

# A Case Study on Women in Leadership Positions at National Irrigation Administration - Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (NIA - UPRIIS) Head Office

JOSEPH PAOLO A GERONIMO<sup>1</sup>, NOEL T. FLORENCONDA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student, Graduate School, Master of Engineering Management, Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, Cabanatuan City, Philippines

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Graduate School, Master of Engineering Management, Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, Cabanatuan City, Philippines

*Abstract—The working landscape in today’s world put forth a more diverse feature of human resources and governing leaders to certain degree that a functioning organization is no longer just a man’s game. Nevertheless, competing in this challenging environment is not something that is very easy to accomplish. From experienced women leaders who have been making strides in this debate for years gone by to the upcoming young talent looking to make a serious impact, women in leadership still face numerous challenges. The first and most evident challenge is that most of the people in the room are men. However, this creates an opportunity for women to stand out and create a long-lasting impression from the off. A scenario that appears time and time again revolves around building a supportive network in a space where males dominate tantamount to a case study being held on women in leadership positions at the National Irrigation Administration – Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (NIA – UPRIIS) Head Office. Though seemingly unconventional with the other agencies being spearheaded by women at the top posts of the agency, women have somehow penetrated superiority hence female representation was visible through its commitment, integrity, and professionalism towards providing efficient, effective, and sustainable irrigation services aimed towards the highest satisfaction of its stakeholders and farmer-clienteles. However, having it been the case of equally distributed number of employees throughout the core and support functions of the irrigation agency, majority of women embody the*

*aspirations on improving and sustaining operations from the support functions rather from those of the core which involves most of the organization’s objectives such as the development and maintenance of irrigation systems in support of the agricultural program of the government along with the planning, constructing, operating, and preserving irrigation systems consistent with integrated water resource management principles to improve agricultural productivity and increase farmers’ income. Conclusively, women continue to aspire for leadership positions in all spheres of governance in both the public and private sector; though dedication is immeasurable as to fulfilling their duties and obligations within their mandates are acknowledge, their willingness to impose conviction and break gender stereotypes and gender-based opportunity barriers being reflected upon their knowledge, strength, and competence are supplemental to assert their representation with every aspects of the organization whether for a supervisory profession of leadership position.*

*Indexed Terms—Female Leadership, Gender Diversity, Gender Representation, Irrigation Agency*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Studies on leadership gained relevance as patterns from the successes and failures embedded within the style of former leaders tend to mold the trend for leading an organization and dealing with its functions towards meeting targets and goals along with

resolving problems and conflicts within their authority. Throughout the ages, leadership has been defined in a manner on how leaders manifest the capacity to lead and how they maximize efforts through social influence in accomplishing their goals and embodying their aspirations.

Physical attributes and innate characteristics contribute to the establishing roles of a person in the society thus during early times, power is reflected upon employing strength and inducing fear which then evolved into exuding charisma and amplifying social influences. Yet, the hallmarks that comprises a convincing leader still rooted upon the conventional and traditional representation of a leader as it necessarily requires a certain one e.g., gender of which often delineated and portrayed by men.

Nevertheless, women have taken a leap within the range of opportunities and appointments over time that are mostly entitled to men initiating a constant debate towards gender equality as competence, expertise, and excellence brought essentiality and conveyed priority upon decision-making and agenda-setting at all levels. Though occurring issues and interchanging conversations globally still yet to be assessed and analyzed whether the under-representation of women in leadership positions and inequality in privileges with basis of gender prevails in most of organizations today.

National Irrigation Administration (NIA) is a male-dominated government-owned and controlled corporation (GOCC). Being an agency in line with agriculture, most of its employees are male, with female usually doing office works. However, there are still those female employees who have climbed their way into the hierarchy.

This paper aims to study women in leadership positions at NIA, specifically at Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (UPRIIS) Head Office.

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Hutchinson, J., Walker, E., & McKenzie, F. H. (2014) concurred that by applying critical gender analysis to the data collected from 21 second tier senior women

managers about their perceptions and experiences of leadership within the sector, as well as their aspirations for an appointment at the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) levels of Western Australian (WA) local government: gender and specifically masculinity emerges as a significant and valued leadership attribute. While this analysis is not unique to local government, what sets the sector apart is its apparent disinterest in examining the reasons for, or the impacts of this continued leadership stereotype when at the same time Australian public and private institutions are challenging these traditional leadership models.

They further pointed out the fundamental weaknesses in the formal power structures and processes of local government that support deeply embedded biases about leadership. Perhaps the most significant contributor to these outcomes that emerged from the study is the apparent unencumbered power of Mayors and elected members over all aspects of CEO employment, especially recruitment.

They also cited that both scholarly and popular literature present persistent representations of leadership as a gender-neutral activity, but fail to convincingly explain why women are absent from leadership roles throughout public domains. Yet, over the past three decades there has been a significant body of research exploring this topic. The key themes emerging from this research are the gendered nature of leadership (Schein 1976; Kanter 1977; Sinclair 2013), gendered leadership styles (Eagly and Johnson 1990; Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2003), women in male dominated work cultures (Maddock and Parkin 1994; Alvesson and Billing 1997), women in leadership (Marshall 1984; Eagly and Carli 2007) and career development and progression (de Vries 2010).

While research indicates that each of these is a separate aspect for analysis, in combination, they provide a lens through which it is apparent that, rather than being gender neutral, concepts and practices of leadership are embedded in a variety of social interactions which shape ideas of gender and leadership. Recent research has attributed much of the resilience of these gendered concepts of leadership to what has been termed as either implicit or unconscious bias (Eagly and Karau 2002; Ridgeway and Corell 2004; Genat, Wood and Sojo 2012). The concept of

unconscious bias refers to cognitive processes and knowledge that motivate or influence an individual's actions or responses to different situations or groups without the person being aware of them. These 'subliminal' responses can include judgments and decisions about a social group's competencies or fitness for different types of work or roles based on very limited or relevant knowledge. In their meta-analysis of 117 studies that compared men and women who were equally matched on all criteria, other than gender, Genat et al. (2012) found that women were consistently assessed as being inferior to their male colleagues in areas such as professional competence, leadership ability and agentic qualities.

Atwater, Brett, Waldman et al. (2004) and Eveline (2005) noted that while the gendering of work persists, and leadership remains largely a male construct, women leaders and those aspiring to leadership, need to negotiate the feminine and the masculine, an issue that men never face. As leaders they are required to demonstrate those qualities associated with normative masculinized leadership, while simultaneously presenting culturally defined behaviors such as solace and support: '...women are measured by two yardsticks – how as women they carry out their management role, and how as managers they lived up to the images of womanhood' (Kanter 1977: 161). The capacity to be available at all times continues to dominate criteria for leadership development and appointment.

Collinson and Collinson (1995) further expressed that as women still undertake the vast bulk of caring and domestic duties, they may find it difficult to meet this requirement. Similarly Simpson (1998) found that 'presenteeism (the tendency to stay at work beyond the time needed) was being used as a visible sign of commitment to an organization and a demonstration of leadership. Simpson (1998: 37) concluded: 'Such presenteeism was found to be gendered: it is associated with a competitive masculine culture . . . and it imposes heavy costs on women as they attempt to meet the conflicting demands of work and home.' Further, where their availability is not in question, women run the risk of not living up to 'images of womanhood' (Kanter 1977: 161). Thus, leadership remains a contested space where women's presence is notable because they are not male (Eagly and Karau

2002; Eveline 2005). Therefore, women who occupy leadership positions represent an aberration of sorts.

It is also expounded that overwhelmingly, in local government, women occupy traditional female roles of support and emotions management (administration, human resources, community services and stakeholder engagement), while men are located in those jobs that are highly technical, visible and influential (engineering, finance and planning) (Gibbs 2013; Pini and McDonald 2008). The career pathways for local government CEOs appear to rarely include feminized roles, even when held at a manager level (Fox and Broussine 2001; Diamond 2008). Further, in a culture that allocates work and authority on the basis of gender stereotypes, the traditional role of women as carers also impacts on concepts of leadership. Such is the nature of local government that much of the interaction between elected members, the community and senior management takes place outside normal working hours, leading to a common view that women will be unable to easily participate and therefore unable to fulfil the time commitments of a CEO.

Conclusively, the literature would suggest that the issue of leadership in local government is still highly gendered and there would appear to be barriers, both actual and perceived, that women face if they aspire to apply for a leadership position.

- *About NIA-UPRIIS*

The National Irrigation Administration (NIA) is a government-owned and controlled corporation primarily responsible for irrigation development and management. Its mandate is to provide irrigation services to the farmer-clienteles and stakeholders its serves to improve agricultural productivity and increase farmer's income.

Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (UPRIIS) is an Integrated Irrigation Systems Office of the agency that supplies irrigation water to most part of the Province of Nueva Ecija and portions of Bulacan, Pampanga, and Tarlac. It draws out irrigation water from Pantabangan Dam and other National Irrigation Systems (NIS). The dam was established in 1974, providing efficient irrigation services to more than 150,000 hectares of agricultural lands in Central Luzon.

The UPRIIS Head Office provides the overall supervision of the operations & maintenance of the irrigation systems, covering six (6) division offices including Interim Division VI, as well as the construction of irrigation projects, and restoration and rehabilitation of existing irrigation systems. In line with these functions, the Irrigators' Associations (IAs) are considered as valued partners. The distribution and control of irrigation from its main source, the Pantabangan Dam, down to the lowest irrigation area are being efficiently taken care of at various levels.

Throughout the years of its public service as one of the government agencies under the National Irrigation Administration, the NIA UPRIIS has been led by a total of eleven (11) Department Managers, eight (8) of which are men and only three (3) are women including the present one.

This research focused on the assessment of women in leadership positions at the National Irrigation Administration – Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems Head Office. Specifically, this aimed to answer the following questions, to wit:

- What is the percentage of men and women currently employed within NIA-UPRIIS Head Office?

Accordingly, what is the percentage of women assuming a leadership position?

- What is the percentage of men and women under the core and support functions of the agency?

Correspondingly, to which function does most women are involved and most likely acquire an utmost authority?

- What is the nature of work designation and distinction of position usually held by the current female leaders of the agency?

The purpose of this study entailed the assessment of the current status of women upholding the duties and responsibilities appointed to a leadership position comprising the management of the NIA – Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (UPRIIS) Head Office. It further encompassed the necessity to initiate the relevance of discussing and gauging the present condition of female leadership in the organization. Hence, the outcome may also attend

to certain concerns and cater definite obligations, commitment, and compliance within the grounds of gender and development plans and programs implementation.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. *Research Design*

The study incorporated a mixed method of research, wherein both qualitative and quantitative approach shall be administered in determining and analyzing the problems encountered relevant to the aspect of analyzing the represented population of female employees at NIA – Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (UPRIIS) Head Office in comparison to male, and further identifying the leadership positions currently enacted by women throughout the said irrigation agency spearheading its attached division offices.

The methodology being presented involved majority of its concepts on finding the corresponding interpretations within numerical data gathered from the existing organization framework of the agency. Moreover, the technique of data gathering shall be structured thus the researcher has chosen a quantitative approach for the study. On the other hand, to further study and describe the significance of female representation, the research is suited for a descriptive approach intervention.

Therefore, descriptive quantitative research is fitted to the study considering the outline of the data collection advantage on which produces a substantial information and data that can be utilized for future research or even developing a hypothesis of a research object. Additionally, the quality and integrity of data is secured through conduct of the research in coordination with the authority and relevant members of the organization that were designated to assist within data provision in an appropriate and lawful manner thus securing confidentiality to avoid the occurrences of any conflict.

#### B. *Research Locale*

The study focused on the vicinity to where the National Irrigation Administration – Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (NIA – UPRIIS) Head Office Administration Building and its

appurtenant offices at Maharlika Highway, Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija is located; catering a total of 136 employees including one (1) Department Manager, three (3) Division Managers, and six (6) Section Heads.

*C. Population and Sampling*

Inasmuch as the researcher identified the population to be the employees of the National Irrigation Administration – Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (NIA – UPRIIS) Head Office particularly women in leadership positions of the said irrigation agency and found out that the target samples are few in number, they were all sampled for data gathering.

*D. Research Instrument*

The researcher utilized the gathered data from the consolidated reports and unified information comprising identification and categorization of the employees under National Irrigation Administration – Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (NIA – UPRIIS) Head Office i.e., Personnel Strength as instruments for the case study accordingly.

*E. Data Collection*

The data were collected upon communication and coordination with the authority under the National Irrigation Administration – Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (NIA – UPRIIS) Head Office primarily responsible for the preparation, integration, and filing of necessary documents and records legally available for public review with acknowledgement from the top management upon extraction of such data subject for assessment in view of the in-progress case study.

*F. Data Analysis*

Throughout the duration of the ongoing case study, the researcher used the descriptive method of analysis in characterizing and interpreting the gathered data as being provided with corresponding summaries substantiating the above-said scrutinized data and information.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Data

Table 1. It can be distinguished from the tabulation further based from the Personnel Strength Report of the Personnel and Records Unit of NIA-UPRIIS Head Office for the period ending the 4th quarter of 2023 that within 136 employees under the National Irrigation Administration – Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (NIA – UPRIIS) Head Office, 71 (52.21%) personnel are male while 65 (47.79%) are female. This minor difference signified corresponding representation for both gender and the current leaders of the organization evidently overseeing a gender diverse agency performing obligations and duties towards assigned section and/or unit. Among 136 employees from the NIA – UPRIIS Head Office, only 48 personnel hold a permanent position upon which there were equal distribution of gender for employees given their permanent appointment after having passed civil service eligibility with 24 male and female performing the necessary designation based on their sworn obligation and work description. This further presented a diverse slate of candidates for leadership roles as each gender was being represented correspondingly with the fundamental position needed to be filled out and acted upon in an organization. Meanwhile, a seemingly almost equivalent number of employees under casual positions occurred along with 35 (50.72%) of the currently 69 total counts of casual employees were male while 34 (49.28%) were female. This demonstrated the aspirational goals of the agency for the proportion of women in leadership roles as these people who might just be on an as-needed basis, to meet agency's staffing needs during peak operation periods; still expressed a balanced gender representation. Lastly, Job-Order personnel who were hired for a piece of work or intermittent job of short duration not exceeding six months and pay is on a daily or hourly basis revealed 12 out of 19 (63.16%) were male and only 7 (36.84%) were female at the time the research case study was conducted.

Gender	All Employees	Permanent	Casual	Job Order
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	No.	%	N o.	%	N o.	%	N o.	%
Male	71	52.21	24	50.00	35	50.72	12	63.16
Female	65	47.79	24	50.00	34	49.28	7	36.84
Total	136	100.00	48	100.00	69	100.00	19	100.00

Table 2. The table manifested a significant representation of women in leadership positions with female leaders performing principal functions of the agency as most of them were on the top posts in the organization. In this case, women have internalized a leadership identity and developed a sense of purpose assuming the duties and obligations of overall supervision, monitoring, and directorship of the agency’s mission, vision, and goals in addition to being acknowledged for their commitment and dedication as reflected upon the awards and recognition given by the Top Management. This also addressed the indicated problem from the previous manifestation of the case study to which further showed and recognized that women were also capable of contributing even on tasks that were stereotypically entitled to men such as in this case the planning, constructing, operating, and maintaining irrigation systems consistent with integrated water resource management principles to improve agricultural productivity and increase farmer’s income which are the foremost aim and purpose of establishing an irrigation agency most especially on an agriculturally-reliant areas. Even from its formative years, those position/designation currently attributed to men were antecedently handled by women which implied that as a person’s leadership capabilities grow and opportunities to demonstrate them expand, high-profile, challenging assignments and other organizational endorsements become more likely. Such affirmation gives the person the fortitude to step outside a comfort zone and experiment with unfamiliar behaviors and new ways of exercising leadership.

No.	Gender	Position/ Designation	Office
1	Female	Acting Department Manager A	Office of the Department Manager

2	Female	Division Manager A	Engineering and Operations Division (E.O.D.)
3	Male	Division Manager A	Administrative and Finance Division (AdFin)
4	Male	Principal Engineer C / Section Chief	Engineering Section (E.O.D.)
5	Male	Principal Engineer C / Section Chief	Operations Section (E.O.D.)
6	Female	Institutional Development Section Chief	Institutional Development Section (E.O.D.)
7	Male	Principal Engineer C / Section Chief	Equipment Management Section (E.O.D.)
8	Female	Administrative Officer / Section Chief	Administrative Section (AdFin)
9	Female	Chief Corporate Accountant B / Section Chief	Finance Section (AdFin)

Table 3. It is indicated in the table below that there was balanced distribution of employees whose duties and responsibilities are associated with the core and support functions of the agency. This further implied a balanced workload distribution which then ensured that each employee’s skills and abilities, regardless of their gender, are optimally utilized. By matching tasks with individual strengths, employees can work more efficiently and produce higher-quality outcomes. Though inasmuch as the gender representation is concerned between those engaged under core functions, 48 personnel (70.59%) of the 68 employees were male while 20 (29.41%) of them are female. While the gender gap in today’s workforce is slowly trending in the right direction, many women still find themselves working in male-dominated environments relevant to this case. Being a woman in these settings often brings unique challenges, and those who want to

advance their careers continue to face bigger roadblocks than their male counterparts. These challenges are connected and essential to the development and maintenance of irrigation systems in support of the agricultural program of the government and providing adequate level of irrigation service on a sustainable basis in partnership with the farmers and local government units. The case also suggested that more women with 45 personnel (66.18%) were currently comprising the support functions than men with 23 employees (33.82%). Analysis has shown that women in senior leadership are largely stuck in support functions, majority of which entrusted to provide technical assistance to institutions in the development of water resources for irrigation and improve and sustain the operation of NIA as a viable corporation and service-oriented agency; not moving into key operating roles despite most of them were presently holding the top management positions of the agency.

Gender	Core Functions		Support Functions	
	No.	%	No.	%
Male	48	70.59	23	33.82
Female	20	29.41	45	66.18
Total	68	100.00	68	100.00

**CONCLUSION**

Committed to provide efficient, effective, and sustainable irrigation services aimed towards the highest satisfaction of the Filipino farmers and striving for the attainment of their strategic themes of Technical and Operational Excellence, and Good Governance through Partnership with the farmers and other relevant interested parties, the National Irrigation Administration – Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (NIA – UPRIIS) Head Office has been able to establish a gender-diverse organization most importantly a breakthrough of comprising the leadership positions with female representation as the two superior management positions were being assumed by women.

At the expanse of emerging tremendous strides for greater gender equality while enhancing the need to close the gender wage gap, organizations have a responsibility to create better policies and opportunities for women. Still, at the same time, women also need support to step forward and overcome the habits holding them back such as the stereotypes that hinders them from assuming an unimaginable number from core functions such as with engineering, operations, institutional development, and equipment management of the agency.

**RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the evaluation on the case study of women in leadership positions at the National Irrigation Administration – Upper Pampanga River Integrated Irrigation Systems (NIA – UPRIIS) Head Office, the following recommendations are put forth to enhance efficiency and effectivity of their performance building a more conducive and innovative approach on the issue of gender-based leaderships throughout every organization:

- Conduct seminar-trainings that shall tackle the foundation of a positive organizational culture equivalent to a gender-equal environment where all employees feel respected and valued creates an overall positive workplace. This gender-diverse culture may help the employees notice that their coworkers have talents and strengths they don't possess. Appreciation for these differences can help promote respect.
- Establish a clear job performance evaluation criterion which shall provide a more substantial and warranted representation of the employee's competence regardless of their gender to further assess who most likely possess a characteristic of being a leader and therefore qualified for a managerial position.
- Invest on accrediting programs and activities that shall further boost gender and development actively coached on career advancement. Senior leaders must ensure that emerging women leaders are given the same opportunities as their male counterparts to showcase their abilities, stretch their roles, network with senior leaders, and promote their visibility at the executive level.

- Implement exploration of features embedded within diverse leadership styles. Understanding the various ways in which men and women work, communicate, and lead is a critical step in promoting and achieving gender parity. Incorporating and encouraging those differences provides strength and flexibility to an organization's leadership, and that diversity of thought can promote organizational success.

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