

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA



**EXPLORING THE CAREER PROGRESSION OF WOMEN IN THE SEFWI
WIAWSO MUNICIPAL ASSEMBLY**

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WIAWSO MUNICIPAL ASSEMBLY**



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**A thesis submitted to the school of graduate studies in
partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of
the degree of Master of Philosophy
(Social Studies Education)**

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DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, ELIZABETH SEWOEKPOR declare that this thesis, except for quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

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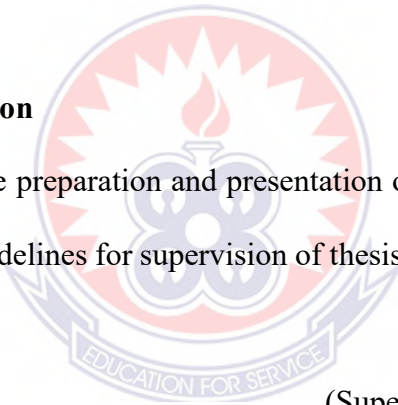
Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work were supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

..... (Supervisor)

Signature:

Date:



DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving husband, Douglas Osei, and my wonderful children, Magdalene Affumwaa Yawson and Nana Osei Aseda, whose unwavering support, encouragement, and love have been my driving force throughout this journey.



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Thank you all for your incredible support.

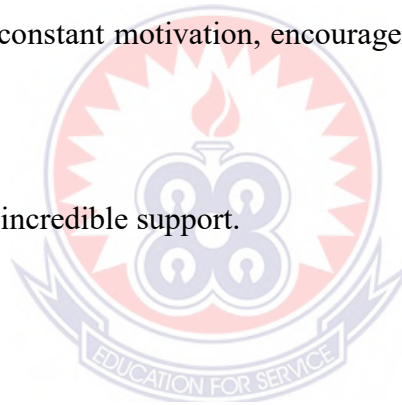


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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study investigates women's career progression within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly, guided by three research questions: (1) What are the lived experiences of female employees regarding their career progression? (2) What institutional, personal, and socio-cultural factors influence their advancement? and (3) What strategies do they propose to enhance career progression opportunities? The study is grounded in Max Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy, Resilience Theory and Career Motivation Theory. The study initially adopted a census approach targeting all 37 females permanent staff. However, data collection concluded at 25 participants when thematic saturation was reached, as no new insights were emerging. Data were generated through 12 semi-structured interviews and 4 focus group discussions, with the Human Resource Officer serving as a key informant. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal persistent experiences of delayed promotion, limited upward mobility, and perceived lack of transparency in evaluation processes. Institutional barriers including weak enforcement of merit-based promotion systems, bureaucratic delays, and informal power dynamics combine with socio-cultural pressures, particularly the tension between family responsibilities and career advancement, to constrain women's progression. Despite relatively high educational attainment among participants, promotion rates remain below 5%, indicating structural stagnation. Participants proposed institutional reforms, including strict enforcement of Local Government Service promotion guidelines, targeted leadership training through the Institute of Local Government Studies and the formal integration of structured mentorship into performance appraisal systems. The study concludes that sustainable progress requires institutional accountability rather than reliance on individual resilience alone. Specifically, the researcher recommends leveraging the newly established University of Local Government and Development (ULGD) for specialized degree-level certifications to bridge identified technical skills gaps.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Over the past few years, institutions such as United Nations (UN), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) together with World Bank have dedicated a significant part of their activities and time for equal representation of women as men, and women empowerment. In the advanced economics such as Europe, many countries have reserved certain percentage for women to assume influential positions as a means of progressing in their careers. Even though countries are more than committed to bridging the gap in the business fraternity, the hurdles are enormous as this impedes the successful sailing of women in their line of work. Women's roles in the corporate world have been held in high esteem as they provide essential and influential ingredients in the effective and efficient running of businesses (OECD, 2018).

In today's world of business, most firms are shifting their attention to the effective and efficient improvement of their female workforce through conferences and workshops to subsequently increase productivity among the female staff (Ramdhony, Oogarah-Hanuman & Somir, 2013). OECD (2018) reports that there are over 30 studies undertaken by academics, women's groups, management consulting firms, accounting and investment firms from different countries all showing a correlation between more women in corporate leadership roles and a company's better financial performance. This is a "business case or a toehold" for women in senior corporate roles in the African continent. This notwithstanding, the survival of women in the business world has been back and forth, and attaining leadership slots have been the major challenge of the

feminine gender since time immemorial (OECD, 2018; Korn Ferry Institute, 2017; Stevenson & Orr, 2017).

The several advocacies for women have been marred with challenges of family making and female unfriendly environments (Adetula, Nwobu & Owolabi, 2014) making the resulting effect not impactful. Career progression, quite simply put by PUSHFAR (2020), is the process of climbing the ladder during your working life. According to PUSHFAR, career progression is moving forward, being promoted, finding new challenges, new employers, new opportunities and getting the most out of your career. Heller (2017) had also defined the phenomenon as one that is distinct to one's career and it is most of the time, likened to a continuum with the back and for the effect that involve breaks, changes in workload together with diverse forms of work throughout life.

Traditionally, career progression involves steadily climbing the career ladder from the base to the apex in the profession (Gyansah & Guantai, 2018). These researchers explained that it is a means of rising to the topmost part of the professional career or having a self-developed firm. This is what Heller (2017) had described as a linear path in one's career. Heller further opined that this definition better suits men more than women. Heller justifies this assertion with the premise that there is no need for men to vacate or ignore the leadership career for so long a time due to issues of childbearing and making of one's family, noting also that no one is indispensable and can be replaced so such careers expect their occupiers to be available to work for long hours. This linear pattern in career, according to the findings of Obimpeh (2018), is mostly suitable to and identified in men than in women. This is due to the multiple breaks, lateral movements and the blend of several off-duties and maternity leaves that cloud women's working

lifestyle (Obimpeh, 2018).

Women's household responsibilities including the need to take care of their children have been found to have an effect on their professional or cooperate life (Heller, 2017). A study by Heller in 2017 unearthed that on average, most females are faced with diverse problems regarding their smooth rise within the corporate world following their child bearing duty. A greater proportion of the respondents of the survey conducted by Heller were astonished by the overwhelming significant consequence. This was confirmed in line with the findings of Crompton and Lyonette (2018) who also revealed that most women either leave their current jobs after giving birth or get demoted through transfers to units where their services will not be much depended on. Holland's theory observes that individuals consider the agreement in their personal traits with that of the working atmospheric conditions in order that, no conflict or inconveniences are created for one of the parties. In view of this, the existence of congruence among the individual's personality attributes, interests and the working environmental condition that are available at the place of work would likely yield an improved professional and organizational satisfaction. Similarly, London's theory of career motivation offers great insight into the dimensions that help to give clarity to what motivates employees at the work place and the triggering effects for retention. London and Noe (2019) integrated individual differences into three purviews: career resilience, career insight, and career identity. These purviews served as organizing framework to understanding the motivators and situational conditions on career decisions and behaviour of employees.

Over the last two decades, a substantial number of investigations has been carried out regarding female workers and the neglect of the occupation. Gammie and Gammie (2019) indicated clearly that "women's career potentials at such local government level

are nothing to write home about, one that is grossed with heavy inequality” (p. 110). At the local government level in Ghana, the district assemblies are the most authoritative bodies (Addo-Yobo, 2013). Amponsaa-Asenso (2018) concurs with Addo-Yobo (2013) by clarifying that the local governing body especially the Ghanaian district assemblies have a closer tie with the indigenes on a daily basis. Basically, the district assemblies make sure the local people’s social needs (amenities) such as market places, hospitals, places of convenience and food supply are available to all for patronage. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana, Article 240 gave rise to the establishment of the Systems of the Local Government legally.

The Act 1993, Act 462 section 10, sub-section 1-3 of the local government empowers the district assemblies to take absolute responsibility in all matters relating to developing all the districts in Ghana. The numerous challenging issues that confront the district assemblies in recent times is to appreciate the real hurdles that possibly impede the successful progress of women in the 21st century world of work and to subsequently eliminate them. The National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) (2017) identified a myriad of problems that hamper women’s chances of staying relevant in business for a long period of time and be nominated for any possible promotion in the civil service. Some of the identified problems that women face in their line of work are household related responsibilities, preference of a particular gender for higher positions, negative cultural expressions directed at the feminine gender, stress, relationship issues, and affiliations with professional entities.

Campbell and Price (2016) concurred that home related responsibilities provide a significant amount of stress to public service workers and this could negatively alter the rate at which female workers are retained in the business sector. The NCWD

explained that the barriers that contribute to the non-retention of female workers in the business fraternity are working overtime, wholly committing to the work, given women the chance to settle household related responsibilities, flextime periods, among others. Additionally, Coughlan and Patton (2018) pointed out four salient reasons that contribute to the abandonment or premature exit of female workers out of their career. The factors include unfavourable working atmosphere, gender preference for certain positions (glass ceiling), nonexistence of flexible organizational structures and lack of challenging tasks which help to build the capabilities of female workers. Taking a critical look at the gender-based challenges within public service cannot be underestimated considering the growing need for women to actively partake in the organizational responsibilities in the 21st century.

Sesay and Odebiyi (2018) noted that, the trend has changed over time since female workers of today are ready and available to find career development opportunities and options for themselves in order for them to rise through the ranks in the business sector. Caldwell and O'Reilly (1990) concurred that for the last 30 years, the eagerness of female workers to avail themselves for economically driven occupations has been a major turning point in today's world of work. Municipal assembly operation is not just about provision of social amenities but also about the application of organizational skills which most women also possess (Ramdhony, Oogarah- Hanuman & Somir, 2013). History has it that those women who occupied positions of varying importance in various societies exemplified themselves with organisational skills (Adetula, Nwobu & Owolabi, 2014; Bruce-Twum, 2013; Ramdhony, Oogarah-Hanuman & Somir, 2013). The development of women, according to Asante (2017), and Campbell and Price (2016), may be described as epileptic because their roles were defined by strong societal values which today still seem to be struggling against the tide of change in

many municipal assemblies in Ghana.

The uproar and upsurge in women's quest to gain a better understanding of gender equality related issues in the business context have resulted in the rising levels of many governmental institutions as well as other private sector organisations, to which Ghana is of no exception, have resulted in the numerous advocates for women inclusion in most of the current and evolving business fields.

Here in Ghana for example, establishing bodies like the National Council on Women and Development at the Gender and Children's Ministry is in the right direction to continuously advocate for the inclusion of women in government and other sectors of the Ghanaian economy (Gyansah & Guantai, 2018). Other initiatives include signing and agreeing into existence, the Universal Human Rights Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The numerous trials by government to drastically eliminate the hindrances of women's progress at the workplace are some of the active inroads.

This notwithstanding, the rationing or proportion of men to women who are in the helm of affairs at the various district assemblies is not conclusively known, and this presents a wide gap (Gyansah & Guantai, 2018). This notwithstanding, the rate at which female workers in district assemblies rise or progress to the top of their career may be below the expectation. Women working the municipal assemblies play major equally as their male counterparts. They, among others, occupy positions such as accountants, administrators, budget analysts, procurement officers, engineering officers, protocol officers, and human resource managers. It is expected that one occupies the aforementioned positions irrespective of their gender. The most important thing is the person's qualification as well as their expertise and skills.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Local Government Service Act, 2003 (Act 656) was enacted to promote the effective administration and management of local government institutions in Ghana through a structured and professional workforce. The Act provides formal procedures governing recruitment, promotion, training and discipline within the Local Government Service. This administrative structure reflects Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy, which conceptualises an ideal type organisation as one governed by rational legal authority, formal rules, clearly defined hierarchies and impersonal decision making (Weber, 1948). A central principle of this bureaucratic model is the merit system, under which appointments and promotions are expected to be based strictly on technical competence, qualifications and performance rather than personal relationships or social bias (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019).

In principle, therefore, career progression within the Local Government Service should follow predictable and objective procedures. However, evidence from the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly suggests a divergence between these formal provisions and actual promotional outcomes. Internal human resource records indicate that fewer than five per cent of eligible female employees have secured promotion despite having served the required years for advancement (Local Government Service, 2020). This pattern raises critical questions regarding the extent to which merit based principles are being implemented in practice.

Further concerns are documented in the 2019 Performance Audit Report of the Auditor General, which observed that the Assembly has not consistently organised structured career development workshops or professional support programmes tailored to staff development needs (Auditor General, 2019). The report further noted disparities in

promotional support between male and female staff. Although these administrative reports acknowledge the existence of challenges, they do not provide a systematic analysis of the underlying institutional and socio-cultural factors contributing to women's limited upward mobility.

Extensive scholarship has examined the phenomenon commonly referred to as the glass ceiling, which describes invisible organisational barriers that hinder women's progression into senior leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2017). However, much of this literature is situated within developed contexts, thereby limiting its applicability to decentralised public sector institutions in Ghana. Studies conducted in other developing settings have often focused on specific professions or urban environments, leaving rural and peri urban local government institutions relatively underexplored.

Consequently, a clear heuristic gap remains. Despite the statutory provisions of Act 656, there is limited empirical evidence explaining why women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly continue to experience constrained leadership mobility. In particular, it is not sufficiently understood how institutional delays, limited access to structured mentorship opportunities (Higgins et al., 2018), and persistent gendered perceptions interact within a bureaucratic framework that is theoretically grounded in meritocracy. This gap necessitates a focused investigation into the institutional and socio-cultural dynamics shaping women's career progression within the Local Government Service.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the career progression of women within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly by analyzing the intersection of formal institutional frameworks and the informal socio-cultural factors that influence their

professional advancement. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the systemic barriers that result in career stagnation despite the merit-based guidelines established by the Local Government Service.

1.4 Study Objectives

To achieve the purpose of this study, the following objectives have been established:

1. To examine the lived experiences of female employees regarding their career trajectories and perceived milestones within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly
2. To analyse the institutional, structural and personal factors that influence the upward mobility of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly.
3. To identify strategic interventions and organisational reforms necessary to enhance equitable career progression for women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of female employees regarding their career progression within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly?
2. What institutional, personal and socio-cultural factors influence career progression among women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly?
3. What strategies and solutions do participants propose to enhance career progression opportunities for women in the Municipal Assembly?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between formal legislative provisions and the lived realities of women's career progression within

Ghana's local government system. This study therefore makes policy, academic and institutional contributions.

Policy and Practical Significance

This research provides policymakers with empirical evidence to assess the extent to which Act 656 is being implemented in practice within decentralised institutions. By documenting the extremely low promotion rate of eligible female employees, the study highlights systemic constraints that undermine the merit based principles embedded in the Act. The findings offer practical guidance to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and the Local Government Service Council in designing targeted interventions to strengthen career mobility for women. Such interventions may include structured mentorship programmes, transparent promotion procedures, leadership training pathways and policies that support work life balance. In doing so, the study supports efforts to align administrative practice with statutory and constitutional commitments to equality and fairness in public service.

Academic and Theoretical Contribution

Academically, the study contributes to scholarship on women's career progression within public sector institutions in Sub Saharan Africa. While existing research frequently examines gender disparities in corporate or urban settings, there is limited empirical work focused on decentralised municipal administrations in Ghana. By situating the analysis within the theoretical framework of Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy, the study deepens understanding of how rational legal authority and formalised merit systems operate within specific socio cultural contexts. It further demonstrates how informal power relations and gendered perceptions can coexist with formal bureaucratic rules, thereby enriching theoretical debates on the functioning of

public institutions in developing settings. The findings provide a foundation for future research on local government administration, gender equity and institutional reform in comparable contexts.

Institutional and Developmental Significance

At the institutional level, the study offers the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly evidence based insights that can inform internal human resource reforms. By identifying barriers to women's advancement, the Assembly may adopt corrective strategies that enhance transparency, fairness and staff morale. Promoting equitable career progression is not only a matter of social justice but also central to organisational effectiveness. Research has shown that diverse leadership structures are associated with improved decision making, innovation and institutional resilience. Strengthening gender equity within municipal governance therefore contributes to broader development objectives, including inclusive governance and sustainable public administration.

Overall, this study provides a structured basis for reforming career progression systems within Ghana's local government sector while advancing academic discourse on gender and bureaucracy in decentralised public institutions.

1.7 Delimitation of the study

This study focused specifically on exploring how women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly have advanced in their careers. It was delimited to examining the progression paths of female employees, the factors influencing their career advancement and the possible ways to enhance their upward mobility within the Assembly. The study did not cover career progression among men or compare the experiences of women in other municipal assemblies.

The study boundary was specifically fixed to female public servants of the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal who are permanent employees. The inquiry concentrated mainly on female public servants who worked at the various departments of the municipality for more than one year at the time of the study.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The research design employed for the study comes with its limitation. This is in the sense that information collected describes career progression for a particular point in time. Information for this study was self-reported by the respondents, therefore, the validity of the findings of this study largely depends on the accuracy of information provided by the respondents.

1.9 Definition of Terms

Career: A career is a person's developmental process throughout his or her life.

Career Development: The institutional support (training at ILGS or ULGD, workshops, mentorship) that enhances an employee's skills.

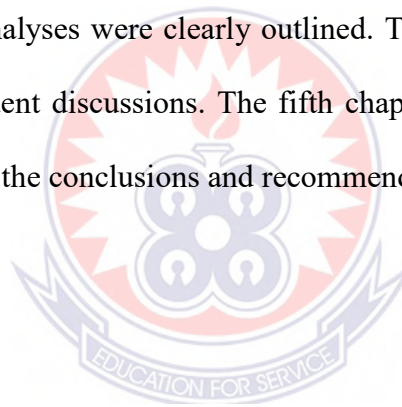
Career Progression: The advancement through ranks resulting from successful development and performance appraisal

Gender Equality: The principle of equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for individuals regardless of their gender, ensuring that men and women have the same access to resources, opportunities, and rewards within society.

Professional Development: Activities, training and experiences that enhance an individual's knowledge, skills, and competencies within their chosen profession or field. In this study, it pertains to the opportunities and programs available to women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal area for advancing their careers.

1.10 Organisation of the Study

This research report was structured into five chapters. The first chapter provided the background to the study, after which the problem was stated. The chapter also looked at the research questions, the benefits of the study, the delimitations, limitations, and operational definition of terms. The second chapter was devoted for the literature review. The literature was organised in terms of conceptual issues, theoretical, and empirical reviews. Chapter three of the study dealt with the methods that were employed for the conduct of this study. The research was described, also, the study population and how the sample and its selection were done were also looked at in this chapter. The instruments used for data collection, the data collection procedures, and the methods of data analyses were clearly outlined. The fourth chapter presented the results and its subsequent discussions. The fifth chapter provided a summary of the study. It also included the conclusions and recommendations.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The current research sought to inquire about the career progression of female workers in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipality. Precisely, the study explores the career progression of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly by examining their advancement over time, the factors influencing it and ways to enhance their career development within the municipal assembly. The chapter constitutes the appraisal of theoretical, conceptual, and empirical literature on the topic under investigation. The review of the literature enabled the researcher to compare previous findings and give vivid explanations of theories and other concepts and pieces of evidence that are related to this current study, which were used to draw conclusions.

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on two major theories: Resilience Theory and Career Motivation Theory. These frameworks were selected because they collectively explain the dynamic interplay between individual capabilities and institutional contexts that shape women's career progression, especially within public sector environments like the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly.

2.1.1 Resilience Theory

Resilience Theory provides a valuable lens through which to understand how individuals and systems respond to challenges, adapt and thrive. The concept, which originated in the physical sciences, was first applied to human behavior through the work of Garmezy, who studied children who succeeded despite experiencing significant adversity (Zimmerman, 2013).

Masten (as cited in Vella & Pai, 2019) later described resilience as a dynamic process driven by “ordinary magic”, everyday protective factors such as problem-solving abilities, emotional regulation, and positive relationships.

In an organizational context, resilience can be analyzed at three levels: individual, group, and institutional (Xiao & Cao, 2014). At the individual level, personal attributes such as self-efficacy, perseverance, and adaptability are essential for navigating complex workplace environments. At the group level, supportive peer networks and collaborative cultures reinforce resilience. At the institutional level, resilient organizations possess flexible systems, equitable policies, and inclusive leadership practices that enable all employees to thrive.

According to Xiao and Cao (2014), organizational resilience involves the capacity to withstand disruptions and adapt through redundancy, proactive planning, and inclusive leadership. However, the Assembly lacks gender-sensitive policies that could facilitate equitable promotion and work-life balance. Masten’s systems-based view of resilience highlights that personal growth is intricately linked to environmental support structures (Vella & Pai, 2019). Without institutional mechanisms to support professional development, individual resilience may eventually falter.

Resilience Theory is particularly relevant to this study as it allows for the identification of both internal strengths and external barriers. It moves beyond viewing resilience as an innate trait and frames it as a process that can be fostered through deliberate interventions such as mentorship, policy reforms and inclusive leadership (Farchi & Peled-Avram, 2025). This positions the theory as a strong foundation for recommending practical, context-sensitive strategies to promote women’s career advancement in the Assembly.

2.1.2 Career Motivation Theory

Career Motivation Theory, developed by London and refined by London and Noe (2019), emphasizes the motivational dynamics that influence individuals' career-related behaviour. It organizes career motivation into three interrelated components: career identity, career insight, and career resilience. Career identity reflects the extent to which one's career is integral to their self-concept. Career insight involves realistic self-appraisal and goal setting, while career resilience denotes persistence in the face of setbacks.

This theory is particularly useful in contexts where institutional support is limited. Employees with strong career motivation are often able to maintain focus on long-term goals despite organizational inertia. According to Campbell and Pritchard (2016), motivation is shaped by an individual's expectations about future outcomes, such as promotions, recognition, or personal fulfillment. Caldwell and O'Reilly (1990) add that this motivational process involves "prospective rationality," where individuals make decisions based on anticipated states of their environment and the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes.

Within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly, female staff are required to make career choices amidst limited promotion prospects and a lack of institutional encouragement. In such settings, intrinsic motivation becomes a critical determinant of professional advancement. The theory helps explain how women remain committed to their careers through self-driven goals, even when systemic conditions are unaccommodating (Boonzaier, Lafrance & McKenzie-Mohr, 2014).

Career Motivation Theory, therefore, complements Resilience Theory by focusing on internal psychological factors that sustain engagement. While resilience addresses how

individuals and organizations adapt to challenges, career motivation explains the internal processes that drive goal-setting, self-assessment, and professional behaviour. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic and context-specific experiences of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly, making them well-suited to guide this study and inform practical recommendations.

2.1.3 Max Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy

To address the limitations of Resilience and Career Motivation theories in explaining structural constraints within public institutions, this study incorporates Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy. Weber's framework provides a comprehensive lens for analysing organisations founded on rational legal authority, which seeks to promote efficiency, predictability and fairness through a structured administrative system (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). According to Weber (1948), bureaucracy represents the rationalisation of authority in modern society, designed to reduce uncertainty through clearly defined rules, procedures and calculable processes.

Weber's theory is built around the concept of the ideal type, which serves as a theoretical model against which real organisations may be assessed (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). Within this ideal bureaucratic structure, administration is governed by several core principles.

Hierarchy of authority refers to a clearly structured chain of command in which each lower office is supervised by a higher one, ensuring accountability and coordination (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019).

Formal rules and regulations require that duties, responsibilities and decision-making powers be defined through written laws or administrative guidelines, thereby promoting

consistency and procedural fairness (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). Division of labour involves the allocation of specialised tasks to qualified officials in order to enhance technical efficiency and organisational competence (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). Impersonality demands that official actions be guided by objective criteria rather than personal preferences, allowing institutions to deal with situations according to established rules rather than individual relationships (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019).

Central to Weber's bureaucratic model, and particularly relevant to this study, is the merit system. Weber (1966) argues that bureaucratic administration operates through domination grounded in knowledge, where authority derives from technical competence and specialised expertise. Recruitment and promotion are therefore expected to be based on objective qualifications such as educational credentials, examinations and professional training rather than personal discretion or informal networks (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019).

Within the framework of the Local Government Service Act, 2003 Act 656, the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly is formally structured to function in accordance with Weberian bureaucratic principles. The Act establishes a professional public service governed by codified rules and procedures intended to eliminate arbitrariness and ensure merit based progression. In theory, this framework provides equal opportunity for all employees to advance through clearly defined criteria.

However, Weber also cautioned that bureaucratic systems may become rigid, with officials functioning as mere components within an administrative machine, and procedural adherence becoming an end in itself (Weber, 1948). Such rigidity may unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities where informal practices coexist with formal rules.

By applying Weber's theory, this study interrogates the policy practice gap between the merit-based provisions of Act 656 and the observed pattern of limited female advancement within the Assembly. The theoretical framework, therefore provides a structured basis for examining how formal bureaucratic ideals interact with informal power relations and gendered perceptions in shaping women's career progression within Ghana's local government system.

2.2 Conceptual Review

2.2.1 Concept of Career

Career is traditionally defined as the sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work-related experiences and activities over a person's life (Hall, 2002). This concept is further expanded by Sullivan and Baruch (2018), who characterise a career as an individual's work-related and other relevant experiences, occurring both inside and outside of organizations, that form a unique pattern over the individual's lifespan. In contemporary organizational theory, two distinct models are often identified: the protean career, which is a self-directed process driven by the person rather than the organization (Briscoe & Hall, 2016), and the boundaryless career, which involves mobility that transcends the boundaries of a single organization (Arthur & Rousseau, 2015).

From a Weberian perspective, a career is an essential pillar of a rational-legal bureaucracy. Max Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy views a career as a "regular career of employees over time," where advancement is strictly governed by technical knowledge and objective qualifications (Weber, 1966; Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). In this ideal-type administrative system, a career is predictable and "machine-like," ensuring that selection and promotion are based on a "merit system" rather than personal feelings,

"individual feelings," or informal power structures (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). Weber emphasizes that bureaucratic administration represents "domination by the force of knowing," which provides the specific rationality required for large-scale organizational management (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019).

In the specific context of the Local Government Service (LGS) in Ghana, a career is a statutory trajectory governed by the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) and the Local Government Service Act, 2003 (Act 656). Under these legal frameworks, the Local Government Service Council is mandated to develop a Scheme of Service and policy guidelines to handle recruitment, training, and promotion within the Service (Local Governance Act, 2016; Local Government Service Act, 2003). Within this framework, a career is structured around the critical delineation between career development—the enhancement of an individual's skills and competencies through institutions like the Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS) or the University of Local Government and Development (ULGD)—and career progression, which refers to the actual advancement through the organizational ranks resulting from successful performance appraisals (Local Governance Act, 2016).

For women, however, the pursuit of a career is often a complex endeavor that deviates from the traditional linear path. While a career ideally provides opportunities for professional growth and financial stability, many women encounter a "policy-practice gap" where formal meritocratic rules are undermined by systemic obstacles (Local Governance Act, 2016; Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). Historically, women's career trajectories have been described as "epileptic" due to the intense wrestling with the management of family and work commitments, often referred to as the tension between the "biological clock vs. career clock" (Obimpeh, 2018; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).

This complexity suggests that for women, the career path is not a simple ladder but a "labyrinth" involving diverse challenges, horizontal segregation, and "unconscious bias" (Eagly & Carli, 2017). Research by O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) identifies a three-phase career model for women: the idealistic phase (focusing on achievement), the resistance phase (managing family and operative demands), and the reinvention phase (contributing to the broader community). Despite these challenges, providing women with equitable opportunities to succeed in their careers is a vital pillar of gender equality, ensuring that society benefits from the diverse skills and technical contributions of the entire workforce (Local Governance Act, 2016).

2.2.2 Concept of Career Progression

Career progression refers to an individual's movement through different stages within an organisation over the course of their working life, usually involving advancement to positions of greater responsibility and authority. It is commonly understood as climbing the organisational hierarchy through promotion and increased job complexity (Hall, 2002; PUSHFAR, 2020). Although often used interchangeably with career development, scholars emphasise an important distinction between the two concepts. Career development relates to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies through education, training, and experience, whereas career progression represents the actual advancement or movement within an organisation that results from such development (Baruch, 2014; Simonsen, 2019). In this regard, career progression can be viewed as the outcome of both individual effort and organisational structures that provide opportunities for advancement (Simonsen, 2019).

From a theoretical perspective, career progression is closely linked to Weber's concept of rational legal bureaucracy. Weber argued that modern organisations are characterised

by structured hierarchies, clearly defined roles, and formal rules that govern administrative processes (Weber, 1966). Within this framework, employees follow a predictable career path based on merit and technical competence rather than personal relationships or arbitrary decision making (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019). Weber described this as a regular career system in which advancement is determined by objective criteria and professional qualifications (Aron, 1994). This system is intended to ensure efficiency, fairness, and stability within organisations by promoting individuals who demonstrate the highest levels of competence. The emphasis on expertise has been described as domination based on knowledge, where authority is legitimised through professional capability rather than informal influence (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019).

In the Ghanaian public sector, particularly within the Local Government Service, career progression is formally regulated by statutory frameworks. The Local Government Service Act, 2003 and the Local Governance Act, 2016 provide the legal basis for recruitment, promotion, and advancement of staff within district assemblies (Local Government Service Act, 2003; Local Governance Act, 2016). These Acts mandate the Local Government Service Council to develop and implement policies that ensure systematic and merit based progression. Section 54 of the Local Governance Act specifically requires the establishment of performance standards and a Scheme of Service to guide staff advancement (Local Governance Act, 2016). Within this structure, the District Coordinating Director is responsible for overseeing the implementation of these policies, while the District Assembly retains ultimate authority over staff progression and discipline (Local Government Service Act, 2003; Local Governance Act, 2016).

These provisions reflect an institutional attempt to align career progression with principles of fairness, transparency and meritocracy.

However, empirical studies suggest that the ideal of merit based progression is not always realised in practice, particularly for women. Eagly and Carli argue that women's career paths are better conceptualised as a labyrinth rather than a straightforward ladder, due to the multiple and complex barriers they encounter (Eagly and Carli, 2017). Even when women possess strong educational qualifications and professional competencies, their advancement may be constrained by a gap between formal policies and actual practices. In many public institutions, informal networks, organisational politics, and unconscious bias can influence promotion decisions, thereby undermining the principle of meritocracy (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019; Auditor General's Performance Audit Report, 2019).

One of the most persistent barriers to women's career progression is the glass ceiling phenomenon, which refers to the invisible structural barriers that prevent qualified women from attaining senior leadership positions (Wirth, 2015; Nabi et al., 2018). These barriers are often embedded in organisational cultures and practices that favour male dominance in decision making roles. As a result, women who meet the formal requirements for promotion may still experience limited access to leadership opportunities.

Additionally, women's career progression is frequently shaped by the interaction between professional demands and family responsibilities. The tension between biological and career timing can create significant challenges, particularly in organisational contexts that prioritise continuous presence and uninterrupted career trajectories (Budig and Misra, 2010; Obimpeh, 2018). Public sector institutions, which

often operate within rigid bureaucratic structures, may not provide sufficient flexibility to accommodate these competing demands. This can result in slower career progression for women compared to their male counterparts.

Achieving equitable career progression therefore requires a shift from reliance on individual resilience to a stronger emphasis on institutional accountability. Organisations must ensure that established promotion policies and guidelines are consistently implemented and free from bias. In the context of the Local Government Service in Ghana, this involves strict adherence to the Promotion Manual and the enforcement of merit-based principles in all personnel decisions (Local Governance Act, 2016; Simonsen, 2019). By addressing systemic barriers and strengthening institutional frameworks, it becomes possible to create a more inclusive environment in which career progression is determined by competence and performance rather than gender-based constraints.

2.2.3 Concept of Meritocracy in Bureaucratic Organizations

Meritocracy refers to an organisational system in which the selection, promotion, and reward of employees are based strictly on technical competence, objective qualifications, and demonstrated skills rather than personal preferences or informal relationships (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019). Within bureaucratic organisations, meritocracy is regarded as a central principle that ensures fairness, efficiency, and legitimacy in administrative processes. It emphasises the idea that individuals advance on the basis of what they know and what they can do, rather than who they know. As such, meritocracy serves as a critical mechanism for maintaining professionalism and accountability within formal organisational structures.

In the context of Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy, meritocracy is fundamental to the operation of rational legal authority. Weber conceptualised modern organisations as systems governed by formal rules, hierarchical authority, and specialised roles, where decision making is based on objective criteria rather than subjective judgement (Weber, 1966). Within this framework, meritocracy ensures that authority is exercised through competence and expertise. Weber described this as domination grounded in knowledge, where the effectiveness and superiority of bureaucracy derive from the possession of specialised technical knowledge required for modern administration (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019; Weber, 1966). This system promotes predictability and stability, as individuals are selected and promoted based on clearly defined standards rather than arbitrary considerations.

A meritocratic system typically relies on formalised procedures for recruitment and advancement. These include competitive examinations, professional certifications, and the requirement for specialised training, all of which serve as objective measures of competence (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019). Such mechanisms are designed to ensure that organisational goals are achieved through the consistent application of standardised rules and procedures. By minimising personal discretion in decision making, meritocracy reduces the influence of bias and prevents the misuse of authority. This impersonal approach to administration is a defining characteristic of bureaucratic organisations, where rules and procedures take precedence over individual preferences (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019).

In Ghana, particularly within the Local Government Service, the principle of meritocracy is embedded within statutory and institutional frameworks. The Local Government Service Act, 2003 and the Local Governance Act, 2016 provide the legal

foundation for recruitment, training, and promotion within the Service (Local Government Service Act, 2003; Local Governance Act, 2016). These legislative instruments mandate the Local Government Service Council to develop policy guidelines that regulate personnel management based on established performance standards. Section 54 of the Local Governance Act outlines the Council's responsibility to formulate policies relating to recruitment, training, and promotion, thereby reinforcing the importance of merit based advancement (Local Governance Act, 2016). Furthermore, the requirement for a Scheme of Service ensures that the terms and conditions governing employment and progression are clearly defined and applied consistently across the Service (Local Governance Act, 2016).

Despite the existence of these formal structures, the implementation of meritocracy in practice often encounters significant challenges. Scholars have identified a persistent gap between policy and practice, where informal power dynamics and organisational culture undermine formal merit based systems (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019). Factors such as unconscious bias, patronage networks, and bureaucratic inefficiencies can influence recruitment and promotion decisions, thereby weakening the integrity of the meritocratic ideal. In such contexts, advancement may not always reflect competence and performance, but rather access to informal networks and influence within the organisation.

Within a Weberian framework, career development is a necessary precursor to career progression, as the acquisition of specialised skills and knowledge forms the basis for advancement (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019). However, when meritocratic principles are not fully implemented, the link between competence and progression becomes

weakened. This can lead to disparities in career outcomes, particularly for groups that may already face structural disadvantages within organisational systems.

Ensuring the effective operation of meritocracy therefore requires strong institutional commitment and accountability. Organisations must not only establish clear policies but also ensure their consistent application in practice. In the context of the Local Government Service in Ghana, adherence to the Promotion Manual and the enforcement of objective performance standards are essential for maintaining the integrity of the system (Local Governance Act, 2016; Serpa and Ferreira, 2019). By strengthening institutional mechanisms and addressing informal influences, it becomes possible to align organisational practices with the principles of rational legal authority and to ensure that advancement is determined by merit rather than extraneous factors.

2.2.4 The Framework of Decentralized Local Governance

Decentralisation in Ghana represents a significant transformation in public administration, marking a shift from highly centralised governance to a system that devolves authority to local institutions. This approach is intended to enhance efficiency, accountability, and citizen participation in governance by transferring administrative, political, and fiscal responsibilities to sub national levels (Local Governance Act, 2016; Local Government Service Act, 2003). Conceptually, decentralisation involves the delegation of decision making powers to regional and district authorities, enabling them to manage their own developmental priorities and human resource needs in a manner that reflects local conditions and demands (Local Governance Act, 2016).

The establishment of the Local Government Service forms a central component of Ghana's decentralised governance framework. Created under the Local Government Service Act, 2003 and reinforced by the Local Governance Act, 2016, the Service is

mandated to ensure the effective administration and management of local government structures across the country (Local Government Service Act, 2003; Local Governance Act, 2016). Its primary objective is to provide a professional and technically competent workforce to support the functioning of Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies. This institutional arrangement reflects an effort to align local governance with principles of efficiency, professionalism, and responsiveness to community needs.

The responsibility for managing human resources within this decentralised system is vested in the Local Government Service Council. The Council serves as the central policy making body for the Service and is tasked with developing guidelines for recruitment, training, promotion, and overall personnel management (Local Governance Act, 2016; Local Government Service Act, 2003). Through these functions, the Council ensures that staffing processes are guided by standardised procedures and objective criteria. A key instrument within this framework is the Scheme of Service, which outlines the terms and conditions of employment, including qualifications, career paths, and promotion requirements for various positions within the Service (Local Governance Act, 2016). This formalised structure reflects the principles of rational legal authority, where administrative processes are governed by rules and procedures rather than personal discretion or informal influence (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019).

The Office of the Head of the Local Government Service plays a critical role in the implementation of these policies across the various assemblies. The Head of the Service is responsible for providing strategic leadership, ensuring the effective functioning of the Service, and coordinating training and capacity building initiatives that align with sector specific needs (Local Governance Act, 2016; Local Government Service Act,

2003). This office acts as a bridge between policy formulation at the national level and practical implementation at the local level, thereby ensuring consistency in administrative practices across districts.

At the district level, the District Assembly functions as the highest political and administrative authority. It is responsible for local governance, development planning, and the overall management of public services within its jurisdiction (Local Governance Act, 2016). Supporting this structure is the District Coordinating Director, who serves as the administrative head of the Assembly. The Director is tasked with coordinating the activities of various departments, ensuring the implementation of policies, and maintaining administrative coherence within the Assembly (Local Government Service Act, 2003; Local Governance Act, 2016). This hierarchical arrangement ensures that responsibilities are clearly defined and that accountability is maintained at different levels of governance.

The decentralised framework also establishes a strong basis for institutional accountability in human resource management. By clearly outlining the roles and responsibilities of key actors, the system seeks to ensure that recruitment, training, and promotion processes are conducted in a transparent and equitable manner. When a District Assembly fails to implement fair promotion procedures or neglects staff development initiatives, it constitutes a deviation from the statutory requirements set out in the Local Governance Act (Local Governance Act, 2016). The Act emphasises the need for continuous assessment of personnel requirements and the organisation of training programmes aimed at enhancing the technical competence of staff.

Ultimately, decentralisation in Ghana is designed to promote a system in which administrative efficiency, accountability, and professional development are

interconnected. By grounding human resource management in formal rules and decentralised authority structures, the framework aims to reduce the influence of informal power dynamics and ensure that career progression is linked to competence and performance. In this regard, decentralised governance provides an institutional environment in which career development and merit-based advancement can be systematically pursued within the Local Government Service (Local Governance Act, 2016; Serpa and Ferreira, 2019).

2.2.5 Concept of Vertical and Horizontal Segregation

Vertical segregation refers to the unequal distribution of men and women across different levels of an organisational hierarchy, where women are disproportionately concentrated in lower and middle level positions while remaining underrepresented in senior management and decision-making roles. This phenomenon is closely linked to the concept of the glass ceiling, which describes the invisible institutional and attitudinal barriers that prevent qualified women from advancing to top leadership positions despite possessing the required competencies and qualifications (Wirth, 2015). Within organisational contexts, vertical segregation reflects persistent inequalities in access to power, authority, and career advancement opportunities.

From a Weberian perspective, vertical segregation can be interpreted as a deviation from the principles of rational legal bureaucracy. Weber's model assumes a structured hierarchy in which individuals progress through clearly defined ranks based on merit, technical competence, and objective criteria (Weber, 1966). However, when women's upward mobility is restricted despite meeting these criteria, it indicates a breakdown in the expected hierarchy of functions. Instead of progression being determined by competence, it becomes influenced by informal organisational practices, unconscious

bias, and entrenched power relations that favour male dominance in leadership roles (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019). Empirical studies suggest that organisational cultures often associate leadership with traditionally masculine traits, thereby disadvantaging women in promotion processes and reinforcing vertical inequalities.

Horizontal segregation, on the other hand, refers to the distribution of men and women across different occupational sectors, departments, or job categories, where certain roles become gender typed. In many organisations, including public sector institutions, women are often concentrated in administrative, social, or support roles, while men dominate technical and specialised fields. Within the context of local governance in Ghana, this pattern is particularly evident in departments such as Works, Physical Planning, and Statistics, which are frequently perceived as male dominated due to their strong emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematical competencies. This division limits women's access to certain career paths and reduces their opportunities for advancement into technical leadership positions.

Horizontal segregation is often shaped by broader societal norms and structural factors, including educational pathways and gendered expectations regarding suitable careers. Women may be underrepresented in technical fields due to historical inequalities in access to science and technology education, as well as cultural perceptions that discourage female participation in such disciplines. Consequently, even within merit-based systems, disparities in qualifications and specialisation can reinforce occupational segregation.

Eagly and Carli argue that women's career experiences are better understood as navigating a complex labyrinth rather than progressing along a straightforward ladder,

as barriers exist not only at the top of the hierarchy but also across different organisational domains (Eagly and Carli, 2017).

Both vertical and horizontal segregation present significant challenges to the principle of meritocracy within bureaucratic organisations. Meritocracy requires that recruitment, placement, and promotion be based solely on technical knowledge, competence, and objective qualifications (Serpa and Ferreira, 2019). However, when gender-based patterns influence either the level at which individuals are positioned or the sectors in which they are concentrated, the integrity of merit-based systems is undermined. These forms of segregation limit equal access to opportunities and distort the relationship between competence and career outcomes.

In Ghana's decentralised governance system, the Local Governance Act, 2016 provides a statutory framework that can be utilised to address these inequalities. The Act mandates the Local Government Service Council to develop policies related to recruitment, training, and promotion, thereby creating an institutional basis for promoting equity within the Service (Local Governance Act, 2016). Through the implementation of fair and transparent guidelines, the Council has the potential to reduce gender disparities in both hierarchical positioning and occupational distribution.

Addressing vertical and horizontal segregation requires a shift from individual coping strategies to institutional reform. This involves strengthening accountability mechanisms, ensuring equitable access to training and professional development, and actively encouraging women's participation in technical and leadership roles. Institutions such as the University of Local Government and Development play an important role in bridging technical skill gaps by providing specialised training that equips women with the competencies required for entry into male dominated fields. By

dismantling structural and cultural barriers, organisations can move closer to achieving a system in which career mobility is determined by merit rather than constrained by gender-based limitations.

2.2.6 Perception towards Career Progression

Evidence points to the fact that work environments are deleterious atmosphere towards women and employment, in general (Gyansah & Guantai, 2018). To Gyansah and Guantai, women encounter discrimination in several forms, whether covert or overt from their employees, irrespective of whether or not they are in training or in full time employment. Employers often hold traditional views about the suitability of men than women for certain jobs and are sometimes unable or unwilling to consider flexible working and childcare issues. Quite some employers who happen to be in work settings are dominated by men are now flexible in terms of coming out with policies and practices that are family-friendly, however, some are adamant. They have the conviction that some jobs are by nature not suitable for females who have given birth, and have some responsibilities relating to child care. This, in a way, prevent women from progressing in their career (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010).

Phiri and Sefah (2019) bemoan that women are mostly asked a lot of questions revolving their personal activities, and their responses are accordingly considered whether or not to engage them during recruitment. Some of these questions often than not include; whether their families would allow them to travel, plan to have children, plan for marriage, and plan for career development. This clearly limits the chances of many qualified and potential women who might not be able to give expected responses to be employed (Raja, 2016).

Because men have traditionally held positions of power, most HR policies and work

structures tend to reflect the life experience of men and are often in conflict with the life experience of women (Ramdhony et al., 2013; Blair-Loy et al., 2017). It is from this that advocates such as Rose and Hartmann (2018) had argued for policy restructuring and a renewed shape of perception towards women. In recent times, most organizations hold the perception there should be gender equality in career progression. An example is the revelation by Tlaiss and Kauser (2010) who posited that organisations are instituting work-life policies with the intention of giving women equal chances to progress.

Raja (2016), and Kottke and Agars (2016) had variously purported that these policies and/or practices are only successful dependent on the perception held by the organisation-wide members. In a nutshell, the perception is that gender-based policies, including work-life policies which are often seen as directed exclusively at women are mostly underutilised (Kottke & Agars, 2015; Newman & Mathews, 2016).

Unless the underlying organisational processes that shape decision making, promotion and professional development are critically examined and consciously reformed, barriers to women's career progression are likely to persist. Sustainable change requires not only formal policy adjustments but also collective institutional commitment to equity and transparency across all levels of the organisation. Organisational structures are rarely neutral. They often reflect broader societal beliefs about gender roles and assumptions regarding which occupations are considered appropriate for men or women (Zippel, 2019). These embedded social norms influence how tasks are allocated, how authority is exercised and how competence is evaluated within institutions.

Consequently, patterns within the labour market, workplace relations, control over the work process and compensation systems are shaped by prevailing organisational and cultural values. Where such values reproduce gendered expectations, they can subtly reinforce unequal career outcomes despite the presence of formal merit-based frameworks.

Van Oosten et al. (2017) stated that these preferences and conceptualisations culminate from the social background of women and men as they age from infancy. Interaction between social class and gender influences the positions of both men and women in any organization. Men are often hesitant to women coming into several domains of work. Byrd-Blake and Olivieri (2018) indicated that most women have developed some mechanisms that they employ in order to stay comfortably in systems that are highly patriarchal.

Enactment of policies and practices to promote female career progression in organisations are necessary in changing perception. The Criminal Law Amendment Act published April 2000 removed the controversies surrounding penalties for sexual offences against women and minors. It offers protection for a victim who has provided evidence of abuse. Also, the Equity Bill 2002 addresses all manner of economic and social discrimination, and thereby promotes equity and equal opportunity for all persons. The Affirmative Action Bill published in 2000 sought to ensure a better representation of children and women who happen to be marginalised in society. According to Girl Child Network (2018), these bills are essential to support and mentor women in career progression because women are highly committed to promoting efficiency and effectiveness.

To most organisations and to the Girl Child Network (2018), women are particularly

effective in promoting an honest, accountable and truthful working environment. In their study, Posholi (2013), found the following as ways of enhancing career progression among women: comfortability working with a male supervisor, comfortability supervising female employees, training on specific course, and allowing females to undertake challenging tasks. In another study, Amponsaa-Asenso (2018) found that women accountants in the Kumasi Metropolis mentioned provision of equal opportunities, mentorship opportunities, positive work habits, continuous training, and work-life balance.

A study by Ryan and Haslam (2007) found that individuals' perceptions of their own competence and abilities can impact their willingness to pursue career advancement opportunities. Another study by Manfredi and Trenerry (2017) suggests that individuals' perceptions of their organization's culture and values can impact their willingness to pursue career progression within that organization. The perception of gender bias in the workplace can also impact individuals' willingness to pursue career progression.

A study by Wilson et al. (2018) found that women who perceived gender bias in their workplace were less likely to seek out career advancement opportunities. A positive perception of career progression opportunities and support from organizational leaders can increase employees' motivation and engagement. A study by Holtom et al. (2015) found that perceptions of career advancement opportunities were positively associated with employee commitment and intent to stay with the organization.

Finally, perceptions towards career progression can also be shaped by broader societal norms and expectations around gender roles and work-life balance. A study by Ladge et al. (2015) found that women's perceptions of career advancement were influenced by

cultural expectations around motherhood and caregiving responsibilities.

Overall, perceptions towards career progression are complex and can be shaped by a range of individual, organizational, and societal factors. These perceptions can impact individuals' motivation, engagement, and willingness to pursue career advancement opportunities within their chosen profession or industry.

2.3 Empirical Review

2.3.1 Career Progression Options in Organisations

Employees ordinarily have the feeling of being more engaged, especially, when they perceive their management or employer sees to the development of their career goals and personal growth (Kim, 2015). To Kim (2015), employees unswervingly rank career progression opportunities as an important factor in accepting and/or keeping a job. To gain traction within the human resource industry, the human resource department of most corporate bodies is making great strides in clearly mapping out “career pathings” for existing and prospective employees. Career pathing, as juxtaposed by Malhotra, Smets and Morris (2016), is seen as a process through which employers in a particular organization provides opportunities for their employees to examine their personal characteristics, experience, skills, goals, and education, among others. For the aforementioned areas, the employees are then made to develop a plan towards the achievement of success in those areas. A career development path is a comprehensive framework that outlines the activities for which employees would engage for the enhancement of their skills and development of their career, which may lead to transfers, promotions, or appointment with different roles. With the effective implementation of career paths, the organisation benefits massively from improved performance on the side of employees, it also brings about satisfaction in career, high

employee morale, high job responsiveness, and increased productivity.

Verma (2020) examined the nature of career advancement among women employees in bank branches of Haridwar district in Uttarakhand state. The study adopted the explorative research design. The questionnaire was designed to gather data from the respondents. Using the convenient sampling technique, 182 women employees were engaged in the study. The study found three main dimensions of career advancement, namely, career orientation, future aspirations, and present satisfaction. Hughes (2012), in his study, assessed career advancement among highly qualified women in the mining industries in Canada. The study utilised the survey design. Data were collected from quantitative and qualitative means. Specifically, questionnaire and interview guide were employed to collect the quantitative and qualitative data, respectively.

Two main career paths, which are the specialist and the corporates were found in the study. Over the past two decades, a lot has been documented on the exclusion of women in some professions. Women's minority in the corporate world has been termed as 'glass ceiling' (Wirth, 2015). Wirth (2015) defined glass ceiling as any organizational prejudice or attitudinal barriers which prevent women from holding top executive positions in an organization. A number of factors have been identified as responsible for this glass ceiling. Gammie and Gammie (2019) indicate that the paramount among those factors is gender bias. Gammie and Gammie (2019) mentioned that in accountancy firms, there appears to be more discrimination against women relative to men. The men are more preferred to be holding high-profile positions with the profession, whereas women are left with menial works in the profession.

Many governments have recognized the need for equal representation of men and women all the sectors of the economy so as to build a sustainable economy (URT,

2017). Through this, some governments have adopted the quota system, where certain numbers of men and women are needed in certain organisations (Sojo, Wood, Wood & Wheeler, 2016; URT, 2017). Though there has been the advocacy of women in assuming top positions, there is still underrepresentation of women in most civil organisations (Sojo et al., 2016). The quota system is where a minimum ceiling is reserved for a certain minority group in society (Tsikata, 2018).

A key concern in interpreting the evidence present to countries that adopt the quota system may be a response to changing the attitudes held about women. In Ghana, there is a quota system for the appointment of the executives (ministers) and this requires that majority of them must be Members of Parliament (Ghana Parliament Hansard, 2019). Unfortunately, there is none of such quota systems when it comes to the recruitment of women and their subsequent progression in the public service (Tsikata, 2018).

According to Tsikata (2018), the problems of underrepresentation of women at the district assembly require immediate policy intervention. However, the policy intervention should encompass career-related policies which geared towards the advancement of the career of female staff. It is worth noting that the assembly has no defined career advancement policy to guide staff much more to specially advocate for women (Tsikata, 2018). However, programmes such as annual durbars, Independence Day celebrations and end of year reviews are used to create opportunities for mentoring and networking.

Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly (2016) identified networking programmes and mentoring as some means through which the human capital of women can be enhanced. Mentoring is viewed as a developmentally oriented link existing between a mentor and mentee. In this regard, the mentor is the more experienced person who provides coaching and

guidance to the mentee who is less experienced or knowledgeable (Kram, 1985; Noe, Greenberger & Wang, 2002; Wanberg, Welsh & Hezlett, 2003; Ragins, 1999). Though there have been several conceptualisations of mentorship, the key feature is that it is a developmental relationship, and not just an ordinary personal relationship.

The importance of mentoring relationships in organizational settings is well documented, particularly in terms of its benefits for the protégé (Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, & Lima, 2014; Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBois, 2018), but also highlighting various potential benefits for mentors (Allen, 2017). Notwithstanding the positive aspects of mentoring, recent research by Eby and colleagues (Eby, Durley, Evans, & Ragins, 2018; Eby & McManus, 2014; Eby, McManus, Simon, & Russell, 2000) finds that mentoring relationships can sometimes involve negative relational experiences for both the protégé and mentor. These deleterious mentoring experiences run the gamut from benign interpersonal mismatches to serious abuses of power. Additionally, employee-led networks organised around a shared identity, such as a women's network or women's wings of the assembly has the tendency to improve women's career progression by tackling social isolation issues (Jones, 2019). Contrariwise, Kalev et al. (2016) had stressed that there was little evidence that employee networks had positive impact on women's progression. This was confirmed by Nishii, Khattab, Shemla and Paluch (2017) whose recent study had concluded that employee-led groups were less valuable in promoting career progression generally.

2.3.2 Factors Influencing Career Progression among Women

Obviously, the career of female employees is unmatched and revolving as both their professional and things they do at their discretionary time as well as their capability to manage occupational and household duties, with some of them having little or no

identifiable issues is magical. In this light, probing the factors that influence the progress of women employees in the occupations in which they work is a laudable one. Saadin, Ramli, Johari, and Harin (2016) investigated the barriers associated with career advancement among female public servants at Perak State Secretariat, Ipoh, Malaysia, employing the descriptive survey design of research. Using the cluster technique in sampling respondents, 63 female public servants were engaged in the study. Questionnaire was used to survey the respondents. Results of the study indicated that work-life balance and gender stereotypes accounted for 60% of the changes in women's career advancement. The results further showed that when there is a balance between work and life, female public servants advance more in their career. Also, the more stereotyped females become, the better their career advancement.

Hadfield and Sen (2018) examined the success and potential barriers towards the career path of women in academic libraries. Through the feminist perspective, the study adopted the qualitative inquiry approach. The study sampled 12 female library workers through the purposive sampling procedure. Interviews were conducted on females who are in senior positions in the academic libraries in UK. The interview data were analysed thematically. Consequent to the revelations of the research, the following were identified as positive determinants of career progression among female library workers: promotion; succession planning; role models/mentors, and confidence/aspirations. Some barriers that hindered the progress of the female staff were caring responsibilities, working for long hours, mobility, and lack of work flexibility.

Raja (2016) examined the factors influencing career progression among women in management positions within universities in Pakistan. The study adopted a qualitative design and employed interviews and focus group discussions involving forty-eight

women occupying both top and lower management positions. The findings revealed that gender stereotyping, limited mobility and entrenched patriarchal perceptions significantly constrained women's advancement. Pakistan was widely perceived as a patriarchal society in which leadership and management roles were predominantly associated with men. Such socio-cultural expectations limited opportunities for women and restricted their movement into senior academic and administrative positions.

Similarly, Raceme (2014) investigated factors associated with successful career paths among women working at the Jelgava Regional Department of the State Employment Agency and the Zemgale Regional Department of the State Police in Latvia. The study utilised a descriptive survey design and collected data from thirty-nine female employees through structured questionnaires.

The results indicated that women's career choices and progression were influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including family responsibilities, social roles, workplace traditions, prevailing stereotypes and the broader organisational environment. These factors collectively shaped women's career trajectories within public institutions.

In another study, Posholi (2013) explored factors affecting career progression among women in selected parastatals in Lesotho. Using a descriptive survey design and stratified sampling technique, one hundred women were selected for participation. Data were collected through questionnaires and included both quantitative and qualitative responses. The findings identified several barriers to women's advancement, including family obligations, disparities in pay and access to training, sexual harassment, lack of mentoring and coaching, restrictive job characteristics and the persistence of the glass ceiling. These structural and organisational constraints significantly limited women's upward mobility within the institutions studied.

Jauregui and Olivos (2018) examined the challenges and barriers confronting women in executive positions in Peru. The study adopted a descriptive research design and employed purposive sampling to select 24 participants, comprising 11 women and 13 men. Data were collected through the use of an interview guide designed to elicit detailed perspectives on women's leadership experiences. The findings revealed four principal barriers affecting women's career advancement. These included limitations related to education and professional experience, the burden of family responsibilities, restrictive organisational cultures and the influence of informal power structures and public resource constraints. The study highlighted how both structural and socio-cultural factors interact to shape women's access to executive positions, thereby reinforcing gender disparities within organisational leadership.

In a related study, Amponsaa-Asenso (2018) assessed the barriers associated with career progression among women in the profession of accountancy in Kumasi. The study, which was descriptive in nature, surveyed 48 female accountants who were engaged through the purposive technique sampling in research. Questionnaires were used for collecting female accountants' data. It emerged from the study that factors such as long hours of work, discrimination in promotion, childcare and family responsibilities, heavy workload or paperwork, and poor work environment hindered the progress of female accountants. The ability to effectively manage the demands of work and family is undoubtedly the greatest hurdle for women in their careers (Kim et al., 2015; Crompton & Lyonette, 2018; Still & Timms, 1998; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

Notably, one major debatable view about women's career needs is the fact that, women are burdened with numerous household duties compared to men (Crompton &

Lyonette, 2018; Van Oosten, Buse, & Bilimoria, 2017), which may likely curtail the successful acquisition of education and professional development opportunities (Obimpeh, 2018). An instance is with regards to career internationalisation, where men are in majority of foreign companies (Vance & McNulty, 2014). In fact, it has been found by the Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2016) that approximately 25% of top managers who were selected for foreign-based firms were females.

Most of the times, females decide on what to do in terms of the desires and family expectations (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). As a result, the final decision to continue working at the workplace or change occupation will be this influenced (Duberley et al., 2014). Continuous professional development through education is a major pre-requisite for occupying top organizational positions (Tharenou, 2019). This is usually so because, such positions require top managers to exhibit high level and quick independent decisions that are critical for the organizational efficiency as a whole. This notwithstanding, Joshi, Neely, Emrich, Griffiths, and George (2015) indicated that female employees are faced with the issue of having less educational and occupational opportunities as well as training programmes that will facilitate and enhance the professional practice of these female employees (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Morley, 2014).

Women have less opportunities as a result of lack of training and education related to their work activities (Joshi et al., 2015; Preenen, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2014). Above all, the available educational opportunities such as postgraduate education in management is few for females. Heller (2017) posits that majority of students on the MBA programme perceive the masculine management model as solely responsible for business management. Scholars have also asserted that networks that are informal may

also hinder the engagement of women in top executive and high-profile managerial positions (Tharenou, 2019; Broadbridge, 2018; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; O'Neil, Hopkins, & Sullivan, 2011). Women are known not to be involved in more informal networks for the risk of sexual abuse and/or workplace romance, though, creating such an atmosphere is what Morley (2014) had interpreted as a barrier to promotion. Morley is of the view that women in most instances create several heterogeneous networks, and this hinder them from attaining high-profile positions. Males, on the other hand, establish a uniform network.

Acker and Haque (2017) encourage women at the local government who want to progress through the ranks and file at the municipal assemblies to actively engage in politics. To Acker and Haque, local government is an important avenue for getting practical experience in participating in politics before moving on to the national arena. Advocates of decentralisation argue that it opens up avenues for women to articulate their interests, to enter arenas of political decision-making, and to advance women interests. However, studies by Crompton and Lyonette (2018) show that women representation in local government does not guarantee that they will have any substantial influence over policy decisions, or that they will articulate women's interests. It depended on the incentives facing them as representatives, and it requires a conscious and deliberate action on the part of the women to make a difference.

Gender stereotypes and male values and patterns largely dominate organisational cultures (Broadbridge, 2018; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Collins, 2015; Joshi et al., 2015; Crompton & Lyonette, 2018; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Due to the effect of these stereotypes, many people still believe that best managers are males (Powell & Butterfield, 2015). Cabrera (2017), reviewing numerous studies, points out that

hierarchical relationships of engagements in which managerial decisions are made are often based on the masculine values of rationality and authority.

Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) had attributed this to stereotypes regarding managerial skills. Female talents and skills are unappreciated and frowned upon by many organisations (O'Neil et al., 2011). Furthermore, talent is frequently defined as a pattern of behaviour associated with male characteristics such as assertiveness and competitiveness (Festing, Kornau, & Schäfer., 2015) and this making career progression challenging for women.

2.3.3 Factors that Enhance Career Progression among Women

In a study among women who got married or had children used to resign from their jobs in South Africa, Gouws (2011) found that with the implementation of labour legislation providing substantial leave for employees who fall pregnant until after the birth of the child, most women were able to make progress in their career. An example of such laws includes the Constitution of South Africa Act (No108 of 1996) and the Employment Equity Act No 55 of 1998). These laws fought for discrimination against and/or dismissal of women who are pregnant. It also provided for the payment of maternity benefits to employees and four months of unpaid maternity leave. Mouley (2013) also found that the changes that have taken place are quite helpful but also have their weaknesses. People who take leave to care for their family and home are rarely promoted because it is not part of the promotion criteria. Secondly, the availability of affordable domestic and childcare services in many countries is also a problem because most kindergartens do not open early for women in leadership to drop off their children and go to work, thereby making it difficult to attend early morning meetings.

A study conducted by Catalyst (2018) found that a major factor contributing to

women's retention and progression within organizations is the implementation of work-family programs and creating environments that are supportive for women. In another study by Rogier and Padgett (2014), it was found that flexible time schedules have been used for several years due to the belief that they help employees manage work-life balance better. For women, being able to work with flexible time schedules made it easier to balance work and life demands and, consequently, made it easier to progress into upper-level positions. Similarly, Schmidt and Duenas (2012) found that when women are provided with supportive work environment, they succeed in their career path. The study found that the primary responsibility for creating a supportive environment rest on organizations.

A supportive environment provides workers with friendly workplace policies, but commitment from top management is crucial in implementing such policies. Another factor that contributes to women's development includes mentors. In a study, women executives in the UK and U.S.A. reported that they need the support of mentors to advance (Riley & White, 2014). Mentor relationships help women advance by providing them with self-confidence and reducing their levels of stress. This was also confirmed by Nelson and Quick (2015) who found that especially important is the role of female mentors who provide role models to their protégés, helping them cope with discrimination, stereo-typing, family/work balance, and social isolation. A major factor contributing to women's development and participation in managerial work is access to education and training and development initiatives (Wirth, 2015). This was corroborated by Burke (2002), who found that access to education, training, and development are part of the challenge to support women's advancement in organizations.

Specifically, access to formal management training programs, access to the appropriate and relevant training, tailoring training to the needs of women, and training in gender equity are believed to be factors that positively influence women's advancement in organizations.

Bajdo and Dickson (2015) found that organizations that maintain cultures that promote gender equity are more likely to have an increasing number of women in management positions. Bajdo and Dickson further indicated that since organizations are based on norms, beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions, which in turn influence organizational practices, tacit norms, and values, a gender-friendly would promote career progression among women.

2.4 Review of Local Government Service Protocols Act 656

The administrative framework of Ghana's decentralised governance is established through the Local Government Service Act, 2003 Act 656 and subsequently the Local Governance Act, 2016 Act 936, which repealed Act 656 while maintaining its core institutional architecture. These legislative instruments created the Local Government Service with the object of securing the effective administration and management of the decentralised local government system (Local Government Service Act, 2003 Act 656, s. 3; Local Governance Act, 2016 Act 936).

The statutory design of the Service reflects key features of Weber's theory of bureaucracy, particularly the reliance on rational legal authority, formal hierarchy and rule-bound administration (Weber, 1948; Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). In principle, therefore, the Service is structured to operate through standardised and impersonal procedures intended to minimise arbitrariness and promote fairness in administrative decision-making.

2.4.1 Governance and Regulatory Framework

The governance of the Service is vested in the Local Government Service Council. Under Section 5 of Act 656 and Section 54 of Act 936, the Council serves as the governing body with general management and control of the Service (Local Government Service Act, 2003 Act 656, s. 5; Local Governance Act, 2016 Act 936, s. 54). The Council is mandated to recommend matters of policy relating to the management of the Service and to develop a scheme of service prescribing the terms and conditions of employment and remuneration for staff (Local Government Service Act, 2003 Act 656, s. 6(a), (c)).

This regulatory framework is intended to institutionalise predictability and transparency in career progression. The day to day administration of the Service is undertaken by the Secretariat under the leadership of the Head of the Service, who is responsible for the efficient organisation and management of the Service and the implementation of the Council's decisions (Local Government Service Act, 2003 Act 656, ss. 13–15).

These provisions collectively establish a formal chain of command consistent with bureaucratic principles of hierarchy and accountability.

2.4.2 Protocols for Recruitment and Promotion

A central function of the Council is the development of policy guidelines for recruitment, training and promotion (Local Government Service Act, 2003 Act 656, s. 6(d)). In addition, the Act mandates the establishment of appointments and promotions committees at the regional and district levels (Local Government Service Act, 2003 Act 656, s. 11(3)). These committees are expected to apply objective criteria in assessing eligibility for appointment and advancement.

Responsibility for career progression and discipline is further decentralised to the Regional Coordinating Councils and District Assemblies. Section 16(6) of Act 656 assigns responsibility for the career progression of officers within the Regional Coordinating Council, while Section 20(5) places similar responsibility on the District Assembly for its officers (Local Government Service Act, 2003 Act 656, ss. 16(6), 20(5)). The Local Governance Act, 2016 Act 936 retains these decentralised administrative arrangements.

Collectively, these provisions reflect a merit based framework in which upward mobility is expected to be grounded in technical competence, formal qualifications and established performance standards, rather than personal relationships or discretionary influence.

2.4.3 Training and Professional Development

The legislative framework places strong emphasis on continuous professional development as a foundation for administrative effectiveness and advancement. The Council is required to develop and coordinate training implementation plans for District Assemblies and Regional Coordinating Councils (Local Government Service Act, 2003 Act 656, s. 6(h)). It is also mandated to develop professional standards and guidelines for various categories of staff (Local Government Service Act, 2003 Act 656, s. 6(i)).

Furthermore, the Head of the Service is tasked with ensuring the effective organisation and development of training programmes consistent with sectoral requirements (Local Government Service Act, 2003 Act 656, s. 15(6)(b)). These provisions reinforce the principle that technical competence and structured capacity building are prerequisites for occupying higher administrative positions within the Service.

2.4.4 The Policy Practice Disconnect

Despite the clarity of these statutory provisions, emerging evidence from local assemblies indicates a gap between formal legislative design and practical implementation. Although the Acts provide for structured promotion systems, training coordination and decentralised oversight, institutional practices do not always reflect these principles. The Auditor General's Performance Audit Report (2019) observed that the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly had not organised targeted career development initiatives for female staff for several years, thereby weakening the training and professional development framework envisaged under the legislation. Such lapses undermine the merit based progression model embedded in Act 656 and retained under Act 936.

This divergence between formal bureaucratic ideals and administrative realities reflects the tension identified in Weber's analysis of bureaucracy, where formal rationality may coexist with substantive inequalities in practice (Weber, 1948). The persistence of low promotion rates among eligible women therefore raises critical questions about how informal power relations, organisational culture and institutional inertia interact with statutory provisions within Ghana's decentralised governance system.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter was apportioned for the research methods that drove the conduct of the entire study. It includes the research paradigm, approach and design that framed the study were discussed. Issues relating to the study area, population, sampling, data collection instrument, how the data were collected, and the data analytic procedures were also looked at in the chapter.

3.1 Research Paradigm

The research paradigm chosen for this study is the interpretivist paradigm, providing a philosophical framework that aligns with the nature of the research on the career progression of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipality. Interpretivism, as noted by Creswell (2014), emphasizes the subjective nature of human experiences and recognizes that reality is socially constructed. This paradigm is particularly well-suited for exploring the complexities of women's career advancement, as it allows for an in-depth examination of their lived experiences, perceptions, and the social constructs surrounding their careers. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) further support this choice, highlighting the interpretivist paradigm's focus on understanding human experiences within specific social and cultural contexts. As emphasized by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), this paradigm prioritizes a holistic understanding of the subject, recognizing the multifaceted aspects associated with it. The subjective nature of career progression, influenced by cultural nuances and organizational contexts, makes interpretivism an apt choice for this study.

3.2 Research Approach

The chosen research approach for this study is qualitative. Qualitative research is characterized by its emphasis on exploring the depth and richness of human experiences, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In adopting a qualitative approach, the research seeks to delve into the complexities of the career progression of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal, aiming to capture the subjective perspectives, perceptions, and social constructs that shape their professional journeys. This aligns with the interpretivist paradigm chosen for the study, as qualitative methods are well-suited for exploring the intricacies of social phenomena and providing detailed insights into the context-specific nature of women's career progression. The qualitative approach allows for the use of methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, facilitating in-depth exploration and understanding of the experiences and factors influencing career advancement for women in the local government sector.

3.3 Research Design

The research design selected for this study is the qualitative case study. A case study design is defined as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018; Fabea, 2012). This design is particularly advantageous for this research as it allows for a holistic and detailed exploration of the complexities involved in women's professional advancement (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

In this study, the "case" is specifically defined as the phenomenon of career progression among female employees within the institutional and administrative framework of the

Sefwi Wiawso Municipality Assembly. While the Sefwi Wiawso Municipality provides the localised socio-cultural and peri-urban environment, the unit of analysis is the institutionalised process of upward mobility as regulated by the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) and the Local Government Service Act, 2003 (Act 656).

This municipality was purposively chosen as a strategic case because, as a regional administrative capital, it serves as a pivotal hub for public service delivery where female representation is growing in number but remains inconsistent in leadership roles (Asante, 2017). The case study design enables the researcher to capture the policy-practice gap between formal Weberian bureaucratic protocols and the informal power structures that shape the lived experiences of these women (Weber, 1948).

3.4 Study Area

Sefwi-Wiawso Municipality, located in the Western North Region of Ghana, is one of the nine districts in the region. It was originally established in 1988 as an ordinary district assembly under the name Sefwi-Wiawso District. A significant restructuring took place in 2008 when the south-western portion of the district was separated to form Sefwi-Akontombra District on 29 February. The remaining portion retained the name Sefwi-Wiawso District until it was elevated to a municipality in March 2012, officially becoming effective on 28 June, thereby becoming Sefwi-Wiawso Municipal Assembly.

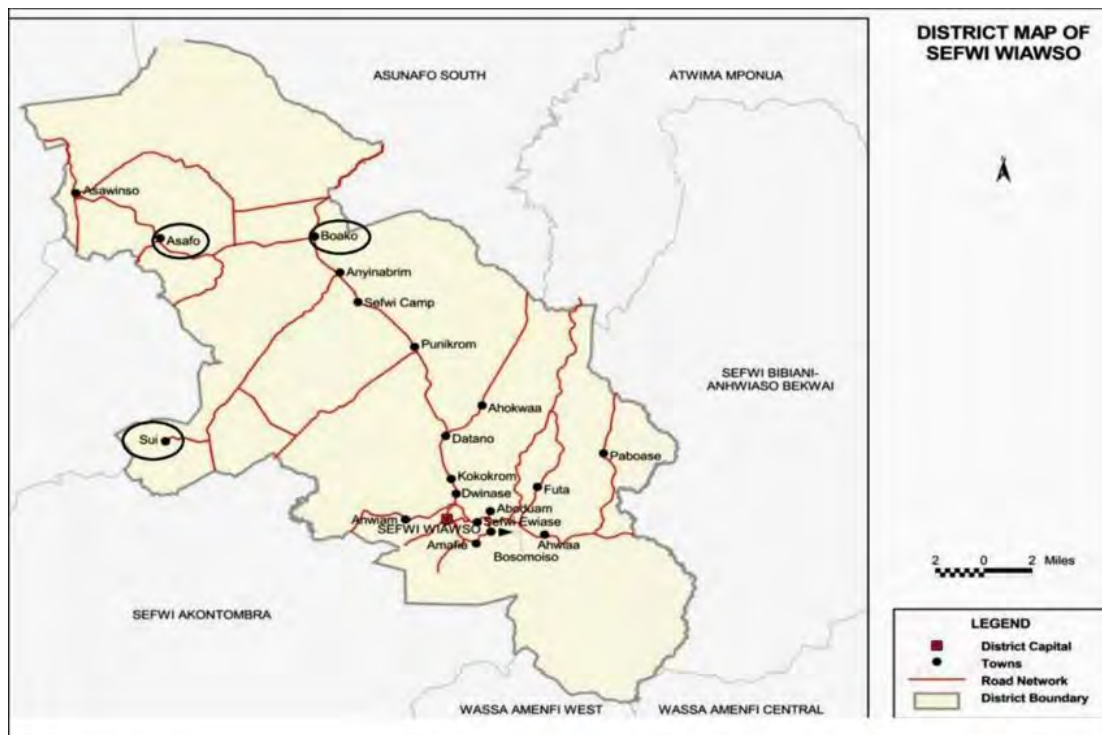


Figure 3.1: Pictorial view of Sefwi Wiawso Municipal

Source: Ghana Statistical Services (2014)

The district is located in the northeastern part of the Western North Region, with Wiawso serving as its capital town. Covering a total area of 992 square kilometres, the district boasts of coordinates of $6^{\circ}12'57''\text{N}$ latitude and $2^{\circ}29'6''\text{W}$ longitude. As of the 2021 census, the population of Sefwi-Wiawso Municipality stood at 151,220, with a population density of 150 individuals per square kilometer (GSS, 2021). This district, with its historical evolution and demographic characteristics, forms the contextual backdrop for the study of the career progression of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal.

Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly, offers a unique socio-cultural and administrative context for studying women's career progression in the public sector. The area is marked by strong cultural traditions and community structures that shape perceptions of gender and leadership, providing a distinct contrast to urban settings where most

existing research has been concentrated. This municipality was purposefully chosen due to its growing representation of women across various departments, despite limited scholarly focus on their advancement within decentralized local government institutions. As the regional administrative capital, the Assembly plays a pivotal role in public service delivery and employment, making it a strategic location to examine how organizational and cultural factors affect women's career mobility.

Preliminary observations also indicate that although women are increasingly present in the workforce, their progression into leadership roles remains inconsistent. This makes Sefwi Wiawso not only relevant but also timely for exploring the barriers and opportunities shaping women's professional growth in local governance. Insights from this study could help inform gender equity strategies within similar rural and peri-urban settings across Ghana.

3.5 Population

The study population, in this case, is delineated to encompass all 37 female employees at the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Office. Defining a study population is a crucial aspect of research design, influencing the scope and generalizability of findings. As Creswell and Creswell (2017) highlight, a well-defined population ensures clarity in research objectives and aids in selecting appropriate data collection methods. In specifying the number and characteristics of the population, the researcher can tailor the study to the unique context of the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Office and gain a detailed understanding of the career progression experiences of its female employees.

3.6 Sample and Sampling Technique

This section details the selection of participants and the methodological justification for the final sample size. In qualitative inquiry, the determination of a sample is guided by

the depth of information required to answer the research questions rather than statistical representativeness (Creswell and Creswell, 2017; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018).

3.6.1 Population and Sample Size

The target population for this study encompassed all 37 female employees serving as permanent staff at the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly. These individuals operate within the decentralised administrative structures established by the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936).

Although the initial intent was to adopt a census-like approach by engaging all 37 women to ensure a comprehensive overview, the final sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006). Consequently, the final sample comprised 25 female participants. In addition, the Human Resource officer was purposively engaged as a key informant to provide an administrative perspective on institutional protocols, bringing the total number of contributors to 26.

3.6.2 Sampling Technique

The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability method in which participants are intentionally selected based on criteria relevant to the research objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015). This approach allowed the researcher to ensure that participants represented a diverse range of ranks, departments, and experience levels, providing insights into the full spectrum of the "policy-practice gap" in career progression.

Regarding rank and position, the sample included both junior and administrative staff, who constituted 68 per cent of participants, and senior managerial staff, who made up

32 per cent. The inclusion of junior staff enabled the exploration of early-career challenges, such as unclear promotion pathways, limited access to formal mentorship, and barriers to professional development. The senior and managerial staff were included to examine the strategies, resilience, and personal agency required to navigate institutional politics, gender bias, and informal power structures, providing a comparative perspective across career stages.

With respect to departmental representation, participants were drawn from a range of units, including Internal Audit, Records, and Administration. This ensured that insights reflected varied administrative contexts within the Assembly. However, the study also noted a critical absence of women in technical departments, such as Physical Planning and Works. This gap highlighted structural and socio-cultural barriers to female representation in certain career paths and underscored the importance of understanding how institutional policies interact with these realities.

In terms of experience, the sample encompassed both seasoned professionals with over 20 years of service and those in the early stages of their careers, with one to five years of experience. This range enabled the researcher to capture longitudinal perspectives on career progression, including factors influencing stagnation, mobility, and professional growth over time.

The principle of data saturation guided the final determination of the sample size. Data saturation is reached in qualitative research when additional interviews or focus groups no longer yield new thematic insights regarding the phenomenon under study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2018; Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006).

Saturation was achieved through the iterative process of conducting 12 one-on-one interviews and four focus group discussions. The researcher determined that by the 25th participant, key thematic patterns had become consistently repetitive, confirming sufficient depth of inquiry. Thematic redundancy was evident in participants' narratives concerning bureaucratic delays, institutional inertia, and unclear promotion pathways, which were reported consistently across different ranks and departments. Moreover, the recurring disconnects between formal merit-based protocols of Act 936 and the influence of informal networks and departmental biases emerged as a core theme in every session. Finally, no novel insights relating to socio-cultural constraints or work-life conflict arose that had not already been documented in earlier interviews, confirming that the sample size adequately captured the complexity of the phenomenon.

By adhering to the principle of saturation, the study ensured methodological rigour, avoided redundancy, and captured the rich, lived experiences of women in the Assembly with high internal validity.

3.7 Methods of Data Collection

3.7.1 Sources of Data Collection

The primary sources of data for this study on the career progression of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Office are the female employees within the organization. The firsthand experiences, perspectives, and insights of these women served as valuable data sources, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing their professional advancement. Secondary sources, such as organizational records and relevant reports, complemented the primary data by providing contextual background information and historical perspectives on the career progression of women in the local government sector (Smith, 2015). These secondary sources contributed to a more

holistic interpretation of the data.

3.7.2 Data Collection Instruments

To explore the career progression of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly, this study employed a multi-method qualitative approach consisting of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The selection of these instruments was guided by the need to capture the depth and richness of human experiences, allowing the researcher to understand the subjective social constructs that shape professional journeys within a local government context. By employing multiple instruments, methodological triangulation was facilitated, enabling the confirmation, contrast, and contextualisation of findings across different organisational levels (Creswell and Creswell, 2017).

3.7.2.1 Semi-Structured Interview Guides

Semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary instrument because they involve direct interaction, enabling in-depth exploration of individual insights and experiences. Two distinct interview guides were developed to address the perspectives of female staff and the administrative framework respectively.

The Female Staff Interview Guide was designed to elicit comprehensive narratives regarding personal career journeys, key milestones, and the challenges encountered within the Assembly. Drawing on the labyrinth metaphor proposed by Eagly and Carli (2017), the guide employed open-ended questions to probe complex barriers such as the "glass ceiling" and socio-cultural constraints. Semi-structured interviews were prioritised for senior female staff holding leadership positions, as their extensive experience provided deeper insights into navigating the organisation's Weberian hierarchy.

A separate Human Resource Officer Interview Guide was used for the HR officer, who acted as a key informant. This guide focused on institutional processes within the legal framework of the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936), covering areas such as recruitment procedures, promotion criteria, and training records. The aim was to contrast formal protocols with the lived realities reported by female staff, thus enabling a rigorous evaluation of the policy-practice gap within the Assembly.

3.7.2.2 Focus Group Discussion Guide

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide was employed to capture diverse perspectives and examine the dynamics of group interaction in relation to shared professional barriers. The study used mini-focus groups comprising three to four participants, a format chosen to create a comfortable environment for discussing sensitive issues, including gender bias and work-life conflict, which might be less forthcoming in one-on-one interviews. The FGD guide concentrated on collective themes such as the perceived lack of structured mentorship and the influence of departmental biases on promotion outcomes.

These instruments were designed in alignment with Max Weber's (1948) Theory of Bureaucracy, particularly focusing on how principles of technical competence and impersonal rules are applied in practice. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, all interview and FGD protocols were pre-tested to confirm clarity, relevance, and depth. Additionally, the use of separate guides for female participants and administrative staff enhanced confirmability and triangulation, thereby reducing the likelihood of individual bias affecting the study's conclusions.

3.7.3 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process followed a systematic qualitative approach designed to

capture the depth and richness of human experiences within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly. The procedures were carefully structured to ensure methodological rigour, ethical compliance, and the attainment of data saturation, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of women's career trajectories.

The process began with obtaining official permission from the Municipal Assembly's administration to engage with staff. In accordance with established ethical guidelines, the researcher prioritised informed consent, ensuring that all participants were fully briefed on the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the measures in place to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. Identifying information was replaced with pseudonyms (e.g., Participant 1 to 25) to safeguard the professional standing of employees within the Weberian hierarchy of the local government.

To facilitate methodological triangulation, the researcher employed a dual-track data collection strategy integrating individual narratives with group dynamics. The first track involved conducting 12 individual semi-structured interviews with female staff, primarily focusing on those in senior or supervisory positions. These interviews were held at locations convenient for participants, creating a conducive environment for open communication and rapport. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the "labyrinth" of barriers, including institutional inertia and gendered biases, shaping their career experiences.

The second track consisted of 4 mini-focus group discussions, each comprising three to four participants. This smaller, more intimate format encouraged interactive dialogue on sensitive topics, such as work-life conflict and the lack of structured mentorship, which may have been less forthcoming in individual interviews. Additionally, a key

informant interview was conducted with the Human Resource Officer. This session provided an administrative perspective, enabling the researcher to contrast the formal protocols mandated by the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) with the lived experiences of female staff.

All interviews and focus group sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Transcription ensured that participants' spoken words were accurately converted into textual data for thematic analysis, enabling the identification of patterns and categories through an inductive coding process. To enhance trustworthiness, the researcher maintained an audit trail and employed member checking, allowing participants to validate the accuracy of their recorded contributions. These procedures ensured that data collection was rigorous, systematic, and reflective of the lived experiences of women in the Assembly.

3.8 Trustworthiness of the Study

Ensuring the trustworthiness of this study involved several key strategies. Credibility is upheld through prolonged engagement with participants and the implementation of member checking, allowing participants to validate the accuracy of their contributions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To enhance transferability, the study provides rich descriptions of the research context and procedures, while also contextualizing findings for broader applicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is achieved through the maintenance of an audit trail and regular peer debriefing, ensuring transparency and external input (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Confirmability is addressed through the researcher's reflexivity and the use of triangulation, employing multiple data sources and methods to corroborate findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in this research study, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and the integrity of the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their participation and providing them with information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Participants were assured of confidentiality, and all identifiable information was handled with the utmost sensitivity. Additionally, the principles of anonymity were strictly adhered to during data analysis and reporting. The study design aligns with ethical guidelines, prioritizing the well-being of participants and minimizing any potential harm. Any potential conflicts of interest and biases are openly acknowledged through the researcher's reflexivity, contributing to transparency and trustworthiness in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The ethical considerations extend beyond participant interactions to encompass responsible data management, ensuring that the research is conducted with integrity and respect for ethical norms.

3.10 Data Processing and Analysis

Data analysis, as described by Creswell and Creswell (2017), is the systematic process of inspecting raw data to extract meaningful patterns, trends, and insights. This analytical approach aims to inform research outcomes. Thematic analysis, a qualitative analysis method, was adopted as the primary technique for scrutinizing the collected data. The thematic analysis allows for the identification and exploration of recurring themes within the dataset, providing a structured framework to distill essential insights and patterns related to the career progression experiences of women in the study area. The audio-recorded interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim to convert spoken words into written text (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

This textual data then underwent systematic coding, where meaningful patterns, themes, and categories were identified within the dataset (Saldaña, 2016). The coding process followed an inductive approach, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data. To enhance rigor, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing and member checking, seeking input from colleagues and participants, respectively, to validate the accuracy and interpretation of the coded data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

3.11 Limitations of the Study

A critical limitation of this study is its reliance on self-reported data from participants, which may be subject to bias or inaccuracies, potentially affecting the validity of the findings. Additionally, the study's focus on a single municipal area may limit the generalizability of the results to other regions or sectors.

3.12 Chapter Summary

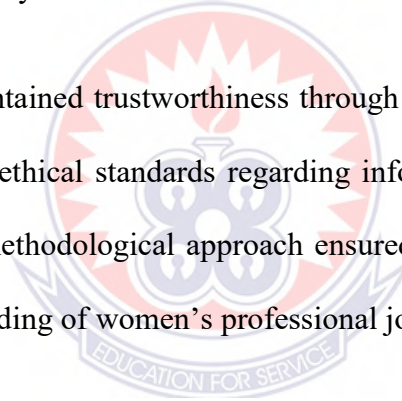
This chapter established a rigorous methodological framework to investigate the career progression of women within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly. Guided by an interpretivist paradigm, the study prioritised participants' lived experiences, recognising that professional advancement is shaped by both institutional and cultural contexts. A qualitative case study design was adopted, with the "case" defined as female career progression within the Assembly's formal institutional structures. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the policy-practice gap between the merit-based protocols of the Local Governance Act and the informal power structures reported by staff.

The target population included all 37 female permanent employees, with a final sample of 25 participants determined by data saturation. Saturation was reached when

narratives regarding bureaucratic delays and institutional inertia became repetitive, yielding no new thematic insights. Participants were purposively selected to ensure diverse representation across ranks and departments, highlighting differences between junior and senior staff, as well as administrative versus technical units.

Data collection employed methodological triangulation through twelve individual semi-structured interviews, four mini-focus group discussions, and a key informant interview with the Human Resource Officer. This multi-method approach ensured corroboration of findings across individual experiences and group interactions. Data were analysed using thematic analysis and an inductive coding process, allowing themes to emerge directly from the transcribed texts.

Finally, the study-maintained trustworthiness through member checking and an audit trail, while upholding ethical standards regarding informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. This methodological approach ensured that the study captured a rich and nuanced understanding of women's professional journeys within the Assembly.



CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, focusing on the career progression of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly. The results are analysed and discussed in relation to the study's objectives, which include identifying the nature of career progression, the factors influencing it, and possible ways to enhance career advancement for women in the municipality. The chapter begins with an overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, which provides context for the subsequent analysis. Responses are presented using pseudonyms (Participant 1 to Participant 25), with references to their respective departmental units to maintain context.

4.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants

The socio-demographic analysis, as outlined in Table 4.1 reveals several critical insights into the career progression of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal. A substantial portion of participants are between the ages of 30-39 (40.0%), indicating a relatively mature and experienced workforce. The majority are married (48.0%) with a significant number having dependants, highlighting the dual responsibilities of work and family. In terms of job positions, the majority of participants were in administrative or junior staff roles (68.0%), followed by senior staff (24.0%), with a smaller proportion occupying managerial or head of unit positions (8.0%). This distribution underscores a possible concentration in mid-level positions, potentially reflecting limited upward mobility. Experience levels are spread across different ranges, with the highest percentages in the 6-10 years (32.0%) and 11-15 years (24.0%) categories, suggesting

a workforce with moderate to substantial experience. However, a notable portion has 20 years or more of experience, which consists of seasoned professionals and individuals facing stagnation. Educational attainment shows that most participants hold a Bachelor's Degree (60.0%), indicating a well-educated workforce, while only a small percentage have advanced degrees (8.0% with Master's Degree).



Table 4.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age Range	20-29	6	24.0
	30-39	10	40.0
	40-49	7	28.0
	50-59	2	8.0
Marital Status	Single	8	32.0
	Married	12	48.0
	Divorced	3	12.0
	Widowed	2	8.0
Job Rank/Position	Management / Head of Unit (HOU)	2	8.0
	Senior Staff (Professional Officers)	5	20.0
	Junior / Support Staff	18	72.0
Years of Experience	1-5 years	4	16.0
	6-10 years	8	32.0
	11-15 years	6	24.0
	16-20 years	4	16.0
	20 years and above	2	8.0
Level of Education	GCE O'LEVEL	2	8.0
	HND certificate	6	24.0
	Bachelor's Degree	15	60.0
	Master's Degree	2	8.0
Number of Dependants	0	4	16.0
	2	5	20.0
	3	4	16.0
	4	7	28.0

5 or more	5	20.0
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Source: Field Survey (2024)

This may suggest a need for further professional development or advanced training for career advancement. The data on dependants shows a diverse range, with a notable number having 4 dependants (28.0%) and 5 or more (20.0%), which may influence career progression due to the additional personal responsibilities these participants manage.

Lastly, the distribution of participants across departments/units as shown in Table 4.2 shows that the Records and Administration Units had the highest representation with three participants each, while the Physical Planning, Works Department, and Statistics had no female. Other departments like Internal Audit, Procurement, Agricultural Department, Environmental Department, Business Advisory Centre, and Social Welfare and Community Development each had two participants, with the remaining departments represented by one participant each.

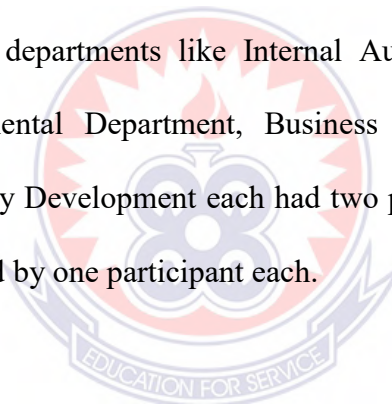


Table 4.2: Distribution of Participants Across Departments/Units

Department/Unit	Frequency
HR Department	1
Internal Audit	2
Records	3
Physical Planning	-
Budget Unit	1
Administration Unit	3
Accounts Department	1
Procurement	2
Works Department	-
Agricultural Department	2
Environmental Department	2
Business Advisory Centre	2
NADMO	1
Statistics	-
Births and Deaths	2
Social Welfare and Community Development	2
Radio Operation	1

Source: Field Survey (2024)

4.2 Lived Experiences of Female Employees Regarding Their Career Progression in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly

The first objective of the study focused on exploring how women perceive their career progression within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly. It provided the opportunity

to understand women's interpretations of career progression, their sense of achievement or stagnation and how their lived experiences, gender identity and organizational environment have shaped these perceptions.

4.2.1 Perceptions of Career Progression

Participants, both junior and senior staff, offered personalized and varied interpretations of what career progression means to them. Their views reflect subjective career experiences, shaped by ambition, challenges, growth opportunities and perceived limitations.

Junior Staff Perspectives on Career Progression

Junior staff often defined career progression through the lens of aspiration, visibility and hope for growth. Many viewed the progression as not merely tied to titles, but as a trajectory toward competence, recognition, and impact:

Career progression to me means achieving a balance between professional growth and personal fulfillment. It's not just about climbing the corporate ladder but also about gaining new skills, taking on diverse roles, and finding satisfaction in my work. *(Participant 1, Administration Unit (Junior))*

For me, career progression is about continuous improvement and setting new professional goals. Each promotion or new responsibility is a milestone that represents my hard work and dedication. *(Participant 4, Records Officer (Junior))*

Junior officers often expressed hopeful ambition but also uncertainty about what lies ahead in the institutional system. Their responses suggested a desire for transparent growth paths, clear communication about expectations, and opportunities for mentorship and exposure.

Some junior participants also reflected anxiety about perceived stagnation, especially

when promotions or new roles seemed distant or unclear. This indicates that lack of clarity or slow feedback loops within the organizational structure may be impacting how they see their career prospects.

Senior Staff Perspectives on Career Progression

Senior staff generally perceived their career progression in retrospective and reflective terms, often situating their achievements within the context of effort, perseverance and navigating barriers:

Career progression means breaking barriers and overcoming challenges that come my way. It's about proving my capabilities and achieving recognition for my contributions. (*Participant 2, Internal Audit (Senior)*)

It's about the opportunities to grow and advance within the organization. Career progression means having a clear path to move up the ranks and achieve higher positions through merit and hard work. (*Participant 11, Accounts Department (Senior)*)

For many senior women, career advancement was hard-earned, often self-initiated and not always the result of structured support. Their perceptions included a sense of resilience, self-determination and strategic positioning in male-dominated environments.

I spent my first year on the job without any assigned tasks, which was frustrating. I had to prove my abilities by taking on self-initiated tasks. Eventually, when I was asked to draft minutes for my boss, he realized my capabilities. (*Participant 8, Budgetary Unit (Senior)*)

This illustrates a recurring pattern in which career progression is actively pursued by individuals rather than passively granted, often in the absence of institutional support.

4.2.2 Milestones in Career Advancement

Participants' narratives revealed a broad spectrum of career trajectories, each shaped by their position in the hierarchy, educational background, and institutional environment.

Junior Staff Perspectives: Aspirations and Early Career Experiences

Junior staff participants often expressed strong aspirations to advance, grounded in the belief that diligence, learning new skills, and visibility to leadership would eventually yield promotion. However, their early career experiences frequently reflected limited support, lack of formal mentorship and minimal task assignment, which led to feelings of stagnation:

During my first year, I was barely given any responsibilities. I had to create my own tasks just to prove I was capable. Eventually, when I was asked to write minutes, my boss noticed my potential. But that came after months of doing nothing official. *(Participant 8, Budgetary Unit – Junior Staff)*

These accounts suggest that self-initiative and persistence were critical during the initial phases of their careers. Many also expressed a desire for clearer guidance, mentorship, and structured induction programs to aid their early progression.

Senior Staff Perspectives: Reflections on Career Trajectories

For senior staff, advancement was often described as a long-term journey punctuated by perseverance, further education, and seizing opportunities when they arose:

I started as an administrative assistant, doing basic secretarial work. Over time, I enrolled in short courses and eventually was chosen for management training. That's when doors opened for me. *(Participant 9, Administration Unit – Senior Staff)*

Others spoke of their promotions as gradual recognitions of accumulated experience,

sometimes in the absence of formal qualifications:

Despite only having a GCE O'Level, I've been working in operations for 23 years and rose to become the Chief Radio Operator. It wasn't through formal training but through demonstrating consistent performance and reliability.

(Participant 25, Operations – Senior Staff)

These observations reveal that career advancement frequently depended on informal processes, including personal visibility, networks, and the approval of superiors, rather than on formal performance criteria.

4.2.3 Motivations for Pursuing a Career

Understanding the motivation behind career choices helps clarify what sustains women's engagement in the municipal service and fuels their ambition to progress.

Junior Staff Perspectives: Hope, Security and Skill Development

Many junior staff shared that their career aspirations stemmed from a desire for economic stability, job security and personal development. Some were inspired by role models, while others made pragmatic choices based on market relevance:

I transitioned from secretarial work to accounting because I realized that secretarial roles were becoming obsolete. I had to stay relevant and make a change that would secure my future. *(Participant 8, Budgetary Unit – Junior Staff)*

I was inspired by my aunty who worked in internal audit. I saw how respected she was, and I wanted to follow that path. But I also needed a job that would support my family. *(Participant 3, Assistant Internal Auditor – Junior Staff)*

Senior Staff Perspectives: Purpose, Service and Fulfillment

Senior staff tended to frame their motivations in broader, more values-driven terms. For them, career progression was not just personal but aligned with public service, leadership, and societal impact:

I chose administration because I wanted to contribute to shaping public policy. The stability was appealing, yes, but it was more about having a say in the direction of our services. *(Participant 10, Administrative Officer – Senior Staff)*

My passion for logistics and the possibility to make a positive impact through procurement is what drives me. Career growth came as a bonus. *(Participant 14, Procurement Officer – Senior Staff)*

This contrast shows that motivations evolve over time from survival and security at early stages, to purpose and legacy at more advanced levels.

4.2.4 Opportunities for Career Advancement

Access to opportunities was a major theme in the participants' accounts of career progression. This theme underscores how institutional structures either support or inhibit growth and how experiences differ between junior and senior staff.

Junior Staff Perspectives: Uncertainty and Limited Access

Junior staff frequently reported a lack of information about available opportunities, and uncertainty about timelines and criteria for promotion. They also highlighted infrequent training and inconsistencies in approval for further studies:

Sometimes you don't even know when the promotions are coming or what you need to qualify. There's no official mentoring or pathway, so we just try to do our best and hope to be noticed. *(Participant 6, Records Officer – Junior Staff)*

Others shared that they were willing to pursue higher education, but faced delays in departmental approvals or personal financial constraints, creating an uneven playing field.

Senior Staff Perspectives: Navigating Gender Bias and Institutional Politics

Senior participants noted that career advancement frameworks exist, but often lack transparency and fairness, especially for women. Despite their qualifications, they often

had to work twice as hard to be considered for leadership roles:

Even when I had the same qualifications and more experience than my male colleagues, the managerial role was given to one of them. You have to constantly prove yourself as a woman. *(Participant 23, Social Welfare – Senior Staff)*

Theoretically, every four years you're eligible for promotion. But in practice, for women, it's not that straightforward. Biases and politics come into play. *(Participant 13, Procurement – Senior Staff)*

These insights suggest that career advancement is not solely merit-based, and that gendered expectations and cultural norms still influence the trajectory of women's careers. Participants also highlighted that training, workshops and further education are vital for preparing staff for higher responsibilities. However, accessibility and effectiveness varied widely between junior and senior staff.

Junior Staff Perspectives: Need for Mentorship and Continuous Learning

Junior staff saw professional development programs as critical to their growth but reported limited frequency and lack of tailored support:

I've only attended one training session since I joined. It was helpful, but there should be more regular programs, especially for us who are still learning the ropes." *(Participant 11, Administration Unit – Junior Staff)*

They called for ongoing capacity-building, mentorship schemes and clear linkage between training and promotion to facilitate their progression.

Senior Staff Perspectives: Formal Qualifications and Strategic Training

Senior staff highlighted that while training was useful, career progression was more dependent on acquiring formal degrees and navigating institutional politics. Many expressed the burden of financing their own education and the lack of institutional support:

Training sessions helped me, but to move up, I had to go back to school for a master's degree. That cost me a lot, and I had to do it without any departmental support.” (*Participant 1, HR Officer – Senior Staff*)

Some also shared how strategic selection of training programs helped them become more visible and indispensable to their departments.

4.2.5 Career Aspirations for the Next 5–10 Years

Participants' articulation of their career goals provides a forward-looking view of their motivation and the kind of support they deem necessary for advancement.

Junior Staff: Clarity of Ambition, But Uncertain Pathways

Junior staff generally had clear aspirations, including aims to become heads of departments, pursue professional certifications, or switch to more technical roles:

In five years, I hope to be a fully certified internal auditor with my ICAG qualification. But sometimes it feels like the system is too slow to recognize our effort. (*Participant 3, Assistant Auditor – Junior Staff*)

I want to head the accounts unit someday, but I need to complete my degree first. My biggest challenge is getting approval for study leave. (*Participant 8, Budgetary Unit – Junior Staff*)

These aspirations are often hindered by bureaucratic bottlenecks, limited access to scholarships or study leave, and lack of transparent career planning pathways within the Assembly.

Senior Staff: Focus on Leadership, Mentorship and Legacy

Senior participants tended to be more reflective and were oriented toward leaving an impact, grooming successors, or transitioning into strategic leadership roles:

I'm working towards a deputy coordinating director position. But more importantly, I want to help younger women navigate what I went through.

(Participant 2, HR – Senior Staff)

These aspirations suggest a potential untapped leadership resource, where senior women could be formally integrated into mentorship and capacity-building roles for the younger workforce.

4.3 Institutional, structural and Personal Factors that Influence the Upward Mobility of Women in the Municipal Assembly

This section presents the factors that shape women's career progression within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly. The analysis is thematically organized to capture the diverse and sometimes contrasting experiences of junior and senior female staff. Participants highlighted several key factors, including organizational support and resources, education and training, personal resilience, mentorship opportunities, job satisfaction and the impact of socio-cultural expectations and family responsibilities.

4.3.1 Educational Attainment as a Prerequisite for Career Advancement

Participants widely acknowledged that academic qualifications are foundational to career progression. Both junior and senior staff recognized that advancing through the ranks required formal education, with many returning to school while working. The consensus was that without improved qualifications, promotion was unlikely. Senior staff often linked their progression to higher education, while junior staff viewed qualification upgrades as necessary for breaking through stagnant positions:

After entering with just a diploma, I realized that without going back to school, I would remain in the same position. That's what motivated me to pursue a degree while still working. *(Participant 11, Administration Unit – Junior Staff)*

It was after I obtained my master's degree that I got promoted to a leadership role. Before that, I had been in the same grade for years. *(Participant 02, Finance Unit – Senior Staff)*

The HR officer confirmed the critical role of qualifications in promotion procedures:

Each rank has specific qualification requirements. Without meeting these, no one is considered for promotion, no matter how long they've served. (*Human Resource Officer*)

4.3.2 Access to Professional Opportunities and Organizational Support

Opportunities for professional development were unequally distributed, according to participants. Senior staff often reported proactive support from superiors, who encouraged them to attend workshops and apply for roles.

In my early years, I had supervisors who regularly encouraged me to attend training programs and short courses. Their support gave me the push to aim higher.” (*Participant 5, Planning Unit – Senior Staff*)

In contrast, several junior staff felt sidelined, citing poor communication and selective access to training. “*Sometimes trainings are announced, but not everyone hears about them. It often feels like those who are close to certain people get all the benefits.*” (*Participant 13, Works Department – Junior Staff*)

The HR officer acknowledged the concerns, “*While we try to make training opportunities available to all, I admit that internal communication varies across departments. We are working on improving that.*” (*Human Resource Officer*).

4.3.3 Personal Motivation and Initiative

Participants generally agreed that personal motivation and initiative played a significant role in career growth. However, the extent to which such efforts were recognised or rewarded varied widely, even among those in senior roles. Some junior staff expressed frustration that their extra efforts often went unnoticed, despite being self-driven and eager to learn. For them, the lack of appreciation made it difficult to stay motivated.

When I joined, I was full of energy. I always stayed behind to help with reports or assist others when we were short-staffed. I wasn't even looking for a promotion, just a simple acknowledgment. But months passed, and it felt like no one even noticed. That really affected my spirit. I started asking myself, 'What's the point of trying so hard if no one sees you?' (*Participant 16, Agriculture Department – Junior Staff*)

Interestingly, not all senior staff felt their journey was smooth or that initiative was always rewarded. Some recalled being overlooked despite their efforts, especially earlier in their careers.

Back when I was starting out, I used to take on a lot — drafting proposals, attending workshops, staying late. I thought it would show commitment. But I was passed over for a promotion more than once. It wasn't until I got a mentor who advocated for me that things changed. So, I understand when junior staff say they feel invisible. I've been there too. (*Participant 08, Health Department – Senior Staff*)

Others shared more encouraging experiences. They saw taking initiative as a way to stand out and build trust over time.

I always volunteered for field assignments. It wasn't easy, especially as a woman, but I saw it as a way to grow. Eventually, those efforts paid off people started recognising my dedication, and I got more opportunities. But it took patience and persistence. (*Participant 04, Social Welfare – Senior Staff*)

The HR officer acknowledged both perspectives and admitted that while initiative is valued on paper, how it is actually recognised often depends on individual supervisors.

Initiative is one of our key appraisal indicators, but I agree that recognition can be inconsistent. Some departments do a great job of supporting hardworking staff, while others still rely heavily on seniority or personal networks. We are trying to build a culture where performance truly matters across the board. (*Human Resource Officer*)

4.3.4 Recognition and Workplace Morale

Recognition emerged as a major factor influencing morale and motivation. Whether formal or informal, acknowledgment of one's effort was deeply valued by staff. Yet, both junior and senior participants shared mixed experiences, with some feeling empowered and others disillusioned. For many junior staff, a lack of appreciation made them feel invisible, despite the long hours and dedication they invested in their roles:

I come early, stay late, and sometimes even work on weekends just to meet deadlines. But no one notices. There's no thank you, no mention during meetings, nothing. You begin to wonder if your work really matters. It makes you want to just do the bare minimum. *(Participant 15, Environmental Health Unit – Junior Staff)*

However, some junior staff had experienced encouraging feedback from supervisors, which helped boost their confidence.

There was a time I handled a community outreach almost on my own, and my boss made sure to thank me in front of the team. That one moment gave me the push I needed to believe I could take on bigger responsibilities. It wasn't a promotion, but it meant a lot. *(Participant 10, Education Unit – Junior Staff)*

Similarly, not all senior staff felt consistently appreciated throughout their careers. Some recalled periods where their work was taken for granted, especially during transitions or when management changed.

There were times I felt like just another name on the payroll. Even when I hit my targets or led successful initiatives, no one said a word. Recognition came much later, and it shouldn't take that long. Everyone wants to feel valued. *(Participant 12, Planning Unit – Senior Staff)*

Others, however, described how simple gestures like public praise or a thank-you note

had a significant impact on their professional outlook.

One of the most motivating things for me was when my director sent a handwritten note thanking me for managing a tough project. It wasn't an award, but it made me feel seen. It's the little things that make a big difference in this kind of work. *(Participant 03, Administration Unit – Senior Staff)*

The HR officer acknowledged these experiences and said the department was looking into practical ways to improve workplace recognition beyond annual evaluations.

Recognition shouldn't be limited to end-of-year awards. We are working on ways to promote more day-to-day appreciation — a culture where effort is acknowledged in real-time, not just documented in reports. *(Human Resource Officer)*

4.3.5 Mentorship and Role Models

Mentorship emerged as a crucial enabler for senior staff, while its absence was a key concern for junior staff. Those who had mentors credited them for helping navigate promotion processes and workplace dynamics. Meanwhile, junior staff described a lack of guidance and felt isolated in planning their careers.

“Having a senior colleague who mentored me made a huge difference. She guided me through the promotion process and gave me honest feedback.” *(Participant 6, Budget Unit – Senior Staff)*

There's no one to guide you or tell you what to do. You just have to figure it out by yourself. *(Participant 12, Physical Planning Unit – Junior Staff)* The HR officer acknowledged this shortfall, “*Mentoring has not been structured yet, but it's on our agenda to support junior staff development, especially for women.*” *(Human Resource Officer)*

4.3.6 Gendered Perceptions and Bias in the Workplace

Subtle gender biases were cited as persistent barriers. Participants felt that women often had to prove their competence more than men. Senior staff recounted similar struggles earlier in their careers, while junior staff described ongoing perceptions that favored men for leadership roles.

There's an unspoken belief that leadership suits men better. As a woman, I had to go the extra mile just to be seen as competent—more than any man in the same role. *(Participant 01, Administration Unit – Senior Staff)*

Sometimes, a position becomes vacant and even though a qualified woman is available, management leans toward a male colleague. It's frustrating. *(Participant 14, Works Department – Junior Staff)*

The HR officer admitted that while formal policies are gender-neutral, unconscious bias persists:

There are no written policies that disadvantage women, but I agree that unconscious bias influences how some decisions are made. We are addressing this through sensitization and leadership training. *(Human Resource Officer)*

4.3.7 Family Responsibilities and Career Mobility

Family obligations had a dual impact. For many junior staff with caregiving roles, especially mothers of young children, career mobility was constrained. In contrast, senior staff highlighted the role of supportive families in facilitating their career moves, including relocation or extended work hours.

I was offered a new position in another district, but I had to decline because my children were still very young and I had no one to help. It was a hard decision, but I couldn't risk their wellbeing. *(Participant 17, Finance Unit – Junior Staff)*

My husband encouraged me to take the promotion even though it meant relocating to another region. That support made all the difference in my decision to move up. *(Participant 7, Social Welfare – Senior Staff)*

The HR officer affirmed that while certain positions require transfers, the Assembly tries to consider family constraints:

Some roles require relocation, but when family challenges are clearly communicated, we try to be flexible. Staff can appeal for deferment or reassignment depending on the situation. (*Human Resource Officer*)

4.3.8 Job Satisfaction and Career Motivation

Job satisfaction influenced participants' drive to grow. Feeling valued motivated them to take on more responsibilities. *"I love my role; it makes a difference in people's lives. Feeling supported at work pushes me to do more and aim higher."* (Participant 21, Births and Deaths Unit, Junior staff). But lack of recognition discouraged others: *"For a whole year, I had no role. It was only when my boss asked for help that he saw what I could do. Being overlooked slows your growth."* (Participant 3, Internal Audit, senior staff)

Some participants demonstrated a strong commitment to their professional growth, even when working outside their primary field of interest. Participant 8 from the Budget Unit, for example, noted that although she studied accounting, she works in budgeting and continues to push herself in hopes of becoming a Chartered Accountant, emphasising that her passion keeps her motivated. Similarly, participants in a focus group of mixed staff reflected that enjoyment of one's work helps overcome challenges, with one noting that love for the job drives continuous growth and the determination to succeed. These accounts highlight how intrinsic motivation and personal dedication often play a central role in career advancement, especially in contexts where formal institutional support may be limited.

4.4 Strategies and Solutions Participants Propose to Enhance Career Progression Opportunities for Women in the Municipal Assembly

The third objective sought to identify potential strategies and improvements to enhance career progression opportunities for women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipality. Participants shared a range of suggestions and practical recommendations for creating a more equitable and supportive professional environment. Their insights covered mentorship, training, institutional transparency, recognition, work-life balance and gender sensitivity.

4.4.1 Improving Mentorship Programs

Participants consistently emphasized the absence of structured mentorship as a gap that needed urgent attention. Both junior and senior staff believed that formal mentoring relationships could provide clarity, encouragement and support in navigating the workplace and promotion processes.

There should be a formal mentorship program where experienced women in leadership roles guide and support younger female employees. This will help bridge the knowledge gap and provide valuable advice on navigating career challenges. *(Participant 12, Accounts Department – Junior Staff)*

Implementing mentorship programs and providing targeted leadership training for women could significantly improve their career progression. Structured guidance builds confidence and helps women prepare for leadership. *(Participant 9, Administration Unit – Senior Staff)*

The Human Resource Officer affirmed this concern:

We recognize that informal mentorship happens, but it's not enough. We're currently developing a mentorship framework to pair junior and senior staff, particularly focusing on women's professional growth. *(Human Resource Officer)*

4.4.2 Training and Professional Development

Across departments, participants pointed to the importance of continuous learning and skills enhancement. They recommended increased access to affordable or fully-funded professional development opportunities tailored to women's needs.

The municipal office should offer regular workshops and training sessions, particularly in emerging areas of our work. This will equip us with the skills needed to compete for higher positions. *(Participant 6, Records Department – Junior Staff)*

Implementing regular training workshops on leadership skills specifically designed for women could help bridge the gap in career advancement. Many women are keen to advance but lack access to these kinds of resources. *(Participant 17, Environmental Department – Senior Staff)*

Institutionalizing a career development plan that includes regular performance reviews and feedback sessions could help women understand their career path better and work towards specific goals. *(Participant 19, NADMO – Junior Staff)*

The HR department echoed this view:

We are planning to partner with training institutions to create accessible, gender-responsive capacity-building programs. Cost should never be a barrier to professional growth. *(Human Resource Officer)*

4.4.3 Clear Career Pathways and Transparent Promotion Criteria

Participants highlighted the importance of developing and communicating clear career progression pathways and transparent promotion criteria as a key strategy to enhance gender equity in career advancement. Both junior and senior staff expressed the need for accessible promotion guidelines and clearly defined career ladders to help women understand the expectations at each stage of their professional development.

Training and advancement opportunities should be clearly communicated across all departments. Sometimes you only hear about a program after others

have been selected. *(Participant 14, Works Department – Junior Staff)*

Participant 2, a senior staff member from the Finance Unit, emphasised the need for clear and transparent promotion guidelines, noting that written criteria would reduce speculation and foster trust within the organisation.

A structured promotion system will not only motivate staff but also ensure fairness, especially for women who often feel left out. When everyone knows the rules and criteria, it removes guesswork and favoritism, making the process more transparent and encouraging. *(Participant 3, Administration Unit – Senior Staff)*

The Human Resource Officer acknowledged that while a promotion policy exists, it has not been effectively communicated or integrated into routine practices. They emphasized plans to revise and widely disseminate the policy, conduct sensitization sessions, and establish mentoring systems that explicitly support women's career goals.

We recognize the need to clarify promotion procedures and make them accessible to all employees. Sensitization workshops and mentorship programs will help address ambiguities and provide focused support for women's career progression. *(Human Resource Officer)*

4.4.4 Enhancing Workplace Recognition Systems

Participants suggested more frequent and inclusive recognition of staff achievements. Many believed that both informal and formal acknowledgment could improve morale and motivate women to aim for leadership roles.

Simple gestures like saying 'well done' or mentioning someone's work during meetings can boost confidence. Recognition doesn't always need to be monetary. *(Participant 15, Environmental Health Unit – Junior Staff)*

There should be quarterly recognition programs where outstanding efforts are acknowledged. This will encourage more women to take initiative. *(Participant 4, Social Welfare – Senior Staff)*

HR agreed and outlined steps being considered:

We are introducing a quarterly recognition scheme that includes nominations from peers and supervisors. This initiative will help highlight staff contributions in real time. *(Human Resource Officer)*

4.4.5 Addressing Work-Life Balance and Family-Friendly Policies

Participants acknowledged that balancing professional duties with family responsibilities was a persistent challenge for many women. Participant 17, a junior staff member in the Finance Unit, said, *“Sometimes, it's hard to attend trainings or take on new roles because of family duties. Flexible work arrangements would help us manage both.”* Similarly, Participant 7, a senior staff member in the Social Welfare Unit, stated, *“Family-friendly policies must go beyond maternity leave. If a woman is transferred or promoted, there should be support mechanisms in place for her family situation.”*

The HR officer recognized the issue and noted:

We've started reviewing our HR policies to include flexi-time and transfer deferment options, especially for women with young children. These will be tailored to balance organizational needs and family realities. *(Human Resource Officer)*

4.4.6 Sensitizing Leadership on Gender Equity

Some participants called for deliberate efforts to challenge gender biases and foster a more inclusive workplace culture. This included sensitization workshops, inclusive hiring panels and the inclusion of gender equity in performance assessments.

Participant 1, a senior staff member in the Administration Unit, stated, *“Managers need training on how to support women fairly. Gender bias isn't always obvious, but it shapes decisions.”* In a similar vein, Participant 13, a junior staff member in the

Physical Planning Unit, added, *“Leadership training should include sessions on unconscious bias. That way, women won’t always have to prove themselves twice as much.”*

4.4.7 Enforcement of Affirmative Action Mechanisms

Several participants proposed the formal enforcement of affirmative action mechanisms as a proactive strategy to promote gender equity in career advancement and leadership representation. They recommended institutionalizing policies that correct historical imbalances and actively support female leadership development.

There should be clear gender-based targets or quotas for leadership roles and training opportunities to level the playing field. This will help address the systemic barriers women face and create real opportunities for advancement. *(Participant 5, Social Welfare – Senior Staff)*

Affirmative action isn’t about lowering standards; it’s about removing barriers that have held women back for years. It’s a way to ensure that capable women get a fair chance to lead. *(Participant 11, Works Department – Senior Staff)*

The Human Resource Officer confirmed that the institution currently lacks an affirmative action policy and tracking mechanisms for gender equity outcomes but acknowledged the potential benefits of formalizing such measures.

We are considering introducing affirmative action policies and gender monitoring to promote fairness in recruitment, promotion and leadership appointments. It’s important to couple this with efforts to shift workplace culture towards greater inclusion. *(Human Resource Officer)*

Participants emphasized that alongside policy enforcement, a cultural shift is essential to embrace affirmative action as a necessary tool for fairness and inclusion, ultimately fostering a more balanced leadership structure within the institution.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

4.5.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants

The findings of this study on the career progression of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly reveal several critical insights, particularly concerning the socio-demographic characteristics of participants and the nature of their career advancement. The analysis suggests that a significant portion of the workforce consists of mature, experienced individuals, with many holding administrative or junior staff positions. Specifically, 68% of participants occupied either administrative or junior staff roles, 24% held senior staff positions, while only 8% were in managerial or head of unit positions. This distribution reflects limited upward mobility, as the majority of women appear concentrated in roles that offer fewer opportunities for advancement.

These findings support the observations of Verma (2020), who identified similar career progression challenges for women in the banking sector, where upward mobility was often tied to factors such as career orientation, personal aspirations, and job satisfaction. The pattern observed in this study suggests that entrenched barriers, such as limited promotion prospects and structural constraints, hinder upward movement, especially when coupled with the dual responsibilities of work and family life, as indicated by the high proportion of married participants with dependents.

4.5.2 Lived Experiences of Female Employees Regarding Their Career Progression in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly

The lived experiences of female employees in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly reveal a profound policy–practice gap between the formal administrative provisions of the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) and the actual professional trajectories of women within the institution. Structurally, the Assembly is designed to operate as a

Weberian ideal-type bureaucracy grounded in rational-legal authority, impersonality, technical competence and a merit-based system of advancement. In principle, such a structure should guarantee predictability, fairness and objectivity in personnel decisions. However, the empirical narratives of participants indicate that these foundational principles are frequently undermined by informal power arrangements, entrenched cultural norms and systemic inertia (Weber, 1948; Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). As a result, the bureaucratic architecture exists more robustly in statutory form than in lived organisational practice.

For junior female staff, career progression is experienced as a complex interplay between aspiration and institutional constraint. Many participants conceptualised progression as the gradual acquisition of competence, increased responsibility and enhanced professional visibility. Yet, their early-career accounts often reflected structural stagnation rather than structured advancement. Several participants reported that upon appointment, they were not immediately integrated into clearly defined roles and in some cases, spent extended periods without assigned tasks.

This compelled them to self-initiate responsibilities in order to demonstrate relevance and capability. Such experiences signify a breakdown in what Weber (1966) described as technical specialisation, which constitutes the operational backbone of bureaucratic efficiency. In a properly functioning bureaucracy, each office is defined by specific duties, clearly delineated authority and predictable career ladders. The absence of structured task allocation and systematic induction undermines this logic of administrative rationality.

Moreover, this reality contradicts Section 54 of Act 936, which mandates the Local Government Service Council to ensure effective performance of the Service through

clearly articulated schemes of service and structured guidelines for progression (Local Governance Act, 2016). When junior staff remain underutilised, the machine-like predictability expected of a rational bureaucracy is replaced by uncertainty, ambiguity and anxiety regarding career milestones (Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). Consequently, the meritocratic pipeline intended to channel competent entry-level officers into higher ranks becomes obstructed at its foundational stage, thereby reproducing stagnation rather than progression.

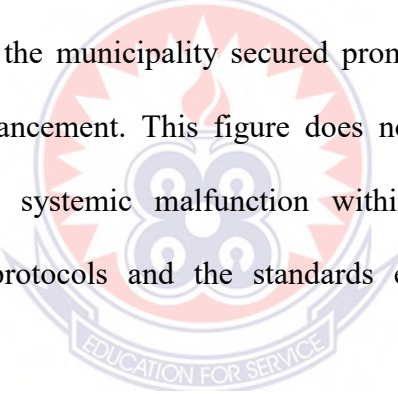
In contrast, senior female staff described their progression as a hard-earned and often survivalist journey rather than a predictable institutional pathway. Advancement was rarely attributed to structured mentorship, systematic succession planning or institutional sponsorship. Instead, upward mobility was portrayed as contingent upon personal resilience, strategic networking and the skillful navigation of institutional politics (Vella & Pai, 2019).

Participants indicated that they frequently had to work significantly harder than their male counterparts to attain recognition for leadership responsibilities. This aligns with scholarship on the glass ceiling, which describes the invisible yet persistent barriers that restrict women's ascent to top hierarchical positions despite possessing the requisite qualifications and experience (Eagly & Carli, 2017). The perception that women must prove competence repeatedly before being entrusted with authority reflects deeper structural inequalities embedded within organisational cultures.

From a Weberian perspective, these accounts signal a departure from the principle of impersonality, whereby administrative decisions should be governed strictly by objective qualifications and technical knowledge rather than subjective preferences (Weber, 1966; Serpa & Ferreira, 2019). However, senior participants highlighted that

informal networks, departmental loyalties and gendered expectations often supersede formal merit-based criteria. Decision-making spaces were perceived to be dominated by entrenched male circles, thereby limiting women's access to strategic influence. This situates women within a double bind, in which they must demonstrate assertiveness to gain credibility while simultaneously navigating the social penalties attached to perceived deviation from traditional gender norms (Dennis & Panagiotopoulos, 2018). Thus, progression becomes less a function of institutional design and more a product of adaptive endurance within a structurally uneven system.

The structural implications of these lived realities are further illustrated by the statistical disparity reported by the Auditor General (2019), which indicates that less than 5% of eligible women within the municipality secured promotions even after meeting the required years for advancement. This figure does not merely represent individual stagnation but signals systemic malfunction within the enforcement of Local Government Service protocols and the standards enshrined in Act 936 (Local Governance Act, 2016).



Additionally, the Assembly's failure to organise targeted career development workshops since 2017 reflects a lack of sustained commitment to the training implementation plans mandated by law (Auditor General, 2019; Local Governance Act, 2016). Continuous professional development is a critical mechanism through which bureaucracies cultivate technical competence and prepare officers for promotion. Its absence further weakens the institutional scaffolding necessary for equitable advancement.

Collectively, these findings suggest that the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly operates as a fragmented bureaucracy. Although formal statutory frameworks and

rational-legal principles are institutionally embedded, their practical application is mediated by cultural inertia, informal patronage patterns and gendered expectations (O’Neil et al., 2015). The coexistence of formal rules and informal power dynamics produces a structural contradiction in which meritocracy is proclaimed but inconsistently practised.

Ultimately, the lived experiences of female employees demonstrate that individual resilience, while significant, is insufficient to secure sustained career progression within a system where institutional structures do not fully align with statutory mandates. Meaningful advancement therefore requires not only personal agency but also deliberate structural reform aimed at reconciling bureaucratic ideals with organisational realities (Zimmerman, 2013).

4.5.3 Institutional, Personal, and Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Career Progression Among Women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal

The career progression of women within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly is shaped by a complex interaction of institutional, personal and socio-cultural factors. These dimensions do not operate in isolation. Rather, they intersect to produce the persistent policy–practice gap between formal bureaucratic ideals and the lived realities of female employees within the Assembly.

Although the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) establishes a formal regulatory framework for merit-based recruitment and promotion, the study reveals a significant departure from these Weberian principles in practice. In theory, the bureaucratic structure is grounded in rational-legal authority, technical competence and impersonality. In reality, participants reported that upward mobility is frequently shaped by patronage systems and alignment with informal power brokers rather than

objective performance indicators alone. This observation aligns with Azameti (2013), who argues that within Ghana's public sector visibility to supervisors and alignment with influential actors often determine promotion outcomes more decisively than standardised evaluation mechanisms. Participants described an environment in which informal endorsement and relational proximity to decision-makers function as implicit criteria for advancement. As a result, the principle of meritocracy becomes diluted by discretionary influence.

Institutional inertia further compounds this challenge. The Assembly has not organised structured career development workshops since 2017, thereby limiting access to formal professional development opportunities. Junior staff in particular reported navigating unclear promotion pathways without systematic mentorship or transparent progression guidelines. Such bureaucratic delays and procedural stagnation reflect broader structural constraints identified by the UNDP (2021), which notes that slow administrative processes and weak institutional enforcement mechanisms remain persistent barriers to women's advancement in public administration globally. Within this context, the reported 5% promotion rate for eligible women becomes not merely a statistic but an indicator of a fragmented bureaucracy that prioritises procedural continuity over equitable progression.

In the absence of consistent institutional support, personal agency emerges as a critical determinant of career advancement. Senior female staff frequently described adopting a survivalist orientation, attributing their progression to resilience, strategic navigation of organisational politics and sustained self-motivation. This adaptive posture reflects elements of Resilience Theory and Career Motivation Theory, both of which emphasise the role of internal psychological resources in sustaining career engagement within

structurally constrained environments.

Educational attainment constitutes a particularly significant personal factor. The majority of participants possess at least a Bachelor's degree, and many pursue postgraduate qualifications through self-funding in order to enhance their competitiveness for higher-level roles. This pattern reflects a broader trend across Sub-Saharan Africa, where women increasingly deploy higher education as a strategic mechanism to overcome structural gatekeeping and limited institutional sponsorship. However, as Ackah et al. (2024) caution, an overreliance on individual resilience risks shifting responsibility for advancement entirely onto women themselves. While personal agency can mitigate structural barriers, it does not substitute for institutional reform. When progression becomes contingent upon extraordinary effort rather than equitable systems, inequality is reproduced under the guise of merit.

Beyond institutional and personal determinants, socio-cultural expectations exert a substantial influence on women's career mobility. Participants consistently referenced the dual burden of professional responsibilities and domestic obligations. Junior staff in particular noted that childcare responsibilities and extended family expectations restrict their ability to accept transfers, attend prolonged training programmes or assume roles requiring geographic mobility.

This tension between the biological clock and the career clock represents a recurring theme in Ghanaian scholarship, where societal definitions of female success often prioritise marriage and motherhood alongside or above professional achievement.

Entrenched patriarchal norms also shape leadership selection processes. Participants described subtle but persistent assumptions that managerial authority is more naturally

aligned with male leadership. These unconscious biases create an organisational climate in which women must repeatedly demonstrate competence to counter implicit scepticism. Such conditions place women within a double bind, requiring them to exhibit assertiveness and ambition while simultaneously conforming to socially prescribed expectations of femininity.

These findings resonate with Bagilhole's (2016) analysis of male cultural hegemony within professional institutions and with Izquierdo and Fabra's (2024) discussion of the enduring glass ceiling in contemporary leadership structures. Within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly, socio-cultural norms therefore intersect with institutional practices to reinforce gendered hierarchies, even in the presence of formal equality provisions.

Overall, the interaction of institutional patronage, personal resilience and socio-cultural expectations constructs a layered system of influence over women's career trajectories. While statutory frameworks articulate merit-based progression, the convergence of informal power dynamics, adaptive survival strategies and entrenched gender norms sustains the policy–practice gap observed within the Assembly.

4.5.4 Strategies and Solutions Participants Propose to Enhance Career Progression Opportunities for Women in the Municipal Assembly

The findings for the final objective reveal a comprehensive suite of strategies aimed at dismantling the systemic, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers that define the “policy-practice gap” within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly. Participants emphasised interventions that shift the responsibility for career advancement from individual resilience to institutional accountability, aligning these recommendations with the formal mandates of the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) and the

meritocratic principles of Max Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy.

A key concern raised by participants was the lack of formal mentorship within the Assembly, which limits women's access to guidance and role models. To address this, they proposed the establishment of a structured mentorship framework, where senior female leaders provide technical, professional, and navigational support to junior staff. Such a framework would help women understand the organisation's Weberian hierarchy, offering essential "career insight" and fostering confidence in male-dominated settings.

This recommendation aligns with Section 63(4a) of Act 936, which charges the Head of the Local Government Service with providing leadership and guidance to ensure effective organisational functioning. Scholarly evidence, including Begashaw and Woldie (2022), supports the critical role of mentorship, highlighting that the absence of female role models continues to impede women's advancement in public administration across Sub-Saharan Africa. By institutionalising mentorship, the Assembly can cultivate a culture of knowledge transfer, support and empowerment that strengthens women's capacity for leadership.

Participants consistently recommended the establishment of transparent promotion criteria and clearly defined career ladders. Written and accessible guidelines were seen as essential for reducing the influence of "informal power structures" and arbitrary decision-making, thereby reinforcing the rational-legal authority envisaged in the Local Government Service.

Under Section 54(e) of Act 936, the Council is mandated to develop policies governing recruitment and promotion. Participants noted, however, that these guidelines are often

inadequately communicated at the municipal level. Aligning promotion practices with Weber's principle of technical competence, whereby advancement is based on objective qualifications rather than patronage, would create a fairer and more predictable environment. Begashaw and Woldie (2022) emphasise that merit-based processes are essential for countering subjective evaluations and discriminatory practices that women frequently encounter in public service settings. Implementing such transparency ensures that women can plan and pursue career progression with confidence and clarity.

Participants recognised that socio-cultural responsibilities, particularly those associated with family obligations, can constrain women's career mobility. They proposed flexible working arrangements and transfer deferment options to accommodate these responsibilities. Such "worker-friendly" policies are critical to retaining talented female staff who might otherwise face the so-called "motherhood penalty".

This recommendation is supported by Rogier and Padgett (2014), who show that flexible work schedules enable women to advance into senior roles by balancing domestic and professional demands. Implementing these measures encourages a shift from rigid Weberian presenteeism, which prioritises physical presence, towards a system that values adaptability, productivity, and outcomes.

This is particularly important for women managing the dual pressures of domestic duties and career aspirations, allowing them to contribute fully without being penalised for personal responsibilities.

A further critical strategy was the enforcement of affirmative action mechanisms, including gender-based targets for leadership roles and technical positions. Participants

emphasised that these measures are not intended to lower standards but to remove the historical “glass ceiling” that confines women to mid-level administrative roles.

This approach aligns with Ghana’s Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Act of 2024, which mandates gender-inclusive practices and minimum female representation in governance structures. Participants also recommended gender sensitisation workshops for management and supervisory staff to address unconscious biases that can override formal merit-based policies. By raising awareness and promoting equitable decision-making, such workshops help ensure that women are considered for leadership roles on the basis of competence and potential rather than gendered assumptions.

Overall, the strategies proposed reflect a dual approach. On one hand, structural reforms such as transparent promotion systems, structured mentorship, flexible work arrangements, and affirmative action are necessary to enforce the statutory standards of Act 936 and provide genuine opportunities for women’s advancement. On the other hand, cultural changes within the Assembly are equally important to recognise and support women’s leadership as integral to organisational effectiveness.

These findings reinforce Resilience Theory and Career Motivation Theory, illustrating that while individual effort and persistence are essential, they must be supported by institutional structures that provide guidance, opportunity, and fairness. By combining structural reforms with cultural sensitisation, the Municipal Assembly can bridge the “policy-practice gap,” empower women leaders, and enhance overall organisational efficiency and effectiveness.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the key findings, draws conclusions based on the results, and offers recommendations for enhancing career progression among women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study explored the career progression of women within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly, framed by Max Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy and the regulatory provisions of the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936). The investigation focused on the lived experiences of female staff, the institutional and socio-cultural factors influencing career advancement, and strategies to enhance women's participation in leadership roles.

Socio-Demographic and Institutional Profile:

The workforce in the Assembly is predominantly mature and experienced, yet there is clear evidence of vertical and horizontal occupational segregation. Notably, 68% of female participants occupy junior or administrative positions, while only 8% have attained managerial roles, including "Head of Unit" status. This distribution highlights persistent structural barriers limiting upward mobility for women despite their qualifications and experience.

Objective 1: Lived Experiences of Career Progression

Participants reported a significant "policy-practice gap", where the formal provisions of Section 54 of Act 936 and the Scheme of Service are inadequately implemented at

the municipal level. Junior staff described a lack of task allocation, induction, and career guidance, which contributed to early-career stagnation.

Senior staff noted that their own career progression relied more on personal resilience and initiative than on structured institutional support.

Objective 2: Factors Influencing Career Advancement

Educational attainment emerged as a key driver of career mobility, with 60% of participants holding a Bachelor's degree. However, progression for these qualified women is often constrained by informal power networks and unconscious bias, as acknowledged by the HR Officer, which can override the merit-based, gender-neutral policies of the Local Government Service Council (LGSC). Additionally, socio-cultural expectations, particularly, the “biological clock vs. career clock” dilemma limit women's ability to accept transfers, undertake training, or pursue career-enhancing assignments. These factors collectively hinder the realisation of gender equality in leadership within the Assembly.

Objective 3: Strategies for Enhancement

Participants emphasised that improving women's career progression does not require new legislation, but rather the effective enforcement of existing protocols. Key strategies include:

1. The institutionalisation of mentorship frameworks, as outlined under Section 63 of Act 936, to provide structured guidance and support from senior female leaders.
2. The dissemination of LGS promotion manuals and guidelines to ensure transparency, reduce perceptions of favouritism, and provide clear pathways for advancement.

3. Promotion of family-friendly and flexible working arrangements to accommodate socio-cultural responsibilities without penalising career progression.
4. Implementation of affirmative action measures and gender sensitisation workshops to address unconscious bias and promote a culture that recognises women's leadership potential.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that the career progression of women within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal Assembly is marked by a significant policy-practice gap. While the Assembly operates under the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) and the Local Government Service (LGS) protocols, which provide clear, merit-based guidelines for recruitment, training, and promotion, the actual upward mobility of female staff remains inconsistent and limited.

A key finding is that the glass ceiling persists not because of a lack of formal frameworks, but due to systemic institutional inertia and the failure to fully implement existing structures. Under Section 54 of Act 936, the Local Government Service Council (LGSC) is mandated to develop policy guidelines for recruitment and promotion, while the Office of the Head of the Local Government Service (OHLGS) is responsible for guidance and leadership. However, participants reported that these formal Weberian protocols are often undermined by informal power networks and unconscious biases. The Auditor General's (2019) report, indicating a promotion rate of less than 5 per cent for eligible women, demonstrates that the rational-legal authority of the LGS is not fully realised at the municipal level due to a lack of transparency and bureaucratic delays.

The study also found that female absence in technical departments such as Works, Physical Planning, and Statistics reflects horizontal segregation. While recruitment patterns contribute to this, the disparity is largely due to the educational backgrounds of female staff, who predominantly hold degrees in administrative and social sciences rather than STEM-based qualifications required for these roles. This shows that career progression is affected not only by promotion systems but also by the mismatch between existing qualifications and the technical requirements of the hierarchy.

Regarding professional development, the LGS already provides a robust training framework through the Institute of Local Government Studies (ILGS) and the mandates of the OHLGS under Section 63 of Act 936. However, participants' expressed need for training suggests that these resources are not being fully used to address the unique work-life challenges and dual-role pressures faced by female staff.

Ultimately, the study concludes that individual resilience and ambition alone are insufficient for genuine career advancement within the current organisational culture. Achieving gender parity in leadership requires a shift from survivalist individual effort to institutional accountability, which includes proper enforcement of LGS promotion manuals, targeted use of ILGS training for female staff, and a cultural adjustment that moves beyond strict Weberian presenteeism to accommodate the socio-cultural realities of women's dual professional and domestic roles.

5.3 Recommendations

To bridge the policy-practice gap identified in this study, the following recommendations target existing institutional structures.

1. Leveraging the University of Local Government and Development (ULGD) for Technical Integration. Municipal Management and the Office of the Head of the

Local Government Service (OHLGS) must proactively sponsor female staff for specialized degree and professional programs at the University of Local Government and Development (ULGD) in Akomadan

2. The HR Department should conduct sensitisation workshops to distribute the LGS Scheme of Service and existing promotion guidelines to all female staff. Clear and accessible information will remove perceptions of favouritism and informal power networks, restoring merit-based promotion as the primary avenue for career progression.
3. The Western North Regional Co-ordinating Council (RCC) must use its authority under Section 188 of Act 936 to monitor promotion practices within the Municipal Assembly. Oversight should focus on addressing the reported 5% promotion rate, investigating bureaucratic delays, and providing back-stopping support to ensure local implementation aligns with national standards and preserves the Weberian hierarchy.
4. The Office of the Head of the Local Government Service (OHLGS) should issue a formal mentorship framework integrated into annual performance appraisals. Pairing senior female leaders with junior staff will provide the necessary “career insight” to navigate institutional politics. This aligns with the Head of Service’s responsibility to offer guidance and leadership in the performance of the Service’s functions.
5. Departmental Heads should move away from strict Weberian presenteeism and adopt an output-based evaluation approach. Using flexibility already provided under LGS conditions of service, they should allow transfer deferments or adjustable working hours for female staff managing domestic responsibilities. This ensures that high-performing women are not lost due to the “biological

clock vs. career clock” challenge, and supports a workforce-sensitive institutional culture.

5.4 Areas for further studies

1. Future research should examine how effectively Ghana’s Affirmative Action Act of 2024 is being implemented in Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs). Studies should assess whether the Act’s gender-inclusive targets are successfully breaking the glass ceiling and increasing women’s representation in senior management and decision-making positions.
2. Research is needed to explore the causes of this horizontal segregation, including the influence of STEM-based qualifications, recruitment practices, and the traditionally male-dominated culture of these departments.
3. Future studies should compare the impact of formal mentorship frameworks under Section 63 of Act 936 with existing informal practices to see if structured mentorship improves career insight and promotion rates for junior staff.
4. Further research should examine how factors such as marital status, age, ethnicity, and rural-urban location interact to influence women’s career progression and resilience. Understanding these intersections would provide insights into why some women advance while others experience persistent stagnation.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

(One-on-one and focus group participants)

Dear Participants,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on the career progression of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal. Your insights are invaluable in contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities women encounter in their professional journeys within the municipal context.

Section A: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants

- Age: _____
- Marital Status: _____
- Number of Dependents: _____
- Highest Level of Education Attained: _____
- Total Years of Work Experience: _____
- Department/Unit: _____
- Job Title/Position: _____

Section B: Nature of Career Progression

1. How do you perceive the concept of career progression, and what does it mean to you personally?
2. Can you provide an overview of your career journey within the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal, highlighting key milestones and transitions?
3. Can you describe any specific challenges or successes you've encountered in your career advancement within the municipal setting?

4. In your opinion, what factors contribute to the nature of career progression for women in this context?

Section C: Factors Influencing Career Progression

1. From your perspective, what are the key factors influencing the career progression of women in the Sefwi Wiawso Municipal?
2. Have you personally experienced or observed any gender-specific challenges or biases that may impact career advancement?
3. How important do you think mentorship and networking are for career growth in this municipal setting?
4. Are there any organizational policies or practices that you believe either facilitate or hinder the career progression of women?

Section D: Enhancing Career Progression

1. Based on your experiences, what do you think could be done to enhance the career progression opportunities for women in this municipal setting?
2. Are there specific training or development programs that you believe would be beneficial for women's career growth?
3. How can the organizational culture be improved to better support the career aspirations of women?
4. In your opinion, what role can leadership and management play in fostering an environment conducive to the career progression of women?

Thank you for your time and input.

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide for the HR Officer

Section A: Background Information

1. What is your current role in the Assembly, and how long have you served in this position?
2. What responsibilities do you hold regarding staff development and promotion?

Section B: Recruitment and Promotion Practices

3. Could you briefly describe the procedures used for recruiting and promoting staff within the Assembly?
4. Are there written policies that guide promotion and career advancement in the Assembly? If yes, can you explain how they are applied?
5. What qualifications or criteria are generally required for promotion, and are these communicated clearly to staff?
6. Based on your observation, are there any disparities in promotion rates between male and female staff? If so, what do you think contributes to these disparities?
7. Have there been any specific interventions or programs aimed at supporting women's career growth within the Assembly?

Section C: Training and Professional Development

8. What types of training or capacity-building programmes are available for staff?
9. Are there records of female staff participation in such programmes over the past five years?
10. Has the Assembly organized mentorship or coaching initiatives for female staff?
If no, are there plans to introduce any?

Section E: Institutional Support and Challenges

11. What are some institutional or administrative challenges that may hinder women's career progression in the Assembly?
12. Are there flexible policies (e.g., maternity leave, work-life balance support) that consider the needs of female employees?
13. From your perspective, what can be done to improve career advancement opportunities for female staff within the Assembly?

