major change.

Unfortunately, the status quo observed in 1995 persists in many developing countries such as Namibia. Buttressing this, Shilongo (2011) explains that, although Namibia has attained political independence, women are still fighting for their own liberation against the clutches of the *glass ceiling*. Namibia in recent years has seen a number of women in junior and senior management positions within PEs. Perhaps it is a matter of time before they emerge to the top position. Despite the above-lamented challenges, opportunities to education and training remain open to women, with some donor organisations providing preference to females for the awarding to scholarships and grants. Evidently,

access to education is not a problem for females. For women to be demographically and actively represented in institutions there needs to be commitment through policy and institutional documents.

Promotion policies

In an effort to annul the pre-independence discrimination leveled against women in Namibia, the dawn of independence saw the promulgation of numerous legislative provisions for the advancement of women in various socio-political and economic spheres in Namibia. It is against this background that PEs had to provide an annual account (through annual reports) as to how women have been incorporated at all levels of the organisations. However, enforcement hereof remained poor and saw women being further disadvantaged. This is against historical corporate practices that saw PE policies before independence not include any ounce of equality and affirmative action within the workplace. However, despite efforts at levelling the playing field for all, particularly women, it would appear that the proliferation of the *glass ceiling* is still prevalent within Namibian PEs. This creates a situation in which existing policies are not effective at removing or reducing the challenges and obstacles women are confronted with in their efforts to ascend the levels of senior management through to that of principals. In a report by Luxton (2016), it has been found that women in management complained of an absence of performance-related feedback juxtapose to their male colleagues. This creates a challenge against women that seek promotion to higher-level positions within such organisations. One more element that appears to be a hindrance for women's workplace ascendency to senior management within organisations is that of education and awareness on the importance of promotion. It is important that institutional promotion policies are framed in a manner that curtails the effects of the *glass ceiling* on women, as nuanced in the social role and role congruity theories and perspective.

Behavioral and cultural explanations

Literature (Auster, 1993; Afza & Newaz, 2008; Mwetulundila, 2019) has hitherto provided several reasons for the challenges women are confronted with in climbing up the organisational management hierarchy towards the principal position. One serious element that goes beyond corporate practices to explain this phenomenon bears a cultural inclination. Oakley (2000) submits that is gender-specific behavioural dynamics influenced by cultural expectations. These expectations position women in employment categories that are subordinate to that of men. From a Namibian cultural perspective, Ambunda and De Klerk (2008) explain that women are expected to allow men to take the lead in whatever they do. The literature agrees in this context and states that:

“... considering subjective explanations that take into account the reasons why women are often not attracted to senior management positions to begin with or feel uncomfortable in the positions when they have attained them” (Oakley, 2000, p. 324).

The above could be attributed to why there are fewer women than men as CEOs/MDs in Namibian PEs, and similarly why the few that make it to such

positions often do not complete their tenure. To explain this further, Oakley (2000) posits that women have cited subjective factors preventing them from ascending to principal positions as opposed to men. Oakley (2000) identifies factors such as “stereotyping, behavioral double-binds, communication and leadership styles, old boy networks, tokenism, and differing male and female attitudes toward power are other behavioral and cultural explanations” (p.324). Amupanda and Marenga (2019) agree that the manifestation of these factors is often amplified in an African setting that culturally places and raises girls into women that regard themselves as subordinate to men. Nchabira (2013) supports this and states that the way, which the girl child is socialised in, is directly attributed to the perceived inabilities on the part of women. Buttressing this, Victor and Shamila (2018) illustratively explain that:

“The life of passage of women are sacramental, celebrated or even acknowledged illustrative of the position ascribed to women, right from the birth of the girl child, in comparison to the boy child. Female employees can perceive their professional dreams only after fulfilling their culturally accepted roles, an expectation nearly impossible considering at what age this should be happening. Women who perform in a positive, antagonistic, self-governing mode are seen as performing outside of societal norms” (p. 4).

This is the context in which sociocultural stereotypes and norms have subjected women to extraordinary challenges in being appointed or completing their tenure in positions of principals. Women who tend to prioritise their careers over familial obligations are seen as rebellious and not well vested in cultural norms. Similarly, those who attempt to strike a balance between their careers and cultural expectations often find that one or both tend to suffer. This is the context in which women in Namibia have been subjected to challenges at career progression and growth owing to the above cultural and patriarchal explanations. Having identified the proliferation of patriarchy as a challenge for women in the different settings of their lives, the Namibian Government has attempted to legislatively remedy this by passing a number of targeted laws and policies on gender equality. More on this legal framework is discussed in the following section below.

2.3. Women in the workplace: A Namibian legislative and policy context/perspective

Prior to the attainment of its independence, the Namibian society was marred by gross inequalities on the access and distribution of wealth and unequal access to land, education, and health (Jauch, 1999). The pre-independence period in Namibia saw the South African apartheid government instill various laws that subjected women (among others) to discriminatory practices. The discrimination of the black community in South West Africa (now Namibia) deprived such communities of various economic and social opportunities. One such opportunity that is important to the context of this paper is the employment of people categorised as previously disadvantaged groups (that is – the blacks, women, and people with

disabilities). This state of affairs created a breeding ground that saw management positions being dominated by white males, to the demise and disadvantage of, particularly black women. The advent of Namibia's independence saw the Namibian Government achieving strides in passing laws that are aimed at redressing historical injustices that subjected the black race and women to discriminatory practices. In an effort to redress the associated injustices that subjected women to various career barriers, the Government established the Public Service Commission of Namibia. This Commission was founded with the primary intention of redressing historical imbalances with a bias for blacks and women in the recruitment, promotion, and transfers in the public sector (Labour Resource and Research Institute (LaRRI), 2005).

The mandate of the Public Service Commission of Namibia came against a historical background of apartheid that discriminated against the employment of women in management positions across the public and private sectors. As Sifani (2009) submits, women were found to be unsuitable for leadership positions but best suited for jobs stereotyped as feminist, such as teaching, nursing, and secretarial work. Additionally, efforts at further redressing these historical injustices against designated groups such as women, the Namibian Government has demonstrated further commitment through the enactment and passing of laws and policies such as the Labour Act, the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act as well as the Affirmative Action Policy. Other statutory initiatives by the Government that embrace and endorse gender equality are the National Gender Policy of 1997, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), National Gender Plan of Action of 1998, Affirmative Action Act of 1998, establishing a flagship Ministry on Women and Child Welfare in 2000, now known as the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare since 2005 as well as being party to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development, which had set a target of 30% representation of women in decision-making positions at all levels by 2005 (Sifani, 2009). While a number of statutory provisions exist, this section provides a synopsis on key policy and legislative provisions that speak to women's workplace equality.

The Constitution

The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia was passed in the year 1990 and provides an overarching framework within which subordinate legislation on equality and women empowerment is premised. For instance, Article 10 of the Constitution guarantees equality for all persons and similarly prohibits discrimination based on “sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, creed or social or economic status” in all spheres of life (Republic of Namibia, 1990, p. 14). Further illuminating this, Article 23(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia states that:

“Nothing contained in Article 10 hereof shall prevent Parliament from enacting legislation providing directly or indirectly for the advancement of persons within Namibia who have been socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged by past discriminatory laws or practices, or for

the implementation of policies and programmes aimed at redressing social, economic or educational imbalances in the Namibian society arising out of past discriminatory laws or practices, or for achieving a balanced structure of the public service..." (Republic of Namibia, 1990, p. 19-20).

Article 23 further sheds direction with reference to redressing the deliberate colonial system that marginalised women by limiting opportunities for self-enhancement. This is supported by the literature that states women in colonial Namibia were subject to extensive cultural and traditional subjugation that positioned them to be subordinate to their male counterparts. There is a suggestion that this subordinate position of women persists to a certain extent in independent Namibia (Ambunda & De Klerk, 2008; Legal Assistance Centre, 2017). It is against this backdrop that Subarticle 3 of Article 23 of the Namibian Constitution takes a remedial stance by making provision for the following:

"... it shall be permissible to have regard to the fact that women in Namibia have traditionally suffered special discrimination and that they need to be encouraged and enabled to play a full, equal and effective role in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the nation" (Republic of Namibia, 1990, p. 20).

The above provisions within the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, as principal legislation, provide a sketch for the context in which all subordinate legislation on women empowerment in Namibia is framed. Women, as previously disadvantaged people in Namibia, are, thus, protected by the Constitution against all workplace discriminatory practices, including women applying to PE CEO/MD positions, as well as unfair dismissal procedures to women occupying such a position. This is the context in which women should enjoy equal employment opportunities in Namibia, regardless of the nature of position or entity. To reinforce these constitutional provisions from a labour perspective, the Namibian government in 2007 passed the Labour Act No. 11 of 2007 to provide an enabling policy environment for affirmative action. More on this is provided below.

The Labour Act No. 11 of 2007

To particularly provide the implementation of the constitutional provisions against discrimination in a workplace context, the Labour Act No. 11 of 2007 was enacted. This Act has a two-fold functionary purpose: 1) provide an enabling setting for the implementation of affirmative action, as well as 2) prohibit workplace discriminatory practices (Republic of Namibia, 2007). More specifically for the context of the current paper, Section 5 of the Labour Act No. 11 of 2007 proscribes businesses (public and private) from exercising and bringing into existence any policies or practices that of a discriminatory nature on the grounds of colour, sex, race, marital status, etc. (Republic of Namibia, 2007). In the same vein, the Act prescribes the institutionalisation of various affirmative action measures to foster equal employment opportunities and treatment for particular groups of people categorised previously as disadvantaged. For instance, this includes women, people with disabilities, and black people under a broader definition. In light of the tenure of women principals

in Namibian PEs, the Labour Act No. 11 of 2007 not only protects women being discriminated against their gender or sex but goes further to ensure women are given recruitment preference in order to strike a gender representative balance in a workforce (Republic of Namibia, 2007). However, the earlier reports by the New Era (2014), Chiringa (2017), Haufiku (2019), and Menges (2020) suggest the contrary that does not conform to the sustenance of representative bureaucracy.

Notwithstanding this, adherence to the above provisions of the Labour Act No. 11 of 2007 has been limited as the enforcement of these provisions has been lax and at a languid pace. This is further supported in a report by Ambunda and De Klerk (2008) who unilaterally states that the continued subjugation of women has withered efforts at socioeconomic and cultural equality of women. This dispensation has spilled over into the corporate world where women find it difficult to climb the institutional hierarchy in both the public and private sectors. In further providing remedial legislative leeway against the historical discriminatory workplace injustices women were subjected to as contemplated in Article 23(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia above, the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act No. 29 of 1998 has been promulgated.

The Affirmative Action (Employment) Act No. 29 of 1998:

This Act has been passed by the Namibian Government with the primary aim of providing restorative justice to women (among others) against workplace imbalances observed in colonial Namibia (Republic of Namibia, 1998). It is against this background that the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act No. 29 of 1998 aims to encourage just employment practices for previously racially disadvantaged people, women, and persons with disabilities (Republic of Namibia, 1998). The main goal of the Affirmative Action Act is to aspire and honour the provisions of fair and just employment practices as echoed in the following statement:

"To achieve equal opportunity in employment in accordance with Article 10 and Article 14 of the Namibian Constitution; to provide for the establishment of the Employment Equity Commission; to redress through appropriate affirmative action plans the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by persons in designated groups arising from past discriminatory laws and practices; to institute procedures to contribute the elimination of discrimination in employment; and to provide for matters incidental thereto" (Republic of Namibia, 1998, p. 1).

In achieving this, the Act prescribes explicit requirements for which employers or organisations are expected to comply. Some of the requirements include the formulation of a three-year Affirmative Action Plan after consultation with personnel. The above plan is then submitted as an Affirmative Action report at regular intervals to the Commission for Employment Equity. The Commission for Employment Equity has a responsibility to oversee the implementation of affirmative action. Here, due consideration is accorded to the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act No. 29 of 1998 during implementation. It should be noted that this Act

specifically aims to remove appointment and career progression obstacles for designated persons, such as women. From the above, it becomes obvious that the principal goal of the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act No. 29 of 1998 is to ensure that no one is deprived of a job opportunity on grounds unrelated to merit and ability to ensure an even representation of Namibia's population demographics (Republic of Namibia, 1998). This is similarly premised in the representative bureaucracy theory discussed elsewhere.

More broadly, legislation on affirmative action in Namibia aims to not only promote employment equity in existing positions but also to new positions considering those (who did not have access to those positions in the past) entering the labour market for the first time. For instance, women did not have access to management positions within the public and private sectors before Namibia's independence. However, efforts at achieving the above legislative goals on affirmative action remain thwarted. The United Nations Population Fund (2012) and Shejvali (2018) agrees and submits that major implementation gaps have marred efforts at redressing the current and historical subjugation of women in leadership and decision-making positions in Namibia. It is against this background that new applicants with relevant skills and experiences should be absorbed into management positions using an affirmative action criterion. Failing to do this will set the country down a path where efforts at redressing historical imbalances associated with employment practices will not be successful. Sifani (2009) unilaterally supports this and illustratively explains that:

"Despite the concerted efforts and initiatives by the government to redress the imbalances of the past, very little progress has been made so far in terms of increasing the representation of the designated groups at management levels and empowering them to succeed in their jobs once they are appointed. To date, the number of the designated groups especially women and people with disabilities in management positions remains insignificant relative to the size of the institutions in various economic sectors" (p. 5).

The United Nations Population Fund (2012) further agrees with the above by stating:

"... despite this progress, many challenges still remained to be addressed to achieve true equality... For instance, women and girls in Namibia face a high rate of gender-based violence, an increasing prevalence of HIV and AIDS, a high maternal death rate, under-representation at most levels of decision-making, and poverty. This is worsened by gender inequalities within the family, where women's financial dependency on men undermines their right to self-determination".

Most significantly, the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act No. 29 of 1998 prescribes to employers that affirmative action measures should be implemented within their respective organisations. For the purposes of identified designated groups or persons, this includes the removal of employment barriers, efforts to accommodate persons with disabilities; furthering employment opportunities through training programmes; and giving preferential treatment in employment decisions to suitably qualified persons from designated groups (Republic of Namibia, 1998). Other key legislation and policies include Vision 2030, the Harambee Prosperity Plan

(HPP), Namibia's 5th National Development Plan (NDP5) (2017), National Human Rights Action Plan (2015), and the National Gender Policy (2010-2020). Together, these key policies and legislation make provision for the advancement and protection of women against discriminatory and unjust practices, including workplace practices on the recruitment and removal of persons (particularly women) from principal positions. However, as mentioned elsewhere, major implementation gaps of these laws and policies have thwarted efforts at equalising the position of women in the workplace and society.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To analyse literature, a desk review was done on female principals among Namibian PEs, and the broader disposition of women in the corporate space. More specifically, the focus is on the representation and tenure of female principals in Namibian PEs. To satisfy the data requirements emerging out of the crux of this paper, a qualitative research method is used. The suitability of the qualitative research method arises out of the focus of this paper that requires an in-depth exposition on the underlying dynamics that prevent women from vying or completing their tenure in positions of PE principals in Namibia. To define this paper operationally, a host of underlying dynamics and factors (the absence of hands-on leadership, starting at the top, existing legal and policy implementation gaps, failure to declare gender diversity as imperative in the public sector, failure to focus on helping women gain broad line experience early on) as independent variables, have been identified and served instrumental in providing evidence for proving whether the status quo in Namibia signals a protracted dearth of women's representation and tenure completion as PE principals, as a dependent variable. The use of qualitative secondary data made it possible to survey literature that allowed addressing the core issues around the protracted dearth of the representation and tenure of female principals among Namibian PEs. A critical analysis of the literature produced the core themes covered in this paper. As observed in the literature review section, these themes have a bias towards lending scope and understanding on the factors and issues that have fostered the undesirable status quo in which women are subjugated to an array of challenges that prevent them from being appointed or completing their tenure as principals in Namibian PEs. In analysing literature, thematic analysis was used in identifying core themes and focus areas covered in this study, where new and alternative findings in the Namibian context are juxtaposed against literature and presented in the results and discussion section below. An alternative research method that could be used in similar studies could follow a quantitative paradigm. For statistical relevance, a quantitative survey is useful for present statistics on women's representation in Namibia's public sector, and more particularly across the PEs. Nonetheless, by following the adopted methodical approach, the section below presents the results and discussion emerging from the analysis of the literature on the representation and tenure of female principals in Namibian PEs.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The current paper sets out to explicitly explain the underlying dynamics that women face in vying for a principal position in Namibian PEs, thus, preventing them from being appointed or completing their tenure. It requires to mention that the specific cases of female PE principals referred to in this paper are only key notable cases observed among Namibian PEs, hence may not be representative of the broader public sector. These cases have been selected owing to their dominance in reports that appears to illuminate the heightened problem of institutional patriarchy among some Namibian PEs. The current paper has established the proliferated effects of the *glass ceiling* on women, particularly those in pursuit of being at the helm of PEs in Namibia. Buttressing this, a key finding emerged from several reports that, despite legislative efforts and improvements of women representation in various sectors, women particularly face challenges that are propelled by the *glass ceiling* when it comes to pursuing principal positions in organisations such as PEs. The results confirm that there exists a strong relationship between the *glass ceiling* and the challenges women face in excelling in their careers, particularly at the executive and top leadership positions of organisations. This became evident, as there appeared to be a consistency among the challenges female principals of PEs face in getting their appointment or completing their tenure. This is relevant for Namibia's case, as embedded institutional cultures often appear to suppress and subdue women pursuing the principal position as explained by the representative bureaucracy theory and the role congruity theory. This is specifically highlighted in reports by New Era (2014), Chiringa (2017), the Commission for Employment Equity (2019), Haufiku (2019), and Menges (2020). This overall conclusive finding gives clearly better results than what Haufiku (2019) was able to illustrate in his report titled "Female technocrats: Rise or extinction?".

The most significant finding is that the proliferation of the *glass ceiling* and its effects on women in leadership positions is prevalent. More specifically, the *glass ceiling* metaphor continues to fester in Namibia despite the policy and legislative efforts and provisions by the government. These include the Labour Act No.11 of 2007 and the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act No. 29 of 1998 and various gender equality policies, which have, on the broader definition, improved female representation in the workplace but appear to have achieved languid successes at the executive and principal position level in the public sector and particularly in PEs. As problematised in this paper, the representation and tenure of women in the positions of principals within Namibian PEs is worrisome and paints a daunting and contradictory picture at the executive level vis-à-vis various policy pronouncements mentioned above. What is being observed is a protracted dearth of women as principals of PEs that can only be changed with renewed policy commitment and implementation. There is indeed room for improvement in ensuring women are not prejudiced and discriminated against in the appointment or completion of their tenure as a PE principal. As nuanced in the social role theory,

Osituyo (2018) agrees that possible career barriers linked to the festered inferiority complex of women creates an environment in which the continuous subjugation of women decreases their morale and drive in pursuing leadership positions, i.e., CEO and MD of institutions. This could similarly be linked to the underrepresentation and low tenure of women as PE principals. The implementation of Affirmative Action in Namibia has seen the improved representation of previously disadvantaged groups (that is - women and people with disabilities, among others). This is important for an emerging market and developing country.

However, this improvement has not been to a significant extent to cater for everyone under the designated groups in Namibia. While the number of women in management and leadership positions has increased, the latest Commission for Employment Equity annual report in Namibia indicates that women and people with disabilities are still underrepresented, particularly at the top decision-making level within public sector institutions (Commission for Employment Equity, 2019). This is indicated in the latest annual report of the Commission for Employment Equity that found 1008 men and 260 women at the executive director level (the equivalent of PE principal) in the public sector (Commission for Employment Equity, 2019). The representation of women at this level amounts to a meager 26%. This paper finds it to be the same for the representation of women in principal positions in public sector organisations such as PEs. As discussed in earlier sections, the continued subjugation of women as principals of PEs in Namibia is found to be linked to specific hurdles and challenges such as the glass ceiling, career barriers, training, and career development, promotion policies, as well as behavioral and cultural explanations. As premised in the representative bureaucracy theory, this indicates the absence of passive and active representation of women as principals of PEs in Namibia. Highlighting this problem, the below excerpt is telling an important thing for the historical context of female representation. In the year 2006, in the Namibian context it has been fittingly explained that:

"... the previously racially disadvantaged people represented 66 per cent of all executive directors and managers, while women accounted for 42 per cent of all positions in the executive director and management occupational categories" (Sifani, 2009, p. 15).

Although the report is of 2006, this status quo appears to still persist as supported by reports by New Era (2014), Chiringa (2017), the Commission for Employment Equity (2019), Haufiku (2019), and Menges (2020). As found in this paper, the current status quo in Namibia suggests that a renewed effort should be pursued by the government and PEs to ensure current and prospective women principals in Namibian PEs are not discriminated against. These renewed efforts would improve the prospects for the appointment of more women as PE principals, and similarly complete their tenure, often 5 years. However, this paper finds that the absence of targeted interventions and policy implementation gaps have marred efforts at redressing the position of women pursuing leadership roles in Namibian PEs. For instance, Saara Naanda was placed on suspension

in 2014 barely a year since her appointment as the CEO of TransNamib, Maria Rukoro was placed on suspension after 3 years of being Namibia Training Authority CEO, Theo Namases was suspended from her role as Air Namibia's CEO after 2 years on the job (Shipanga, 2013; The Namibian, 2014, 2016). While post-independence improvements were recorded in the representation of previously disadvantaged groups among 70% of civil service management positions in the year 1999 in Namibia, 52% of these comprised of black males with black women representation at 13% (Jauch, 1999). Evolving from colonialism to independence posed some challenges for women. Considering that, colonial Namibia was very traditional and cultural in its social interactions. In its analysis, the Legal Assistance Centre (2017), an institution in Namibia, explains that there are various behavioural and cultural inclinations that have subjected women to discriminatory practices that render them inferior to men. For instance, it has been found that "some cultural practices justify the beating of wives by husbands as a way for men to exert control over their wives and to demonstrate women's subordinate place in family and society" (p. 189). This is the context in which the social role and role congruity theories are justified in the Namibian context.

As part of its findings, this paper indicates that the implications of these statistics for Namibia are that affirmative action that has been successful to a certain extent but failed to adequately improve the representation of women among management positions/principals within state institutions. While Namibia met the SADC target of 30% (by 33%) women representation in the public service management cadre in decision-making structures by 2005 (Sifani, 2009), no specific improvement were recorded in terms of appointments of women as principals among PEs – hence the need for targeted interventions, i.e., on women vying for PE principal position. Further going into the spectrum of the private sector, this paper finds that private businesses have similarly not achieved any significant strides in improving the representation of women as principals. A 2006 study by Namibia's Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGEWCW) fittingly found that "the private sector has achieved 33 per cent of women in decision-making positions" (Republic of Namibia, 2006, p. 37). Furthermore, a report by the MGEWCW found that 73% of 82 private sector institutions had reached the 30% target of the SADC in terms of women's representation in management positions (Republic of Namibia, 2006).

While the above achievements are noteworthy vis-à-vis the colonial dispensation that discriminated against women in pre-independence Namibia, it is regrettable that a majority of these women surveyed private sector institutions were at the bottom of the management ladder and did not include any principal positions (Republic of Namibia, 2006). Recent developments in the private sector have seen an increase of women in some sectors as institutional heads. For instance, the banking sector has seen a majority of local banks being headed by women (Amukeshe, 2020). Notwithstanding this, the Legal Assistance Centre (2017) in their report found that women in the public sector in permanent positions of permanent secretary/director general/

executive director (the equivalent of PE principal) constituted 23.1% in 2011 and 27% in 2016. The lacklustre progress in which women get appointed to leadership positions could be attributed to training and career development bottlenecks observed in the case of Namibia. Eze (2017) explains that owing to family obligations women are confronted with in caring for children and the household in a traditional setting, they often lag behind in taking up training and career development opportunities available.

From the above, it becomes evident that the representation of women as heads of organisations, particularly PEs, has been very limited. This is because those who have risen amidst discriminatory practices to the positions of CEO/MD often face challenges that result in them being removed from such a position. Indeed, Chiringa (2017) and Haufiku (2019) suggest the same in their reports for the Namibian case of female PE principals. As found in this paper, the various underlying causes and dynamics are still evident in the removal of various female principals from PEs, and/or limiting their tenure in such positions. For instance, Theo Namases, Air Namibia's first female CEO was suspended in 2014. It has been reported that, "In the months leading up to her suspension, the airline has been embroiled in infighting with accusations of favouritism, autocracy and tribalism between Namases and the board, which is chaired by Harald Schmidt..." (New Era, 2014). The removal of Namases from her position as the CEO of Air Namibia and that of Nghiwete from Namibia Students Financial Assistance Fund appears to be a classic case of the manifestation of the *glass ceiling* as further informed and buttressed by the role congruity theory. As such, this paper submits that the conditions women principals have been subject to as principals of Namibian PEs are different from what men in similar positions experience.

The above finding broadly supports the work of other studies (Bradbury & Kellough, 2011; Stamarski & Hing, 2015) in linking the subjugation of women as principals with the patriarchal *glass ceiling*. As explained by the *glass ceiling* elsewhere, this paper highlights that the situation in Namibia provides for a quagmire where, practically, affirmative action and women empowerment dispensation contradicts the policy pronouncements, especially with reference to women as principals of PEs. Various attempts have been made (Legal Assistance Centre, 2017) to depict the statistical representation of women vis-à-vis men in Namibia's public sector, but these have neglected to look at the specific segment of women in the positions of PE principals and the challenges they face in ascending and staying in these positions. This paper finds that the position of institutional head/principals is very competitive in the appointment process of prospective candidates; however, no deliberate efforts appear to have been taken to ensure women are protected against the effects of the patriarchal glass ceiling in Namibia. As mentioned elsewhere, women in the public sector at the PE principal level constitute 27% as in 2016 (Legal Assistance Centre, 2017). In addition to this, regressive promotion policies within various public sector institutions could be attributed to the exceedingly low rate of women that progress and are promoted into

institutional heads. As indicated in literature elsewhere, the effects of the *glass ceiling* create a situation in which existing promotion and personnel policies are not effective at removing or reducing the challenges and obstacles women are confronted with in their efforts to ascend the levels of senior management through to that of principals within PEs.

Consistent with extant literature (Chiringa, 2017; Haufiku, 2019; Menges, 2020), this text established that women in Namibia face increased challenges in ascending to the positions of PE principals and remaining there to complete their tenure. This particularly juxtaposes the experiences of their male counterparts. This is despite clear policy pronouncements that should protect women against unfair discrimination. In addition to the above-explained factors that have contributed to the protracted dearth of women representation as PE principals in Namibia, this paper further identifies some additional factors below.

The absence of top-bottom hands-on leadership

Despite Namibia's ruling political party (SWAPO) having adopted a 50/50 gender representation within its structures, this has not trickled to the public sector, or notably PEs. This paper finds it to be problematic as the women still experience subjugation and patriarchy in the absence of a 50/50 gender representation in the civil service. One cannot fathom this status quo in an education system of Namibia that produces more female graduates than males at the tertiary level of education as found by the Legal Assistance Centre (2017). Based on figures in Namibia 2013 Millennium Development Goals Interim Progress Report No. 4 of the largest university in the country, the University of Namibia, female students constituted an overwhelming 77% of the student population (National Planning Commission, 2013). Despite these obvious dynamics, it became obvious that even PE boards of directors lacked the necessary vision to ensure women are accorded the same opportunity as men in their appointment and completion of tenure as PE principals in Namibia. In addition to this, it became evident that the absence of cultural consideration in gender equality policies and legislation has created an even deeper barrier for women who have been culturally conditioned to be inferior to men, while men similarly expect to be superior and in leadership positions.

This is particularly in light of the need to provide adequate legal protection for girls from harmful cultural practices, such as early marriage, that become a barrier for them to go to school or have a career as further reported by the Legal Assistance Centre (2017). This has further subjected women to unfair discriminatory practices in the workplace. What emerges in this paper is the absence of a top-down government commitment from the head of public administration in Namibia, the Office of the Prime Minister, on the increased and equal representation of women across the public sector, particularly leadership/principal positions among PEs. The absence of deliberate efforts aimed at protecting women principals in Namibian PEs by the Government suggests they have failed to recognise the effects of the *glass ceiling* on women in the public sector, despite the existence of

evidence as provided by New Era (2014), Chiringa (2017), the Commission for Employment Equity (2019), Haufiku (2019), and Menges (2020). Namibia's Public Service Commission has failed to effectively reverse the effects of the *glass ceiling*.

Existing legal and policy implementation gaps

Namibia has been praised for having some of the best gender equality policies around the world (Shejavali, 2018). However, this does not reflect the reality on the ground due to exacerbated policy implementation gaps that exist. As part of its findings, this paper specifically notes that the lack of effective policy implementation has resulted in a situation where women and other designated groups face discrimination in various spheres of life. As evidenced by New Era (2014), Chiringa (2017), the Commission for Employment Equity (2019), Haufiku (2019), and Menges (2020), it is true that in Namibia where women who aspire to be appointed as PE principals and complete their tenure face a conglomerate of challenges. It is against this context that existing legislation should be robustly implemented with effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place to prevent the surging of the *glass ceiling* against women, particularly those aspiring to occupy the position of a PE principal, and complete such tenure. Without the requisite policy implementation necessities, not all policy and legislative provisions would be impactful in reversing the effects of the *glass ceiling* against women in the corporate world, i.e., PEs.

Failure to declare gender diversity as imperative in the public sector

As mentioned elsewhere, Namibia's ruling political party, SWAPO, has declared a "zebra-style" 50/50 gender representation across its leadership structures (Mongudhi, 2013; SWAPO, 2013). However, this has not been passed on to the public sector. This paper finds that this has created a consequence of unfair representation of women across all levels of the institutional hierarchy within public sector organisations. This is particularly problematic in light of the subjugation women faced under colonial rule, and similarly due to regressive cultural practices that reduced them to be inferior to men. One would expect a more forceful approach from the government in enforcing gender equality. Consistent with this, this paper links the absence of a "zebra-style" 50/50 gender representation in the public sector to the subjugation and discrimination of women that pursue and fail to complete their tenure as principals of Namibian PEs. With the existing policy and legislative framework in place, PEs should inculcate an institutional culture of gender diversity and acceptance - an activity that should be initiated and guided through a top-bottom approach in government. Buttressing this, Barsh and Yee (2012) agree that this should be included in company strategic plans with periodic reporting intervals for compliance. For the principal position, PE boards should prioritise and recruit women to reverse the effects of the *glass ceiling* and introduce a gender diverse institutional culture. The goal should be to establish an innate link between PE performance and gender diversity - an element that can be incorporated in institutional strategic plans.

Failure to focus on helping women gain broad line experience early on

Part of the challenge women experiences in being appointed to the principal position of PEs in Namibia is a lack of management experience. Barsh and Yee (2012) illustratively explain that women face an additional challenge of climbing up the corporate management ladder, owing to insufficient experience by the time they pursue the position of a principal compared to their male counterparts. This paper finds it to be true that female applicants to PE principal positions are often not shortlisted due to insufficient required experience. The experience that could not be accumulated due to sociocultural expectations to, amongst others, maternal responsibilities to raise children. To curtail this, institutional policies should foster and accelerate women's growth and on the job experience so that once women begin to form families, they will already have some of the prerequisites for advancement to the position of principal. In light of this, Barsh and Yee (2012) assert that it is generally easier to encourage the acquisition of relevant experience for women in the earlier years of their career. The same should indeed be encouraged in the Namibian public sector setting. Doing this is essential for ensuring women acquire the needed experience to take on positions of PE principals. This effectively removes the "lack of experience" hurdle and will result in more women being appointed as the head of PEs. Over time, seeing more women in these positions will help shift everyone's mindset that views women as inferior to men when it comes to key institutional leadership positions such as CEO/MD.

The above challenges women face in ascending in the corporate world stems from the colonial and cultural dispensation that subjected women to unfair discriminatory practices. However, this status quo has continued to prevail despite the attainment of Namibia's independence and various policy pronouncements aimed at curtailing this. It should be noted that Namibia's liberation movement under SWAPO was based on the need for equality among all Namibians, including women. There are various benefits that come with having women in positions of principals within the space of public administration, and more particularly PEs. A study by the UNDP broadly indicates that there is a positive effect on economic development that arises as a result of female participation in decision-making processes within public administration (UNDP, 2014). Moreover, any state that embraces gender equality within public administration structures often scores higher in gender representation from international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations. Further, it has been found that the inclusion of women in key positions and roles within public administration fosters an environment for effective governance (UNDP, 2014), indeed, an approach the Namibian Government could embrace. However, it is not always that female PE principals are ethical. As observed by Haufiku (2019), this paper agrees that it appeared that some of these axed PE principals affected questionable decisions that could be viewed in light of corruption and incompetence.

Considering the above host of factors and dynamics that have created dire challenges for women in becoming PE principals or completing their

tenure in such positions, it, thus becomes relevant to ask the following: *Do the tenure and representation of women as PE principals signal a protracted dearth in Namibia?* To address this question, this paper submits that, indeed, the representation and tenure of women as principals in Namibian PEs do signal a protracted dearth. This is a downward trajectory that can only be changed with renewed policy commitment and implementation. Taking into account the evolutionary path of women since the attainment of Namibia's independence, this paper finds that women still face subjugation as perforated by the glass ceiling in their pursuit of leading PEs as principals. Deducing from the excerpts of evidence in earlier sections of this paper, it appears that women still face discrimination in the workplace, amidst government lackluster policy pronouncements and major policy implementation gaps that have marred efforts at levelling the corporate playing field for women. The prospects for improving the representation and tenure of women as PE principals in Namibia are hinged on efforts aimed at redressing the main contributing factors as discussed elsewhere in this paper. Furthermore, these prospects for women are difficult, as affirmative action legislation does not prescribe 50/50 gender representation in public administration as seen in Namibia's ruling political party, SWAPO. Without this, women's representation will remain low despite higher female graduate outputs from local universities.

5. CONCLUSION

The reduced representation and tenure of women as public enterprise (PE) principals in Namibia is concerning (Mboti, 2014; Menges, 2020). The present paper was designed to determine whether the current trends in the representation and tenure of female PE principals in Namibia signal the protracted dearth of women in such positions. This paper concludes by arguing that at 30 years of Namibia's independence women continue to experience the effects of the *glass ceiling* as rooted in the pre-independence sociocultural and economic dispensation. The analysis of literature led to the conclusion that the continued challenges women face in being appointed or completing their tenure as PE principals over the years signal a protracted dearth. This protracted dearth is in light of the representation of women as PE principals in Namibia, with a majority of men taking over/remaining in such positions among Namibian PEs. This is found to be problematic considering women are more than men in terms of the population, and similarly, local universities graduate more females than males in key qualifications often required for principal positions.

A host of factors have been identified as key contributors to the subjugation of women in this context. These are the absence of hands-on leadership, starting at the top, existing legal and policy implementation gaps, failure to declare gender diversity as imperative in the public sector, failure to focus on helping women gain broad line experience early on (as independent variables). Now it can be concluded that the identified independent variables negatively influence the dependent variable (that is - a protracted dearth of women representation and tenure completion as PE

principals in Namibia). Other contributing factors include the *glass ceiling*, career barriers, training, and career development bottlenecks, regressive promotion policies, behavioral and cultural explanations. Broadly translated, the findings in this paper indicate that the continued effects of these factors are specifically linked to the subjugation of women that pursue and fail to complete their tenure of PE principals in Namibia. Although the identified contributing factors are key for our understanding in this context, it should be noted that such factors are not exclusive and more factors could be explored in future studies, in different contexts. The results on public sector institutional patriarchy are broadly consistent with the role congruity and social role theories. Similarly, the results suggest a contradiction with the representative bureaucracy theory that advocates for institutional representativeness in terms of the population demographics in Namibia. This represents an important theoretical contribution element literature has not been able to link to relevant theories in the Namibian context.

The main conclusion that can be drawn is that the current dispensation of challenges women face in being appointed or completing their tenure as PE principals will continue unabated. This is owing to policy formulation and implementation gaps that make such gender equality policies and legislation redundant and ineffective in levelling the playing field for women, in a job sphere dominated by men. This is the context in which this paper concludes that the representation and tenure of female principals in Namibian PEs do indeed indicate and signal a protracted dearth for women. The practical and normative contribution of this paper permeates by illuminating the underlying dynamics confronting women vying for the position of principals among Namibian PEs, thereby allowing policy and legislative reforms to reverse the effects of public sector institutional patriarchy. Owing to these key findings,

there is a need for a targeted approach aimed at reversing the effects of the causes and dynamics that prevent women from being appointed as PE principals in Namibia, or completing their tenure in such positions. Such a targeted approach could be scholarly presented in a separate paper. The present paper adds to the growing body of literature that indicates women in the post-colonial 21st century continue to face hurdles brought forth by patriarchy as nuanced in the *glass ceiling*. This paper recommends the robust implementation of existing anti-patriarchy legislation

This paper has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of how patriarchy is not only limited to a sociocultural setting but also how it is practiced in an institutional setting, and more broadly in the public sector as observed in the case of Namibia in this paper. Although this paper relies on limited synopsis of secondary data on public sector patriarchy, it serves as an impetus and springboard for future studies, especially considering the scholarly neglect public sector institutional patriarchy has experienced over the years from a developing country perspective. Despite this significant contribution, this paper experienced a limitation in that it relied on few cases of documented institutional patriarchal practices among Namibian PEs, hence the need for an empirical quantitative in-depth study to document similar cases that may have not been documented in the public sphere. In light of this, the major strength of the current paper is that it serves as an impetus for future studies in this regard. It is hoped that the findings of this paper will have important implications for future policy formulation and practice. This is in light of removing barriers and the *glass ceiling* that has confronted women that pursue principal positions in the Namibian public sector, and more particularly PEs.

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