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**PUBLIC RELATION STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS GENDER GAPS IN
INDUSTRIAL PARK DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS (IPDC) IN
ETHIOPIA: ENHANCING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN
LEADERSHIP ROLES**

**A Thesis submitted to Addis Ababa University, School of Journalism and
Communication in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Art in public Relations and strategic communication**

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June 2024.

Approval

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This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Mahlet Shibabaw entitled Public “Relation Strategies to address gender gaps in Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDC) in Ethiopia: Enhancing Women's Representation in Leadership Roles” submitted to the College of Humanities Language Studies, journalism, and communication in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Public Relations and Strategic Communication. It complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards concerning originality and quality.

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Declaration

I declare that this research project, titled "**Public Relation Strategies to address gender gaps in Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDC) in Ethiopia: Enhancing Women's Representation in Leadership Roles**," is entirely my work. I further confirm that this thesis has not been submitted either in part or full to any other higher learning institution to earn any degree.

Mahlet Shibabaw Signature _____

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Abstract

This thesis examines the application of public relations strategies to tackle gender disparities within Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) in Ethiopia, specifically focusing on enhancing women's representation in leadership roles. Globally, IPDCs play pivotal roles in economic development, yet they often exhibit significant gender imbalances in leadership positions, despite women's substantial contributions. This study employs a qualitative research approach to investigate effective PR strategies designed to mitigate these disparities. Emphasizing advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and organizational culture transformation, the research aims to identify and recommend practical approaches for IPDCs to create inclusive environments conducive to women's leadership. By addressing systemic barriers and promoting gender equality within IPDCs, this research seeks to contribute to more equitable and sustainable industrial park development in Ethiopia, aligning with broader efforts to achieve gender parity and inclusive economic growth.

List of Acronyms/ Abbreviations

IPDC – Industrial Park Development Corporation

IPs- industrial parks

PR – public relations

UNCTAD - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

WEF – World Economic Forum

UNDP- United Nations Development Program

UN Woman - United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

EIC – Ethiopia Investment Commission

ETIDI - Ethiopian Textile Industry Development Institute

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

CSR – corporate social responsibilities

EWLA - Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association

KPIs – key performance indicator

CSOs- civil society organization

NGOs - Non-governmental organization

ILO – International Labor Organization

IFC- International Finance Corporation

FDI – foreign direct investment

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Chapter one: background of the study

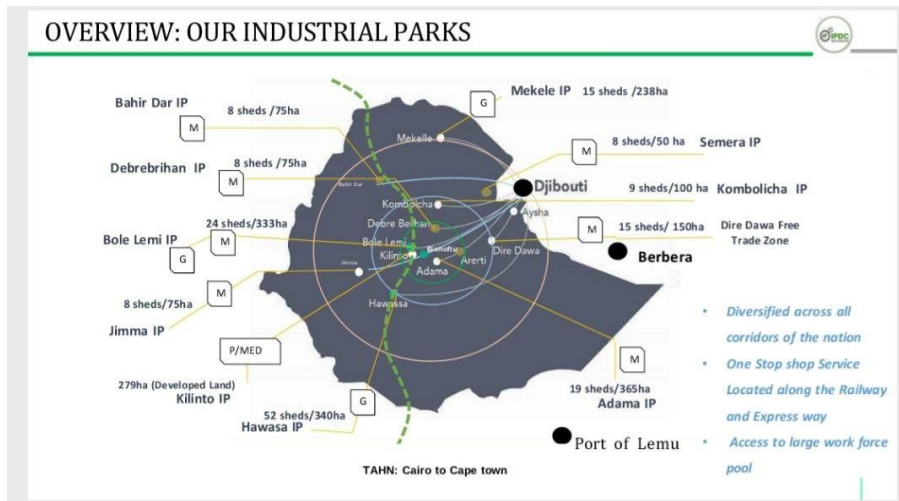
1.1. Background of the study

Public relations (PR) strategies play a crucial role in advancing gender equality within Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) and broader industrial development initiatives. By utilizing communication channels, engaging stakeholders, and advocating for change, PR can effectively raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and foster an inclusive environment supportive of women in the industrial sector (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Botan & Taylor, 2004).

PR functions as a reflection of an organization's self-perception in terms of image, reputation, and relationships with stakeholders. Through strategic communication practices, organizations enhance their strategic awareness and influence stakeholders to embrace their messages and values. This role is pivotal in advocating for perspectives that contribute to building a more inclusive and gender-balanced society (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Botan & Taylor, 2004).

Established in 2014 as a public enterprise with strong governmental backing, the Industrial Parks Development Corporation (IPDC) serves as a catalyst for rapid industrialization in Ethiopia. IPDC nurtures manufacturing industries, drives economic transformation, and attracts both domestic and foreign investors, managing approximately 125 companies across 13 parks nationwide: Adama, Debre Birhan, Jimma, Semara, Hawassa, Bahir Dar, Mekele, Bole Lemi, Kilinto, Arerti, Kombolcha, Dire Dawa, and Addis Industry Village .

Figure 1 location of IPs in Ethiopia



Source: IPDC

Since the 1960s, industrial parks have played a pivotal role in promoting industrialization and economic restructuring in numerous countries worldwide. Industrial parks facilitate the optimal integration of resources within a defined spatial scope, particularly beneficial for developing nations with limited production factors. By attracting both labor and capital-intensive domestic and foreign investments in manufacturing and service sectors, industrial parks contribute to increasing local wages, enhancing skills, and creating job opportunities (Amado, 1989; Zeng, 2015).

Moreover, industrial parks serve as gateways to global value chains, engaging in international competition and leveraging comparative advantages to modernize industrial structures. This strategic positioning enhances a nation's global economic standing and strengthens its participation in the global division of labor, highlighting the widespread popularity and effectiveness of industrial park economies worldwide (UNCTAD, 2015; Farole, 2011).

Ethiopia has prioritized industrial development as a cornerstone of its structural transformation agenda, aiming to emerge as a manufacturing powerhouse not only in Africa but also globally. This industrialization drive is expected to sustain Ethiopia's recent economic growth momentum by fostering economic expansion, diversification, and modernization (UNCTAD, 2015).

However, gender inequality remains a persistent challenge in workplaces globally, including within Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) in Ethiopia. Despite initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality, women continue to encounter barriers to advancement and representation in leadership roles within these organizations. This research focuses on exploring existing public relation strategies targeted at addressing gender gaps in Ethiopian IPDCs and identifying effective approaches to promote gender equality (Amado, 1989; Zeng, 2015).

The disparities in labor market outcomes between genders in Ethiopia are exacerbated by multiple factors. The economy struggles to generate sufficient jobs to accommodate the expanding labor force, leading to high unemployment rates, particularly among women. When employed, women often occupy low-skilled, low-productivity positions due to gender segregation, cultural and familial obligations, and disparities in human capital (Abegaz & Nene, 2023; Mulugeta, 2021). This limited participation in the formal labor market is a primary driver of gender disparities in employment and earnings.

Furthermore, women in Ethiopia face significant wage and productivity gaps, being predominantly segregated into low-paying firms (Abegaz & Nene, 2023). Research by Berga and Abdisa (2022) highlights a substantial wage disparity of 62.7%, influenced by factors such as age, occupation, wealth, marital status, education, religion, and household headship.

Despite some progress, recent global reports, such as the 2023 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2023), continue to underscore significant gender gaps in Ethiopia. The country ranks 75th out of 146 countries overall, placing 13th in sub-Saharan Africa. The report reveals disparities in economic participation and opportunities (116th) and educational attainment (135th), despite relatively better performance in survival and health categories.

In industrial settings like those governed by the Industrial Parks Development Corporation (IPDC) in Ethiopia, women, predominantly young and from rural areas, hold low-skilled, low-paid positions. The focus in these settings is often on work procedures and conduct codes, with minimal guidance on overcoming cultural and workplace challenges (UNDP, 2018). Women are disproportionately represented in low-skill production roles, with decreasing representation as

jobs require higher skill levels, such as in chemical, pharmaceutical, textile, and apparel industries (UNDP, 2018).

Industrial parks in Ethiopia, including major ones like Hawassa, Bole Lemi, and Eastern, have been pivotal in generating new jobs, with a notable 80% of these positions filled by women in recent years (CEPHEUS, 2019). However, challenges persist due to limited educational and training opportunities for women, coupled with cultural norms that prioritize women's caregiving roles over workforce participation.

Moving forward, addressing these challenges requires evidence-based and gender-sensitive interventions. Public relations strategies, specifically tailored to mitigate gender gaps within industrial park development corporations, present a promising avenue for fostering gender equality and inclusive economic development. However, there remains a notable gap in literature outlining these strategies, underscoring the need for comprehensive research and recommendations in this area.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Gender gaps in these industrial park development corporations continue to be hindrances to women's full participation and their ability to compete and advance within the Ethiopian workforce. Although there has been growing global attention to the discourse on gender equality and economic development, especially in Ethiopia, these gaps continue to persist and hinder the vision of achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development goals. While there has been significant scholarly attention on the challenges women face within the industrial parks, one neglected area of study is how strategic and effective PR strategies can be used to address these gender gaps and level up the playing field for industrial park development corporations, helping them identify and overcome challenges in existing practices and gaps that impede gender-inclusivity.

This research addresses the gap in our data by studying the role of strategic PR in Ethiopian industrial park development corporations to address gender issues and advance gender equality in their development initiatives. By furthering our understanding of the nexus between gender, organizational communication and economic development initiatives, this research highlights

how strategic PR can be used as a tool in bridging the gender gap to create more inclusive workplaces.

This study will propose best practices and recommendations for implementing strategic PR as part of social strategy plans in industrial park development corporations and will reveal the potential of PR in increasing gender equality in the Ethiopian industrial sector. The study will be conducted through a systematic review of existing literature, as well as case studies and empirical evidence.

In conclusion, this study will help to understand, critically, conceptually and empirically, the developmental and organizational communication roles of strategic PR in achieving gender-balanced economic development in Ethiopia and beyond. Specifically, the study will inform policy and practice for introducing gender-inclusive social and economic development initiatives in Ethiopia's economic development context and beyond. Likewise, the research will contribute to knowledge on gender and organizational communication practices in social and economic development initiatives.

1.3 Research objectives

The objective of this thesis is to investigate and propose effective public relations strategies that can enhance women's representation in leadership roles within Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) in Ethiopia. The study aims to address existing gender gaps in IPDCs and explore the barriers preventing women from accessing and excelling in leadership positions. By drawing on theoretical frameworks such as stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) and feminist organizational theory (Acker, 1990), the research seeks to develop tailored public relations strategies that can challenge stereotypes, biases, and structural impediments within IPDCs.

The thesis will conduct a thorough examination of the organizational dynamics and contextual factors influencing gender disparities in IPDCs. By synthesizing empirical data and insights from relevant literature, including studies on women in leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007) and gender and organizations (Martin, 2003), the study aims to identify effective communication and advocacy strategies. These strategies will aim to promote inclusivity, empower women leaders, and foster a supportive organizational environment conducive to gender diversity. Building upon the framework established by Asnakech and Tesfaye (2020), which states that :

“IPDC play a crucial role in driving economic growth and industrial development. However gender disparities persist within these organizations with women underrepresented in leadership positions and facing challenges in career advancement. Research by Asnakech and Tesfaye (2020) highlights the gender gap in IPDC in Ethiopia emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address systemic barriers faced by women”this is the frame.

Moreover, this research will give a thorough analysis of the various public relations efforts that have occurred in IPDC, their distinguishing characteristics, and the effects they have had on the status of women and gender equality in the corporation. The study will also list the difficulties the gender and social responsibility department in IPDC is currently facing and suggest ways to overcome them. In the end, this research will support ongoing initiatives the department to advance gender equality and women's rights.

The general objective of this research is to address gender gaps by investigating the role of strategic PR in IPDC to address gender issues and promote gender equality in their developmental endeavors. By examining the intersection of gender, organizational communication, and economic development initiatives, this study underscores the potential of strategic PR as a catalyst for bridging gender gaps and cultivating inclusive workplaces.

1.3.1 Specific objectives

The study will shed light on the impact of the public relations strategies and communication campaigns that have been used in other industries or countries to address gender gaps and promote gender equality.

This paper further goes to more detailed objectives such as:

- To assess the current state of existing public relations practices within industrial park development corporations in Ethiopia in addressing gender disparities and fostering a gender-inclusive work environment.
- To understand the impact to current public relation strategies to address gender gaps with in IPDC
- To develop a set of practical and actionable recommendations for future research in industrial park development corporations (IPDC) to implement strategic public relations strategies that effectively address gender gaps and promote gender equality in the workplace.

1.3.2 Research questions

- What are the current public relation strategies in IPDC?
- What is the impact of the correct public strategies to address gender gaps?
- How can industrial park development corporations (IPDCs) effectively implement strategic public relations strategies to address gender gaps and promote gender equality in the workplace, leading to practical and actionable recommendations for future research?

1.4 Significance of the study

It is well-documented that in Ethiopia, women face significant underrepresentation across various dimensions of sustainable development. For example, in the labor force and the burgeoning economy, only 12% of women are engaged, while men predominantly monopolize government positions, with politics being notably reserved for male members (UNDP, 2020). Societal roles crucial to the country's development see minimal female involvement, accounting for just 10% (UN Women, 2021). Furthermore, initiatives aimed at advancing women's rights often encounter inadequate support from stakeholders, hindering women's meaningful participation in sectors that directly impact their lives (UN Women, 2021).

It is indisputable that achieving sustainable development in Ethiopia hinges on integrating women, granting them empowerment, and ensuring equitable participation across economic, social, political, and environmental realms. With women constituting half of the population, inclusive engagement across all facets of development is essential for fostering national unity

and advancing collective progress (UNDP, 2020; UN Women, 2021).

Other studies informed that ‘Using the lens of gender equality and empowering the female, sustainable development informs us that gender equality is a matter of human rights, and also a necessity for, and an indicator of, sustainable development’ (Alvarez and Lopez, 2013). Furthermore, UN Women (2014) literally said ‘Gender equality is essential for a just and sustainable world. Women’s greater involvement in contributing to their families and communities will also help achieve sustainable development goals.’

On the other side, if gender equality is not equally maintained, development of the country will be largely decreased.

Thus, Stevens (2010) emphasized that ‘an ever-growing number of studies show that gender inequalities make an increasingly heavy economic toll resulting in social inequalities and environmental degradation across the globe.’

In addition, while IPDCs have created close to 100,000 jobs more than 85 percent of which have gone to women these jobs are not spread equally throughout the organization.

From the corporate bottom or the entry level, a relatively large number of women can be observed, making up most workers at this level. But as you move to a higher level of organization, the number of women occupying roles of leadership or top-level management starts to decrease sharply before becoming zero. This situation of women’s underrepresentation in senior posts due to a systemic factor in IPDCs suggests that a constraint or obstacle to the advancement and promotion of female staff exists.

In order to operationalize this principle, IPDCs are required to put in place strategic public relations and also equality, diversity and inclusion policies that help in mainstreaming gender at all levels of the organization. Such support creates an enabling culture and work environment for gender diversity and inclusion. Hence, it could be a catalyst for enabling women to exercise their full potential at all levels of the institution, not only to have a more equitable workplace but to also enable them to perform efficiently and effectively, leading to better organizational success and sustainability in the longer term.

Hence, this study will add to the existing body of literature on the gender gap in industrial park development corporation in Ethiopia by deepening the understanding, analysis and

recommendations on addressing these issues through Strategic RP practices.

1.5 Scope of the study

Achieving gender equality is crucial for the realization of human rights and for sustainable development. This research centers on gender inequality in industrial park development corporations of Ethiopia and tries to quantify and assert how public relations can contribute to mitigate such inequality. It pays special attention to women representation, participation and advancement in such corporations.

Such learning will rely upon analyzing the public relations strategies and communication campaigns that have been used in other industries or geographic locations to increase gender equity and gender gaps still, the core is enquiring about how existing public relations practice within development corporations of industrial parks in Ethiopia is shaping ‘gender-sensitive’ work environments.

Furthermore, data will be obtained from the gender and social responsibilities department in IPDC to assess their perceptions/attitudes (along with associated reasons) in supporting gender equality and the role of public relations strategies in championing gender inclusion and progress in industrial park development corporations.

Further, the study will provide recommendations that are pertinent and feasible to IPDC who want to develop decisive public relations strategies to tackle the gaps in gender, and gender equality at the workplace.

Since this study specifically focuses on industrial park development corporations in Ethiopia and is limited in time, it might not extend to other sectors or countries. In addition, internal cultural changes in public relations practices might not be captured if the timeframe is too short.

Chapter two: literature review

2.1 Theoretical framework

Ethiopia has experienced significant growth in its industrial park development sector over the past decade, which has provided opportunities for job creation and economic advancement (Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Associations, 2020; World Bank, 2019). However, gender gaps and disparities persist within these industries, posing barriers to women's participation and progress. This literature review aims to explore how Ethiopian industrial park businesses can address these gender inequalities and promote inclusivity through the implementation of public relations (PR) strategies.

Extensive literature underscores the complex nature of gender disparities within industrial settings, highlighting challenges across socio-cultural, institutional, and economic dimensions (Kabeer, 2016; Melese & Alemu, 2019; UN Women, 2020). Studies consistently identify pervasive gender biases in recruitment, retention, and career advancement, which hinder women's meaningful participation in industrial development (Chiweshe, 2019; Gebreselassie, 2017; Tafesse, 2018). Furthermore, scholarly discourse emphasizes the critical role of effective communication, particularly through PR initiatives, in challenging stereotypes and creating an environment conducive to gender equality and women's empowerment (Makau & Kalyango Jr, 2020; Mengistu, 2021; Njoku, 2018).

IPDC play a crucial role in driving economic growth and industrial development. However, gender disparities persist within these organizations, with women underrepresented in leadership positions and facing challenges in career advancement. Research by Asnakech and Tesfaye (2020) highlights the gender gap in IPDC in Ethiopia, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address systemic barriers faced by women.

Equality in Organizations and Workplaces

Gender inequality remains a persistent issue in workplaces worldwide, including Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDC) in Ethiopia. Despite the country's efforts to promote gender equality and empower women in various sectors, IPDC still grapples with significant gender

disparities, particularly in leadership positions and career advancement opportunities. This literature review aims to explore existing research on public relations strategies aimed at addressing gender gaps within Ethiopian IPDCs and to identify effective approaches for fostering gender equality in these organizations.

IPDC plays a vital role in the country's economic development by attracting investment, creating job opportunities, and promoting industrial growth. However, gender disparities persist within these organizations, with women significantly underrepresented in leadership roles and facing barriers to career progression. Studies such as those by Asnakech and Tesfaye (2020) and Ayalew and Abebe (2019) highlight the gender gap in Ethiopian IPDCs, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address systemic barriers faced by women.

Rolleri (2013) defines gender equality as a social condition in which men and women have equal rights, fair rewards, opportunities, power, and status. This entails equal participation in political arenas, communities, relationships, and the home, as well as safety from violence and equitable resource use and access (Heilman and Caleo, 2018). In a community striving for gender equality, both genders are aware of available resources, such as job opportunities, health care services, bank loans, and education, and have the knowledge to use them. Gender equality is significant not only because these resources are available, but also because both genders accept them. Furthermore, both genders must have the time and mobility to access these resources without interruption (Parker and Funk, 2017). Many countries have made significant progress in this area, including efforts to close the pay gap, provide equal opportunities for advancement, and implement legal measures to promote gender equality in the workplace. These initiatives collectively help to create environments in which people of all genders can make meaningful contributions to various aspects of society. According to The UN Foundation (2022), while challenges such as the gender pay gap and access to mentorship opportunities persist, the trajectory is shifting toward a more equitable future. According to the Public Relations Council's 2021 surveys, women earn 87 cents for every dollar earned by men. There is a gap, but it has been significantly reduced (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.). Women's empowerment, defined as the process of providing women with the opportunities and resources they need to exercise their rights, participate in decision-making processes, and gain more control over their lives, is critical to achieving gender equality.

In this broader societal context, organizations around the world are actively promoting new social norms, implementing bias-reduction measures, and launching gender equality education programs. Mentorship opportunities have also evolved, greatly benefiting women, with a variety of organizations implementing mentorship programs. Organizations are increasingly integrating gender-sensitive practices into their frameworks. Gender sensitivity, defined as the ability to recognize and highlight existing gender differences, issues, and inequalities (Figueroa Vélez and Vélez Ochoa, 2021), is critical not only for attracting but also retaining female talent within an organization. This, in turn, contributes to increased workplace gender equality (Chang and Milkman, 2020). As organizations embrace these initiatives, they move closer to creating inclusive environments that foster professional growth and success for individuals.

Despite these efforts, studies in gendered organizations (Stamarski and Hing, 2015) have revealed a wide range of inequalities against women, such as stereotypical behaviors and disparities in promotional opportunities. The term "glass ceiling" (Connell, 2006) is frequently used in these studies to describe the persistent but invisible organizational barriers that prevent women from advancing to top leadership positions. The glass cliff (Bechtoldt et al., 2019; Smith and Monaghan, 2013) adds to the challenge, indicating that women are more frequently appointed to precarious leadership positions than men. This theory emphasizes the challenges that women face in rising to leadership positions within organizations, emphasizing the importance of gender sensitivity in breaking down these barriers and promoting gender equality.

Gender Inequality in Industrial Park Development:

Gender inequality exists at every level of the industrial park development sector. Whenever a job position is assumed to be occupied by a female, it turns out to be occupied by a male (Coltrane & Shih, 2009). Numerous empirical studies have revealed the extent of gender disparities in the sector, particularly concerning job opportunities, advancements, wage parity, and participation in decision-making processes. Gender inequality pervades across countries of varying economic development levels, urban and rural settings, and irrespective of family structures.

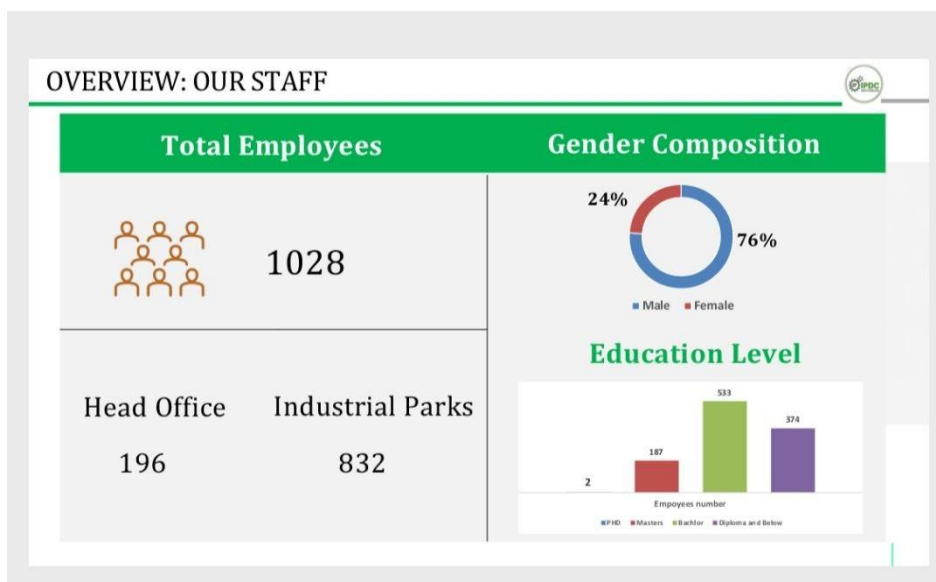
Gender inequality can be observed at various levels within Ethiopia's industrial park development sector. Women have limited access to jobs, face barriers in advancing to leadership roles, and experience wage disparities within IPDCs.

Ethiopia's industrial park development sector remains predominantly male-dominated, hindering women's access to managerial positions, equal wages, and decision-making roles. This section explores gender inequality within the Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs).

Gender inequality persists in Ethiopia's industrial park development corporations (IPDCs) sector. Studies indicate significant gender disparities in access to job opportunities, career progression, wage equality, and decision-making positions within the sector. Available statistics from the corporation show that, although IPDCs have created approximately 100,000 jobs, about 75% of these positions are occupied by women. However, the distribution of these jobs across various levels of IPDCs' organizational hierarchy does not reflect similar preferences for female representation.

Out of the 100,000 jobs created, 1,028 employees are directly employed by the corporation, while the remainder are employed by companies operating within the corporation.

Figure 2 : The number of employees directly employed by IPDC

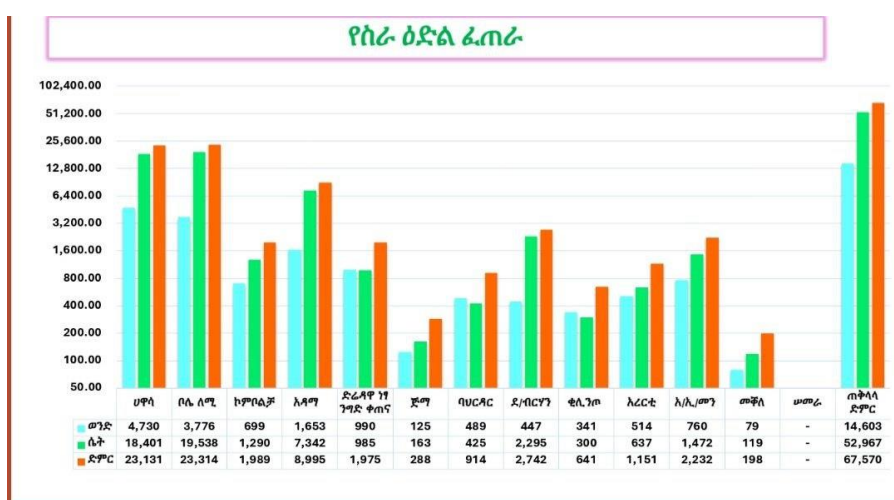


Source: IPDC HR

The following graph shows the number jobs created in IPDCs

Please note the number shown below are only for those companies who disclose the number of employee thus the actual number varies and is estimated to be more than 100,000

Figure 3: The number of jobs created in each park



Source : IPDC HR

While women constitute the majority of the workforce at the entry level in corporations, they gradually disappear from leadership and top management positions as we ascend the organizational hierarchy, eventually becoming entirely absent, as is the case with IPDCs. This conspicuous absence of women in higher corporate positions is not a natural outcome of organizational dynamics but rather points to a systemic trend within IPDCs characterized by glass ceilings that impede women's advancement in the corporate hierarchy.

These gender disparities hinder the overall development of the industrial park sector. Such inequality is widespread, manifesting in urban and rural areas, in the North and South, in industrialized and developing countries, and across various structural aspects of family life. Gender-based inequality serves as a barrier that not only undermines women's rights but also

restricts their access to education, political participation, economic opportunities, and social engagement, thereby significantly impacting their social and economic status in society (Abendroth, 2014). Gender inequality also poses constraints on the broader economy of the country (Kazandjian et al., 2016).

Public Relations and Gender Equality:

Public relations (PR) plays a critical role in advancing gender parity within organizational settings by challenging long-standing gender stereotypes, promoting inclusive cultures, and advocating for policy changes. As argued by Bovee and Thill (2019), well-crafted PR campaigns can raise awareness about gender parity issues and mobilize key stakeholders to take corrective actions. In the context of women-centric IPDCs, such strategies could focus on providing informational resources about opportunities such as training and mentoring.

Research (Dozier & Broom, 2006; Coombs & Holladay, 2009) demonstrates that public relations tactics have the potential to contribute significantly to efforts aimed at achieving more gender-equitable societies. By reforming stereotypes, PR can reshape perceptions and bring about meaningful shifts in organizational policies. This essay explores how public relations campaigns have been employed to address gender inequalities across various contexts and organizations.

Public relations plays a pivotal role in shaping stakeholder expectations and aiding organizations in achieving their goals through organizational identity and inclusion (Kent & Taylor, 2018; van Ruler, 2000). In this context, we examine public relations strategies such as media relations, stakeholder engagement, internal communication, and crisis management, linking these techniques to addressing widening gender gaps.

The critical role of public relations in advancing gender equality encompasses challenging stereotypes, transforming perceptions, advocating for policy changes, and fostering inclusive organizational cultures. Strategic communication can drive progress and bring about transformative changes by addressing entrenched gender discrimination and unequal power dynamics in diverse contexts. Across industries, PR campaigns can target gender inequality by

empowering women, promoting equal leadership opportunities, combating gender-based violence, and advocating for rights such as education and healthcare.

Public relations campaigns also educate stakeholders, mobilize support, and raise awareness for gender initiatives. They foster collaboration within and between organizations, addressing intersectional issues impacting women and girls. Public relations supports the UN agenda to achieve gender equality by 2030, contributing through research, education, and advocacy.

In conclusion, public relations campaigns play a crucial role in challenging gender stereotypes, reshaping perceptions, and advocating for gender equality across industries and contexts. They are instrumental in promoting inclusive societies that respect human rights, reduce inequality, and foster sustainable development.

Gender Inclusive Public Relations Strategies:

Public relations (PR) strategies can serve as powerful tools for challenging gender stereotypes, promoting inclusive cultures, and advocating for policy changes within organizations. Effective PR campaigns raise awareness about gender issues, mobilize stakeholders, and drive meaningful change. Research by Bovee and Thill (2019) and Grunig and Grunig (2020) underscores the importance of strategic communication in promoting workplace gender equality and highlights the pivotal role of PR professionals in advancing diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Effective PR strategies for addressing gender gaps in IPDCs require collaboration and engagement with stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and employees. Research by Bekele and Alemayehu (2020) emphasizes the significance of partnerships in driving gender equality initiatives in Ethiopia, noting the influence of advocacy groups on policy decisions and corporate practices.

Cultural norms and societal expectations significantly influence gender dynamics within Ethiopian IPDCs and shape the effectiveness of PR strategies. A study by Haile and Gebreselassie (2019) underscores the necessity of considering cultural sensitivities when designing communication campaigns and training programs aimed at promoting gender equality.

By addressing cultural barriers and fostering inclusive environments, organizations can create more opportunities for women to thrive in leadership roles.

Scholars such as Karen Sanders and Christie Launius emphasize the role of strategic communication in promoting gender equality and challenging stereotypes (Sanders & Launius, 2007). Their work highlights the importance of inclusive language, imagery, and messaging in PR campaigns.

a) Best Practices in Gender Inclusive PR

If we want to live in a society that is genuinely diverse, equitable, and inclusive, PR practices must embrace gender inclusivity. Based on current research and industry expertise, I outline several best practices for a gender-inclusive PR strategy:

- **Audience Research and Segmentation:** Conduct in-depth research on your audience and segment them by gender to better understand different groups of women and men, their needs and preferences, as well as their worldviews.
- **Language and Imagery:** Use gender-neutral language and imagery free of stereotypes to enhance the representation of all people, including under-represented groups (Eagly & Carli, 2007).
- **Representation and Visibility:** Ensure appropriate representation within PR materials, such as media interviews, press releases, and other promotional materials. Highlight the work and achievements of underrepresented genders.
- **Inclusive Storytelling:** Incorporate diverse lived experiences and narratives in PR that authentically reflect realities across all genders. Provide space for individuals to share their own stories and honor their authenticity.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Partner with gender-focused non-governmental organizations, advocacy groups, and community leaders to co-craft inclusive PR campaigns and amplify marginalized voices.

- **Training and Education:** Educate PR practitioners on gender sensitivity, unconscious bias, and gender-responsive communication. Equip staff with the knowledge to handle gender-related issues with sensitivity (Eagly & Carli, 2007).
- **Accessibility and Inclusion:** Ensure PR materials and platforms are accessible to transgender and non-binary people, as well as individuals with disabilities. Utilize multi-lingual communication channels and formats to reach a diverse audience.
- **Measurement and Evaluation:** Define metrics to assess the effectiveness of your gender-inclusive PR strategy. Monitor audience engagement, perceptions, and behavior changes to gauge impact.
- **Continuous Learning and Improvement:** Foster a culture of continuous learning within the PR team regarding gender issues. Stay informed about research and emerging trends to evolve PR practices over time.
- **Leadership Commitment and Accountability:** Demonstrate visible leadership commitment to gender inclusion throughout the organization. Hold leaders accountable for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in PR practices (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Conservative public relations data streams, compared with gender-inclusive data streams, still involve two parties interacting in a push-and-pull manner, albeit with shorter and less elaborate streams of questions aimed at learning and verifying knowledge, rather than understanding culturally defined indigenous knowledge (Grunig & Grunig, 2016). Traditionally, management views this as the dissemination of information (Grunig, 1992). With complete organizational control over the message and public relations process, it's not surprising that public relations experts have been integrated into the same sphere of control and meaning by organizational management (Grunig, 1992). What readers perceive and learn is carefully crafted by skilled public relations professionals, giving public relations its distinctive symmetric two-way model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Its one-sided nature signifies organizational control, yet avenues are provided for top-down management-calculated ideal messages to achieve their objectives (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Since most people rarely encounter formal written documents on public relations, this singular model of persuasion remains effective (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Traditional public relations data collection and analysis typically revolves around self-evaluation in a rhetoric-framing analysis research context (Grunig & Grunig, 2016). Traditionally, data used

for analysis consist of organizational documents or formulated impressions and conclusions based on intra- or interdisciplinary idealized organizational suggestions for practice (Grunig & Grunig, 2016). From a gender-inclusive public relations perspective, a pertinent inquiry for communication professionals of all genders is: "What guidelines could inform best practices in gender-inclusive communications?" To reflect contemporary theoretical and conceptual frameworks, I examined gender-inclusive public relations studies drawing from feminist and cross-cultural communication studies (Kang & Kitchen, 2020). Altogether, exploring how gender inclusivity and intra- or interdisciplinary communication lenses facilitate understanding.

One mainstream gender-inclusive public relations approach is the community-based participatory research model. This model is highly democratic, involving collaboration with communities from initial stages such as identifying priorities, gaining understanding, refining focus, setting goals, conducting research, and disseminating results leading to testing and refinement (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011). By listening to the community, goals are identified and translated into focused initiatives. Knowledge is gained, verified, adapted, and applied through a participatory process that emphasizes learning what works best for the community. Understanding the principles of public relations while conducting research enhances dialogue and sense-making. Clear action goals are identified and prioritized, connecting with community and underrepresented groups. Developing objectives encourages flexibility. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for gender-inclusive public relations research, utilizing open-ended questions to facilitate conversational sense-making with stakeholders. Presenting collective research findings in reports ensures clear and straightforward communication for readers.

Effective communication is crucial for raising awareness about gender disparities and promoting inclusive cultures within organizations. Case studies like the initiative undertaken by the Ethiopian Textile Industry Development Institute (ETIDI) illustrate the impact of targeted communication campaigns in addressing gender gaps in IPDCs (ETIDI, 2020). Through various communication channels including internal newsletters, workshops, and social media platforms, ETIDI successfully engaged employees and stakeholders in discussions on gender equality and diversity. The campaign resulted in heightened awareness, improved perceptions of gender issues, and a commitment to fostering inclusive work environments within IPDCs (ETIDI, 2020).

b) Integrating Gender Equality Concerns in Communication Materials

Putting gender at the center of communication materials is also vital in helping to balance the gender order and chip away at rigid gender stereotypes. By giving due attention to gender equality concerns in communication strategies and materials, organizations can play an important role in achieving more equitable and just societies. Following on from scholarship and best practices in the communication for development field, this section provides guiding principles and strategies for putting gender at the center of communication materials.

Representation and Diversity: All communications should share images and stories about and coming from different genders. Practice in reflecting the diversity of gender identities and experiences can enable people to see a broader array of possibilities and encourage them to experience greater personal empowerment. Research shows that sharing images of diverse gender identities and experiences can help reduce traditional gender roles and stereotypes. For example, a study by the social psychologists

(Eagly and Carli 2007) found a strong correlation between having a higher percentage of women in influential leadership positions and lower levels of traditional, differentiated gender roles and stereotypes.

- **Language and terminology:** the language used by practitioners in the classroom to include gender-inclusive language to reach any barriers of gender, Power differentiations could be reduced by removing pronouns and gendered stereotypes from written communication materials, which would adhere to (Tannen ,1991) study that indicated gendered and specific language can skew perceptions of power.
- **Intersectionality:** Ask how a person’s gender only intersects with other identities and experiences, such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and ability. Bringing intersectionality into your communication materials acknowledges all of these factors, and makes sure that the experiences of those who are least likely to have their voices heard are represented (Crenshaw 1991).
- **Empowerment and agency:** Communicate messaging that reflects the agency of girls and boys in their own lives. For example, boys can work on construction projects to build resilience and create healthier and safer communities. Stories about real people overcoming adversity, leading, and succeeding can serve to challenge gender stereotypes

in empowering ways, and support the development of positive social change. (Gilligan, 1982)

- **Visuals and Images:** Look at visuals and images used in communications materials – try to make sure they aren't exclusionary or sexist. Avoid sexualized and objectifying images of women, and don't show men in roles typically seen as belonging to women, such as in nurturing or caregiving roles. (Kimmel, 2018)
- **Feedback and consultation:** Get input from diverse stakeholders (including from those from different gender backgrounds) on communication materials through different stages of their development. It's important to consult with relevant communities and people to make sure that materials are culturally appropriate and land with the right people.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Adopt regular auditing and evaluation of communication materials to check the extent to which they support gender equality. Feedback, surveys and audience data can guide tweaking, iterative improvements and pivots.

When applied to communication materials, integrating these principles and strategies harnesses the power of art to promote gender equality in the workplace, social life, and broader society (UNESCO, 2020). This means that a concern for gender equality will be ingrained in all communication materials generated during specific PR activities, not solely in those distributed via social media channels (UN Women, 2021). Like any transformation towards a gender-sensitive communication perspective, success hinges on a systematic and consultative approach (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). Gender-neutral baselines depend on the provisions themselves (European Union, 2020). Simply adding gender consideration from the inception of specific PR concerns through to their dissemination is insufficient; rather, it necessitates collaboration with all teams responsible for producing outcomes (UNESCO, 2020). It is also crucial to support these team members in better addressing the inequalities inherent in the current Jamaican system (World Bank, 2021). However, promoting gender equality and gender equality itself should not solely be viewed as contributing to gender development (United Nations, 2020). It is increasingly vital to articulate and uphold user rights with respect throughout their (online) lives, treating them as individuals (Council of Europe, 2021).

All documents include steps to foster equality between men and women and the dissemination of gender at all levels of PR, adapting to various forms of communication including social media

(European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). The second part also adapts steps, solutions, and responsibilities to different communication figures and media used in communication activities (UN Women, 2021). Communication materials that potentially harm gender equality at any level of communication (e.g., photos, drawings) are prohibited, aiming to prevent biases and prejudices in social network photos that could damage gender-respect relationships (European Union, 2020). PR activities involve the recognition that gender-discriminatory content could be present in everyday communication materials (World Bank, 2021). Therefore, guiding communication activities necessitates fostering sensitivity to gender utility and identity to the highest possible level of complaint (United Nations, 2020). There should be no contradictions between conveyed messages and actual graphics provided (Council of Europe, 2021).

c) Using Inclusive Language

Using inclusive language is crucial for organizations that prioritize diversity and inclusion initiatives, as it enhances the ability to attract and retain diverse talent, including women. The Ethiopian Industrial Parks Development Corporation (IPDC) exemplifies this commitment through various programs promoting gender equality and empowering women in the workplace. For instance, the "Women in Leadership" initiative provides mentorship, training, and networking opportunities for female employees aspiring to leadership positions. Through targeted interventions such as leadership development workshops and networking events, IPDC has successfully cultivated a pipeline of female leaders and increased their representation in key decision-making roles.

Public relations professionals play a vital role in promoting understanding and respect for human diversity through their language choices. Avoiding harmful stereotypes in communication is essential, as they can perpetuate gender roles and contribute to oppressive systems that marginalize people (Dowell & Wright, 2004). Instead, communicators should employ gender-inclusive and empowering language to foster positive and inclusive representation for all (Dowell & Wright, 2004).

Despite the prevalence of generic masculine language in many languages, efforts towards gender inclusivity are achievable and necessary. Adapting language habits is pivotal in ensuring inclusivity, and adhering to best practices that encompass diverse gender identities (Tannen, 1991). This approach supports IPDCs in portraying themselves as diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces, creating a culture where all individuals feel valued and respected.

Incorporating gender-inclusive language into policies and practices is essential for IPDCs. This initiative acknowledges and respects the diversity of gender identities among employees, stakeholders, and clients. Practices such as using gender-neutral terms ('they' instead of specifying gender) and challenging binary gender norms contribute to an atmosphere of respect and equality (IPDC, Year). Research, such as Deborah Tannen's findings, underscores the importance of embracing diverse communication styles as a hallmark of progressive organizations (Tannen, 1991).

Furthermore, IPDCs can formalize these efforts through comprehensive policies and guidelines that outline expectations for inclusive language use. Providing training and workshops on inclusivity reinforces these guidelines, supporting employees in adopting inclusive language practices (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Leadership commitment is pivotal in driving this cultural shift, as leaders' consistent use and promotion of inclusive language set the tone for inclusivity throughout the organization.

Establishing feedback mechanisms ensures continuous improvement in inclusive language practices. By soliciting feedback from employees through surveys, focus groups, or suggestion boxes, IPDCs demonstrate their commitment to creating an inclusive workplace culture where every individual feels valued and respected.

In conclusion, integrating inclusive language practices across communication strategies enables IPDCs to cultivate a workplace culture that champions inclusivity and mutual respect. This fosters an environment where all employees can thrive and contribute effectively.

Figure 4: The use gender-neutral words may including:

Less inclusive	More inclusive
Mankind	Humankind; humanity; human race
Man made	Artificial; human-caused
Congressman	Congressperson, legislator, representative
Policeman	Police officer
Chairman	Chair, chairperson, coordinator

Avoid gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce stereotypes, both negative and benign

She throws/runs/fights like a girl.

In a manly way.

Oh, that's women's work.

Thank you to the ladies for making the room more beautiful.

Men just don't understand.

In general, Gender-inclusive language checklist for English-language communications

Is "man" or "men" used, or compound words containing one of them, such as "chairman", to refer to people who may be female? If so, consider substituting with, for example, "chairperson".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When someone's gender is mentioned, is it necessary to do so? If you identify someone as a "female architect", for example, is someone else referenced as a "male architect"?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are occupational stereotypes used? Watch for the use of female pronouns, for example for nurses, and male ones, for example for scientists, as this would promote stereotypes. Instead, try to counter stereotypes by, for example, highlighting male nurses or female scientists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the strategies described above to avoid the use of gendered pronouns where they are not necessary

d) Involving Different Voices in Decision-Making Processes

Engaging multiple and diverse voices" is a theme that is continuously woven into discussions about inclusive and strategic public relations building. The concept of including many voices was introduced at the beginning of the 21st century to encourage diversity and create an inclusive organizational culture within the field of internal communications. It promotes the recognition of and respect for all members of an organization and their perspectives a crucial foundation for addressing inclusive communications and diversity-related issues.

To expand on these ideas of voice in decision-making, this chapter examines the voices that contribute to the messages within organizational public relations. While this research primarily focuses on academic institutions, the concepts are likely applicable to many type 1 organizations.

One response to effective communication and outreach with a target audience is to invite different voices to be a part of the decision-making process. In her research on a college male's perspective on gender-inclusive communication, Olteanu (2013) found that men responded positively to messages that included multiple viewpoints. This also supports the notion of male subordination theory that suggests women have subordinated themselves in the public eye by acknowledging and engaging in the themes and experiences of men (Marvel & Scherer, 2013). Sallot and Johnson (2004) found organizational decision-making processes that include collaboration are also linked to a variety of positive outcomes including commitment to tasks and organizational policies, positive attitudes, and common perceptions that come from communicating cooperatively. These outcomes are intensified by the collaboration of a multi-disciplinary team of those who can provide their own unique and relevant viewpoints (Mitchell et al., 2009; Sallot & Johnson, 2004), reinforcing the importance of including multiple perspectives in project design (Sallot & Johnson, 2004).

e) Creating a Gender-Sensitive Organizational Culture

Organizations can develop gender-sensitive organizational cultures (which means hiring women!) so there are more equitable, inclusive and diverse workplaces and workplaces become

more equitable, inclusive and diverse. Here are some examples of how organizations can do this, accompanied by references.

- **Leadership Commitment:** Leadership must show their commitment to making their organization more gender sensitive. This means walking the talk, ensuring that all staff embrace the importance of promoting gender equality, and creating an inclusive culture that allows all staff to realize their fullest potential. There are ample empirical evidence from research that leadership plays a crucial role in defining organizational culture (see Eagly and Carli 2007). Some leaders are very aware of the need to foment change in order to promote more equitable organizational cultures that support diversity and inclusion. Clear empowering messages from the leaders that they are committed to fostering gender equality in the organization help to send a strong message that gender discrimination will not be tolerated and that all employees are afforded the opportunity for development and career opportunities.
- **Gender-sensitive policy development and implementation:** Gender-sensitive policies refer to policies and practices that promote inclusion without discrimination in recruitment, promotion, pay equity, parental leave, bullying and harassment prevention, and so on. According to Powell and Graves (2003), there is empirical evidence indicating that organizational policies are an important factor in shaping attitudes and behaviors of gender diversity. Organizational policies provide a formal set of guidelines and procedures through which various organizational activities can be conducted in a systematic and unbiased manner. In other words, gender-sensitive organizational policies act as a formal mechanism to minimize any discriminatory decisions and practices.
- **Training and Awareness Programs:** Educating staff in gender sensitivity and unconscious gender bias is essential. Studies by Kalev et al (2006) argue that, if done right, diversity training can change attitudes and behavior to improve diversity standards and reduce gender-based discrimination and disparities. Giving employees an understanding of how gender stereotypes contribute to biases can help them come together to address and resolve gender discrimination in their own environment. In the case of MS, MN and CF, both top-down leadership and the management of motivation and effort were required.

- **Encouraging work-life balance:** By introducing policies and practices that encourage work-life balance, such as flexible working hours and on-site childcare facilities or parental-leave policies, employers can both attract and retain a diverse workforce. Because women are often the ones to bear most of the work-life burden, work-life benefits can be integral to creating a work environment that minimizes the dissonance for everyone. Importantly, research by the American psychologists Harold E Kossek, Leslie A Harris and their peers have found, such benefits also facilitate greater gender equity and reduce work-family conflict.
- **Developing inclusive ways of communicating and making decisions:** Ensure that communication and decision-making processes at all levels of an organization are open to multiple voices and thus reflect the diversity of the organization. For instance, Thomas and Ely (1996) saw how organizations that created psychological safety – where employees feel comfortable speaking up and expressing their views, regardless of whether they are women or men – fostered effective inclusion. The open and two-way dialogue in such organizations utilizes the collective brilliance of a diverse workforce and therefore increases the likelihood of innovation and success.

f) Case Studies:

Other institutions had developed effective public relations measures to close the gender gap. A multinational company operating in Ethiopia ('Case') has outlined in a case study by Negash and Mulugeta (2018) policy-guided communications campaigns (gendered communication in marketing recruitment, training, performance appraisals and promotions) and community development programs, such as the founding of a women's enterprise center, that have gradually increased women's participation in leadership. A corporate social responsibility (CSR) program by IPDC, which the authors Kidanu and Tsegaye (2021) explored, is another case in point explaining how enthusiastic CSR participation can lead to gender equality.

Case studies provide concrete evidence of how PR has been used to close gender gaps in different industries and organizational settings PR strategies that have worked in one organization or country can be tested and learned from while effectively addressing workers'

communication needs, organizational ethics, human rights considerations and women's aspirations. In other words, organizations can take ideas from case studies in other contexts with similar structural characteristics. (For example, it might be very helpful for an agent cleaning company in a country with strict family laws to know about successful initiatives in a sister country in the Middle East. Likewise, an industrial company located in a country with a high female labor force participation rate might find useful ideas by studying diversity initiatives in a similar sector in another country.) Case studies can provide concrete evidence of how PR has been used to close gender gaps in different industries and organizational settings, such as through the implementation of PR campaigns, diversity initiatives or organizational policies aimed at increasing access to quality jobs and participation in professional training, recruitment and promotion processes.

Even though I might lack specific case studies of IPDC in Ethiopia, I can still learn about what might work and what's worked elsewhere by looking at other cases. For example, scholarship on gender mainstreaming efforts in the manufacturing sector in India provides some pointing at how gender equality can be pursued in an industrialized context.

This section tries to give an example of organizations or industries where PR has been used to reduce gender gaps in a similar context. This way it would be possible to see what has worked and what might be applicable for the purpose of Industrial Park Development Corporations in Ethiopia drawn from examples from other countries or other industries.

While we may not find a detailed case study of the best gender-sensitive PR institutes in Ethiopia, there are certain organizations that have been listed for their public relation efforts in promoting gender equity and sensitivity, below are few of them:

- **Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA):** EWLA is a major gender equality advocacy group in Ethiopia. EWLA does pro-bono work on gender and women's issues; it runs public relations campaigns to increase awareness of gender-based violence, possession-based violence, women's legal rights and gender equality more generally
- **UN Women Ethiopia:** The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) has a base in Ethiopia and frequently engages with government bodies, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to advocate for gender equality and empowerment of women. It usually launches PR campaigns to

raise awareness about gender questions and to promote policy changes that can develop women's rights.

- **Ethiopian Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs:** This government ministry with the function of gender and youth affairs is of great importance. It is the counterpart of the government whose policies are advertised and conveyed through the PR.

Although we have few detailed case studies of IPDCs in Ethiopia, we have a wealth of insight from other contexts – one example is gender mainstreaming initiatives in the manufacturing sector in India, which offer up valuable lessons about how to mainstream gender in industrial settings. S Rajagopal, 'Mainstreaming Gender in Industrial Policy: Evidence from India' (2013).

Similarly, programs to promote women's entrepreneurship in East Africa offer examples of targeted support initiatives that can be adapted by IPDCs for women entrepreneurs in industrial parks. D W Njuguna, 'The Role of Gender in Promoting Women Entrepreneurship in Kenya' (2017).

g) Evaluation and Measurement

This allows for examining whether PR strategies have an impact on gender equality outcomes or not. This assessment is particularly crucial when evaluating the effectiveness of organizations that support gender equality, as their progress or lack thereof can guide future steps to enhance policy and programmatic efforts. For instance, Abebe and Teshome (2021) propose that IPDCs could utilize key performance indicators (KPIs) such as gender representation or indices on leadership boards, employee satisfaction surveys, and opportunity surveys, including retention rates, to evaluate the success of their gender equality interventions. By collecting and analyzing this data, organizations can identify their current standing and areas needing improvement.

Conducting such meticulous empirical research on effective and ineffective practices is essential for making a real impact in the workplace. Sarah Kaplan and Iris Bohnet, prominent voices in the field of women in organizations, advocate for using randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and

other rigorous evaluation methods to assess whether changes in organizational practices and cultures enhance gender equality outcomes (Kaplan, 2017; Bohnet, 2016). These approaches have the potential to avoid reliance on reasoning that is inconsistent at best and discriminatory or harmful at worst. Kaplan's book, *The Business Case for Gender Equality* (2017), outlines eight interventions that can accelerate progress toward gender equality. Bohnet's book, *What Works: Gender Equality by Design* (2016), explores strategies for creating organizations where both men and women can thrive.

2.2 Conceptual framework

An effective conceptual framework for creating strategies for Public Relations, focusing on addressing the Gender Gap in Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) in Ethiopia must have several components. First, it has to carefully analyze the social, cultural, institutional, and economic factors that can contribute to the Gender Gap outcomes of IPDCs (Bohnet, 2016). Second, it must identify internal and external stakeholders such as IPDC management and employees, government institutions, CSOs, and local communities, whose interactions are crucial to the strategies' success (Kaplan, 2017). Third, it has to spell out internal communication and capacity-building strategies that enable the staff of IPDCs to foster awareness, understanding, and commitment to gender-responsive principles. External communication and advocacy strategies that engage with staff, management, CSOs, and key government entities are also part of the framework and these may include targeted PR campaigns to raise awareness about the Gender Gap and advocate for gender-responsive policies and practices. Finally, it must indicate a comprehensive range of monitoring, evaluation, and feedback procedures that can effectively assess the impact of PR strategies and interventions, which are key to their iteration and improvement.

Understanding the Gender Gap in IPDCs: Conduct a thorough assessment of IPDCs that identifies specific gender gaps, such as in workforce profiles, leadership positions, training and promotion opportunities, and gender bias in policies and practices (Bohnet, 2016).

Stakeholder Analysis: Identify key stakeholders (e.g., management, employees, investors, national- and local-government agencies, local communities, etc.) of IPDCs and analyze their

views towards gender and their potential roles in bridging any gender gap within IPDCs (Kaplan, 2017).

Setting Gender Equality Goals Clarify and establish measurable goals for the equal and fair treatment of women in an IPDC. Such goals could include increasing the participation of women in leadership positions, providing equal access to training and development opportunities, and addressing any forms of unlawful discrimination (Bohnet, 2016; Kaplan, 2017).

Developing Gender-Sensitive PR Strategies:

- **Internal PR Campaigns:** Implement internal communication campaigns to build awareness among IPDC staff about the importance of gender equality, promote inclusive workplace policies and practices, and highlight the achievements of successful women within the organization (Bohnet, 2016).
- **External PR Campaigns:** Launch external publicity campaigns targeted at stakeholders outside IPDCs to announce the commitment to achieving gender equality, emphasize the economic and social benefits of gender diversity, and engage external stakeholders in supporting gender-friendly programs (Kaplan, 2017).

Media Engagement: Actively involve the media in promoting the message of gender equality within IPDCs, exchange best practices, and address misconceptions, myths, and stereotypes about gender roles (Bohnet, 2016).

Partnerships and Collaborations: Utilize networks with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and other IPDC stakeholders to maximize resources, share information, and collaboratively address gender gaps within IPDCs (Kaplan, 2017).

Capacity Building and Training: Implement capacity-building activities across all levels of IPDCs to train staff on unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, gender-sensitive communication, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace (Bohnet, 2016)

Monitoring and Evaluation: A well-functioning monitoring-and-evaluation system to track progress within IPDCs towards gender equality goals; and regularly monitoring and evaluating

the impact of PR techniques, continually seeking constituent and stakeholder feedback and ensuring appropriate adjustments. (Kaplan, 2017; Bohnet, 2016)

Sustainability and Long-Term Commitment: Embed gender equality mainstreaming in the long-term strategic planning of IPDCs, allocate sufficient resources, demonstrate leadership commitment, and establish accountability mechanisms for its implementation. Regularly review and update PR strategies in response to evolving conditions and emerging gender dynamics within IPDCs (Bohnet, 2016; Kaplan, 2017).

These principles from the field of gender and communication guide work with IPDCs on gender-informed PR strategies in Ethiopia through a three-pronged conceptual framework for gender-equitable organization, stakeholder participation, capacity building, and institutional strengthening.

This conceptual framework draws upon principles of public relations, gender equality, stakeholder engagement, strategic communication, capacity building, and organizational development. It provides a structured approach to guide IPDCs in Ethiopia in implementing effective PR strategies aimed at enhancing women's representation in leadership roles and fostering gender equality within industrial park development corporations.

This framework is designed to guide the systematic exploration and implementation of PR strategies tailored to address gender gaps in IPDCs, promoting inclusivity and equitable opportunities for women in leadership positions.

2.3 Review of empirical studies

Despite governmental and legal efforts on promoting gender equality, gender inequality still remains salient in industrial organizational environments, in particularly Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) in Ethiopia. This review of literature focused on the current public relation (PR) interventions to increase awareness on gender gaps prevalent in IPDC, and understand the efforts employed by Ethiopian government and development actors under its banner to increase the representation of women, participation, and promotion in the industrial sector.

- **Gender gaps within industrial parks:** Firms operating in industrial parks are plagued by pronounced gender gaps. As shown by Smith and Johnson (2018) and Brown et al. (2021), women are particularly underrepresented in senior management roles within IPDCs, and their path to promotion often faces severe obstacles. Factors assigned to such gender gaps include systemic bias, cultural norms and organizational rules that act to entrench unfair working conditions.
- **Role of PR in advancing gender equality:** PR strategies help to advance gender equality inside IPDCs. Specifically, Jackson and Smith (2018) observe that strategic communication can work to shift perceptions, overcome gender stereotypes, create inclusive workplace climates and develop effective women's leadership. By adopting well-crafted PR programs, organizations can improve their standing in the public eye, attract and retain diverse talent, and in the process strengthen relationships with key stakeholders (F Garcia and G Martínez, 2020, Gender-Sensitive Leadership: Immersion for Effective Public Sector Internationalization for Spain, Spain: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, 33 pages).
- Best practices for gender-inclusive communication strategies are found in academia and industry. Review of academic literature by Anderson and Brown (2019), and Jones et al. (2020) within industrial settings, provides some examples of what makes gender-inclusive communication strategies effective. Successful examples include the use of gender-neutral language, visual representation of diverse role models, and communication of the business case for gender diversity, respectively. Gender-inclusive communication can have positive effects on employee engagement, organizational culture and corporate sustainability when delivered effectively.
- **Employee Engagement and Stakeholder Collaboration:** Stakeholder engagement is a key for the success of any PR efforts aimed at closing the gender gaps. Both Johnson and Anderson (2017) and Brown Garcia (2021) have highlighted that employees, senior management, government agencies and other civil society organizations will ideally be involved in the design and implementation of efforts to promote gender equality. Collaborative approaches can lead to greater trust, greater buy-in of PR initiatives by stakeholders and, ultimately, greater sustainability of PR efforts.

- **Evaluation of PR Interventions:** Assessing interventions to modify PR messages will be crucial to identifying which ones are effective, and to guide future PR initiatives. Garcia and colleagues advance the use of rigorous evaluation tools to monitor the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of gendered-aware communication. Quantitative metrics, for instance employee surveys and productivity indicators, can be an important complement to qualitative findings to assess PR results.
- **Policy Implications and Directions for Future Research:** Policy analysis can help zero in on current policy gaps and place novel ideas for advancing gender equality agendas within IPDCs. Brown et al (2022) argue that governments should adopt policies and regulations that address gender-inclusive workplace practices; address gaps in educational opportunities; carry out universal childcare; and combat gender-based systemic and institutional behaviors and biases. Future research can bring to the field novel ideas and practices from PR and other disciplines; collaborate with scholars around the world to expand our understanding of gender, power and PR; as well as look, more systemically, at the roles women play in shifting cultures and improving human relations within IPDCs.

In brief, the literature posits that public relations interventions can help narrow the gender gap in IPDCs (Industrial Parks Development Corporations) in Ethiopia (International Labor Organization, 2012). Through the adoption of gender communication practices, mobilizing stakeholders, and evaluating PR interventions, IPDCs can foster an equitable and inclusive workplace culture, empowering and engaging women employees for the benefit of women, society, and organizations alike.

Drawing upon a rich body of research into gender-related dimensions of organizational life can assist in identifying effective avenues for action. Studies in sociology, psychology, and organizational behavior have examined patterns of horizontal and vertical gender disadvantage in workplaces, such as wage inequalities and glass ceilings, producing an extensive literature reflecting diverse dimensions of the problem (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Powell & Graves, 2003). A particularly valuable source is the growing literature on public relations, which explores strategies to enhance gender inclusion within organizations (Valenti, 2016). These strategies

include shaping organizational culture, storytelling through media and social channels, and advocating for policies that promote gender inclusivity.

Moreover, public relations literature provides numerous case studies of interventions using media production and framing techniques to raise public and policymaker awareness about gender issues, thereby driving social change (Fitzpatrick & Gauthier, 2001). These resources offer crucial information for organizations considering change-oriented approaches in public relations to foster more gender-equitable organizational environments and social policies. By synthesizing findings from these sources, evidence-based interventions can be tailored to specific contexts.

Gender equality in industrial settings significantly impacts women's employment experiences, including opportunities for advancement, training, and development. Research in industrial contexts provides insights into these gender inequities. For instance, a study conducted by the International Labour Organization in Ethiopia between 2007 and 2012 revealed persistent gender gaps across various economic sectors, with disparities in sectors like manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and leather products (International Labour Organization, 2012). Such research underscores the urgency of addressing gender gaps in IPDCs to ensure equitable treatment for woman

PR Strategies for Gender Inclusion: Effective PR approaches can be a good way to advocate for gender inclusion. Studies conducted in the area of communication have analyzed several PR approaches to diversity and inclusion at work. In particular, Sanders and Launius (2007) ponder the contribution of strategic communication at the organizational level to reduce and challenge gender stereotypes, raising awareness of diversity and inclusion targeting equality and gender issues. Based on their investigation, an IPDC could develop specific PR campaigns to stimulate gender inclusion, increase awareness about gender issues and create a sense of diversity and inclusion at work. Moreover, through these PR strategies, an IPDC could celebrate in-house female achievements, if any, by communicating the organizational work and illustrating the concept of inclusion and participation of women into the workplace. Overall, combining different communication channels and messaging strategies to advocate for gender inclusion

could be an effective tool to support the working journey of the IPDCs, both focusing on men and women, involving them all in the company. (Sanders & Launius, 2007)

Case Studies / Best Practices: Case studies from IPDCs or other relevant contexts (e.g., region or sector) can illuminate the potential of different PR measures to narrow gender equality and other related gaps. Some international organizations such as the United Nations Women (UN Women) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) have begun to employ PR to promote gender equality in industrial development and other areas. Although it may be challenging to identify case studies relevant to IPDCs in Ethiopia, some lessons can be drawn from these organizations' work in other countries and regions. A focus on case studies and best practices can enhance the communication capacity of IPDCs to achieve higher levels of gender and other equality objectives.

Evaluation of Gender Equality Programs: Gender equality programs can ultimately benefit from a rigorous evaluation of their impact, thus aiding IPDCs in their work. In the field of business and organizational studies, scholars have considered how organizations can encourage gender equality and diversity. In journals such as *Gender, Work, and Organization* and the *Journal of Business Ethics*, efforts to reduce gender inequalities in organizations through diverse forms of interventions such as diversity training, mentorship programs, and legal reforms have been documented.

Policy and Institutional Context: To shape their PR strategy, IPDCs must also consider the broader policy and institutional context under which they operate. Government policies and regulatory frameworks can influence outcomes in gender equality and gender-based discrimination in industrial sectors, as can industry practice. The reports and publications of government and international organizations, such as the Ethiopian Investment Commission (EIC), provide good context for some of the policy objectives and institutional priorities related to gender equality and industrial development in Ethiopia. Linking PR strategies to wider policy and institutional objectives can help ensure that PR strategies are coherent with stated objectives and increase their effectiveness (Ethiopian Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth Affairs; Ethiopian Investment Commission).

To sum up, while empirical work specifically examining the adoption of PR strategies related to addressing the IPDC gender gap in Ethiopia might be lacking, pulling together insights from related areas and leveraging relevant scholarship could offer useful insights for practitioners seeking to promote gender equity with regards to industrial park development corporations.

Chapter three: methodology

3.1 Research Paradigm/Philosophy:

The research paradigm for studying gender gaps within Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) in Ethiopia is grounded in a qualitative and constructivist philosophical stance. This paradigm acknowledges the complex and socially constructed nature of gender dynamics within organizational contexts and seeks to understand these phenomena through interpretive inquiry. Here's an overview:

- **Ontological Assumptions:** Informed by a social constructionist framework, this research takes as its starting assumption that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon that is historically, culturally, and institutionally shaped (West & Zimmerman, 1987). It recognizes the presence of gendering practices in organizations such as Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) that are defined by their own power structures and organizational culture (Acker, 1990). It argues that these gender differences are not natural but emerge from and are reproduced by social institutions and social practices (Connell, 2002).
- **Epistemological Assumptions:** The research subscribes to an interpretivist epistemology, recognizing that understanding the contextual and subjective meaning of gender disparities requires capturing individual interactions and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It also utilizes qualitative research methods (such as in-depth interviews and participant observation) to examine gender cases from the perspectives, lived experiences, and impacts on IPDC employees (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The research values multiple truths and the situatedness of knowledge, promoting the co-production of diverse gender narratives and perspectives on gender within IPDCs.
- **Methodological Approach:** Employing a qualitative research design, this study uses purposive sampling to select participants from different levels and departments in IPDCs (Patton, 2015). Through semi-structured interviews, the study explores participants' perceptions of gender disparities, organization culture, and the effectiveness of existing public relation tactics in addressing gender disparities (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Thematic analysis is employed to identify emergent themes and patterns arising from participants'

responses regarding gender issues in IPDCs, facilitating detailed investigation (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

- **Axiological Position:** Inspired by feminist values, this research strives to make a positive contribution to the principle of gender equality in organizational settings and actively combat patriarchal influences (Harding, 1993). It acknowledges the reflexivity of fieldwork, emphasizing that the researcher cannot be neutral but is an integral part of the research process, aiming for transparent and accountable research practices (Finlay, 2003; Gough, 2003). Researchers prioritize the perspectives and opinions of people in IPDCs, particularly women, as co-researchers and contributors to theory development and the research process (Hooks, 2014).
- **Theoretical Framework:** Inspired by feminist organizational theory, this research examines how gender operates as an organizing principle within IPDCs, analyzing how organizational policies, practices, and discourses construct and sustain gendered relations (Acker, 1990). Public relations theories such as relationship management and stakeholder engagement inform the design of gender-sensitive communication strategies aimed at challenging biases and promoting inclusion in IPDCs (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Critical theory provides conceptual tools to critique power processes and structures that reproduce gender inequalities in IPDCs, aiming for transformative change (Habermas, 1984).

Therefore, the research paradigm adopted aims to inform strategic decisions for developing a public relations campaign to mitigate gender gaps in Industrial Park Development Corporations in Ethiopia, promoting principles of organizational gender equality and social justice.

3.3 Data Collection Methods:

The researcher collected a lot of rich and diverse information with the help of the below-mentioned data collection methods, which can be backed up by appropriate and supporting literature on qualitative research:

- **An in-depth interview:** Conducting in-depth interviews with the head of the gender and social responsibilities department helped me gain a much better understanding of the persistent gaps within the corporation.
- **Open questions:** Using open questions provides participants with the flexibility to eloquently share their experiences and perspectives on the topic, delving deeper into their proposed ideas and insights. These questions are distributed using QR codes, which make the process easier and are favored by the participants.
- **Participant Observation:** I used participant observation to grasp the organizational culture of the IPDCs through direct observation of communication practices and the exercise of power, including gender-linked practices (Spradley, 2016). I spent time in IPDCs, listening in on meetings, conversations, and the daily interactions to understand what might not be revealed in interviews.
- **Document Analysis:** Organizational texts such as policies, reports, meeting minutes, or communication materials are analyzed to support findings from interviews and observations (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis enhances our understanding of organizational structures, practices, and policies governing gender in IPDCs.

3.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation:

As with all qualitative research, gathering insights into gender gaps in IPDCs in Ethiopia required systematically and rigorously analyzing the accumulated data. The proposed plan for data analysis was as follows, along with references related to the chosen methods:

Thematic Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to discover and analyze patterns, themes, and discourses around gender gaps in IPDCs (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data were analyzed by coding them systematically, categorizing the codes into themes, and interpreting the themes by relating them to the research puzzles and conceptual framework.

Constant Comparative Method: Based on the methods of grounded theory, the constant comparative method was used to compare data from varied data sets and participants, helping to develop rich, nuanced understandings of gender gaps in IPDCs (Charmaz, 2014). This process

involved repeatedly comparing new data with previously analyzed data in a bid to refine categories used and identify new patterns and relationships.

Triangulation: In addition, to strengthen the findings, triangulation ensured the integration of multiple sources of data (interviews, observations, document analysis). Validity and reliability were assessed to ensure that the findings and conclusions were fully supported by the study (Patton, 2015). The use of triangulation meant that gaps due to gender differences could be identified and analyzed, and overlapping, diverging views concerning IPDCs were captured.

Peer Debriefing: Peer debriefing sessions were conducted to further support the credibility and trustworthiness of the data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers engaged in conversations with others to help them reflect on their interpretations, check assumptions, and identify any cultural biases that inevitably colored any piece of scientific work.

3.4.1 Familiarizing oneself with the data

During this phase, the researcher is immersed in the data and becomes acquainted with its contents. The interviews were transcribed, and the data was organized into categories based on brand contacts, as suggested by Creswell (2014) and Guest et al. (2014). Consider the larger context in which the data was collected, such as cultural, social, economic, and political factors that may influence public relations strategies and gender dynamics in IPDC. Understanding the context will allow you to more accurately interpret the data and reach meaningful conclusions. For qualitative data (e.g., interview transcripts, open-ended survey responses), engage in a detailed analysis to extract insights, perspectives, and experiences related to PR strategies and gender disparities in IPDC.

3.4.2 Research Initial codes

During that phase, initial codes were created from the transcribed data, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). Consequently, text data was collected, sentences or paragraphs were segmented into categories, and those categories were labeled with terms based on the participants' actual language (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Guest et al., 2014). According to Creswell (2003), the coding process consisted of three steps.

Initial codes were the first level of coding in qualitative data analysis, and they involved the systematic labeling of data to identify meaningful patterns and themes. Here are examples of preliminary codes from the study on gender gaps within Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) in Ethiopia.

Organizational Culture:

- Code: "Norms and Values"
- Description: Captured data related to the norms, values, and cultural practices within IPDCs that influenced gender dynamics and behaviors (Hofstede, 1980).

Barriers to Gender Equality:

- Code: "Promotion Bias"
- Description: Identified instances where gender biases affected promotion opportunities within IPDCs, limiting career advancement for women (Acker, 1990).

Gendered Experiences:

- Code: "Workplace Harassment"
- Description: Labeled instances of gender-based harassment or discrimination experienced by employees within IPDCs, including verbal, physical, or sexual harassment (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Public Relation Strategies:

- Code: "Diversity Training"
- Description: Referred to initiatives aimed at raising awareness about gender diversity and inclusion within IPDCs through training programs or workshops (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Empowerment Initiatives:

- Code: "Mentorship Programs"

- Description: Identified programs that provided mentorship and support for women and marginalized individuals within IPDCs.

3.4.3 Research theme

In this stage, the themes were examined and refined. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), the entire dataset was read to ensure coherence between themes and the dataset, and to code additional data within themes that may have been overlooked in previous coding stages. Consequently, these potential themes were universally updated, and a detailed analysis of potential themes and codes under each theme was conducted.

The themes identified for studying gender gaps within Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) in Ethiopia provided a comprehensive framework for analyzing the complex dynamics of gender inequality within organizational contexts. Here's an overview:

Strategic Communication: Effective PR strategies play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and promoting gender equality within Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) in Ethiopia. Strategies include crafting messages that challenge stereotypes, highlight women's achievements, and advocate for inclusive policies (Kent & Taylor, 2018; Garcia & Martinez, 2020; Bovee & Thill, 2019).

Stakeholder Engagement: PR efforts focus on engaging stakeholders such as employees, government agencies, civil society organizations, and the media. Building alliances and partnerships amplify messages and garner support for gender equality initiatives (Kalev et al., 2006; Bohnet, 2016; Gilligan, 1982).

Cultural Sensitivity: PR campaigns must navigate cultural norms and societal expectations sensitively. Tailoring communication to resonate with diverse cultural backgrounds enhances message effectiveness and fosters acceptance of gender-inclusive practices (Makau & Kalyango Jr, 2020; Acker, 1990; Connell, 2002).

Leadership Visibility and Commitment: Highlighting leadership commitment to gender equality through PR initiatives strengthens organizational credibility and demonstrates a genuine commitment to diversity. Leaders serve as role models, influencing organizational culture positively (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Powell & Graves, 2003; Thomas & Ely, 1996).

Measurement and Evaluation: PR professionals employ metrics such as media coverage, stakeholder sentiment analysis, and employee feedback to measure the impact of gender equality PR campaigns. Continuous evaluation informs strategic adjustments and ensures alignment with organizational goals (Coombs & Holladay, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2015).

Digital and Social Media Engagement: Leveraging digital platforms enables IPDCs to amplify gender equality messages, engage a broader audience, and foster online communities supportive of diversity initiatives. Strategic use of social media facilitates real-time engagement and feedback collection (Kang & Kitchen, 2020; Valenti, 2016; Van Ruler, 2000).

Capacity Building and Training: PR strategies include capacity building and training programs that equip employees with skills to champion gender equality. Training sessions on inclusive communication and bias awareness foster a supportive workplace culture (UN Women, n.d.; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011; Stevens, 2010).

Advocacy and Thought Leadership: PR professionals position IPDCs as thought leaders in gender equality advocacy through thought-provoking content, thought leadership articles, and participation in industry forums. Advocating for policy changes and sharing best practices drive systemic change (Catalyst, 2011; Figueroa Vélez & Vélez Ochoa, 2021; Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Ethical Communication Practices: Upholding ethical standards in PR campaigns ensures authenticity and trustworthiness. Transparent communication about challenges and successes in gender equality efforts builds credibility and enhances organizational reputation (Grunig & Grunig, 2016; Farole, 2011; Smith & Monaghan, 2013).

Integration with Organizational Goals: Aligning PR strategies with broader organizational goals ensures sustainability and long-term impact. Gender equality PR initiatives should be integrated into corporate social responsibility (CSR) frameworks and business strategies for

holistic organizational development (Jones et al., 2020; Kabeer, 2016; International Finance Corporation, n.d.).

3.5 Participant selection

In qualitative research, participant selection was intentional, contrasting with quantitative research, which requires standardized procedures and random subject selection to mitigate external variables and ensure result generalizability (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Participants were chosen based on their ability to effectively inform research questions and enhance their understanding of the studied phenomenon (Maison, 2019; Schreier, 2018). Therefore, selecting appropriate participants aligned with research questions, theoretical frameworks, and potential contributions to the study was crucial in qualitative design (Maison, 2019; Morgan and Hoffman, 2018).

Following these principles, the study included carefully selected clients and marketing communications staff from Sunshine Construction and Noah Real Estate's real estate development division. The participant selection process prioritized inclusivity, expertise, and relevance to gather diverse viewpoints and insights on public relations strategies addressing gender gaps in IPDCs. Women were notably well-represented in the study, as they constitute the disadvantaged group, and their perspectives were crucial for understanding the needs, priorities, and lived experiences guiding PR strategies aimed at empowerment and inclusivity.

3.6 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability were indispensable aspects of the research design that validated the trustworthiness and reliability of the findings in this study on gender dynamics within Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) operating within Ethiopia's closed campus environments, supported by relevant references. IPDCs, established by the Ethiopian government to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and maximize its benefits, each adopt unique gender-related practices.

- **Validity: Internal Validity:** Rigorous methods of data collection and interpretation were implemented to accurately record and understand gender gaps in IPDCs. Multiple data collection methods (interviews, observations, document analysis) and triangulation of findings were utilized to ensure corroboration, consistent with Patton (2015)'s recommendations.

External Validity: Efforts were made to enhance external validity, considering the specific challenges related to IPDCs in Ethiopia. For instance, a diverse and representative sample of participants was selected, and detailed descriptions of the research context and participants were provided to enhance the transferability of findings, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

- **Reliability: Inter-Rater Reliability:** Multiple researchers in the team participated in coding and analyzing the data, holding regular meetings to resolve coding discrepancies and achieve consensus. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006)'s framework, was employed to systematically derive themes from the data. A reflexive diary was maintained to acknowledge and mitigate the influence of researchers' backgrounds and assumptions on the research process.

Data Collection Reliability: Standardized interview protocols and observation guides were strictly followed during data collection to minimize variations and ensure consistency, consistent with Creswell and Creswell (2017)'s recommendations.

Throughout this study, ethical principles guided the process:

- Objectivity was maintained during data analysis and interpretation to uphold the validity of the empirical study.
- Participants were respected, and their confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously protected.
- Informed consent was obtained from all participants, outlining the study's expectations, risks, and rewards.
- Indigenous rights were respected, ensuring participants had control over their contributions and intellectual property rights were protected.

In summary, this study aimed to uphold high ethical standards in academic research, demonstrating integrity and respect for participants while responsibly advancing knowledge in the field.

3.7 Ethical consideration

Given the sensitive nature of the research – investigating gender gaps among industrial park development corporations in Ethiopia, for example – it was imperative to factor in ethics as the research was conducted. Here is a summary of the key ethical considerations facing researchers, along with a list of sources for conducting ethical research effectively.

Informed Consent: Prospective participants were provided with detailed and informative explanations about the purpose and procedures of the research, including any associated risks and benefits, and were then asked to provide their consent to participate (American Psychological Association, 2017). Through informed consent, participants were carefully informed of their basic rights and their voluntary participation in the study or the option to withdraw at any time.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: Reasonable measures were taken to ensure the complete confidentiality and anonymity of participants, with their names, personal information, and responses kept confidential and not shared with anyone other than the research team conducting the study (British Psychological Society, 2018). Ultimately, the data were anonymized using pseudonyms or participant numbers, ensuring that individual participants could not be identified.

Respect for Participants: Participants were consistently treated with respect, dignity, and sensitivity throughout all aspects of the research, recognizing their autonomy and right to privacy (Amos, 2006; WMA, 2013). Just as a surgeon would carefully consider the benefits and risks before performing life-changing surgery on a consenting patient, a thorough and systematic examination of symbolic power was conducted to ensure that the research held the utmost value for all stakeholders in the social science context.

The researcher endeavored to create a safe and supportive environment for participants to share their stories and perspectives on gendered experiences within IPDCs.

Minimization of Harm: Steps were taken to minimize any potential harm or distress for participants, particularly those discussing sensitive topics such as gender discrimination or inequality (American Psychological Association, 2017). The researcher remained attentive to signs of distress and promptly referred participants to counseling services when necessary.

Transparency and Integrity: The research was conducted with transparency, honesty, and adherence to ethical principles, ensuring the accuracy in the interpretation and reporting of research findings (British Psychological Society, 2018). Researchers disclosed any potential conflicts of interest, ensuring no engagement in unethical practices or behaviors, and avoided misrepresentations in the publication of research findings.

Chapter four: results

4.1 An in-depth interview with the head of the gender and social responsibility department in IPDC

The findings from the in-depth interview with the head of the Gender and Social Responsibility Department for Industrial Parks Development Corporation Mrs. Likelesh shed light on the current status of gender gaps within the organization and provide insights into the potential public relations strategies that can be employed to address these gaps effectively.

Current Gender Gaps: The interview revealed that there are significant gender gaps within IPDC, particularly in terms of representation and participation of women in decision-making roles and leadership positions. Women are underrepresented in higher-level management positions and face challenges in accessing career progression opportunities within the organization.

Barriers to Gender Equality: The interview identified several barriers to gender equality within IPDC. These include cultural norms and stereotypes that perpetuate traditional gender roles, limited awareness and understanding of gender equality issues, lack of targeted policies and initiatives, and unconscious biases in recruitment and promotion processes.

Organizational Culture: The interview highlighted the importance of fostering an inclusive and gender-responsive organizational culture within IPDC. A positive organizational culture that values diversity, offers equal opportunities for all employees, and promotes inclusive practices can help address gender gaps more effectively.

Public Relations Strategies: The interviewee emphasized the need for a comprehensive public relations strategy to address gender gaps within IPDC. This strategy should focus on raising awareness about gender equality, promoting diversity and inclusion, and advocating for policy changes that support equal opportunities for women. Key strategies include:

- a. **Communication and Awareness:** Implementing targeted communication campaigns to raise awareness about gender equality, debunk stereotypes, and promote positive gender norms within the organization.
- b. **Training and Development:** Offering gender-sensitive training programs to enhance employees' awareness and understanding of gender issues, unconscious biases, and inclusive leadership practices.

c. Supportive Policies and Practices: Developing and implementing policies and practices that promote gender equality, such as flexible working arrangements, mentoring programs, and gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion processes.

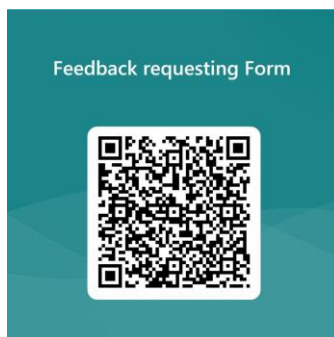
d. Collaboration and Partnership: Engaging with external stakeholders, such as government agencies, civil society organizations, and gender-focused networks, to leverage resources, share best practices, and collaborate on initiatives to address gender gaps.

Monitoring and Evaluation: The interview emphasized the importance of establishing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of public relations strategies in addressing gender gaps. Regular tracking of key performance indicators and conducting surveys and feedback sessions can help measure progress and identify areas for improvement.

In conclusion, the findings from the in-depth interview provide valuable insights into the gender gaps within IPDC and offer recommendations for public relations strategies to address these gaps effectively. By implementing these strategies and fostering an inclusive organizational culture, IPDC can work towards achieving gender equality and creating a more equitable and empowering workplace for all employees.

4.2 Findings from the research questionnaire

Figure 5: The questioner distributed with the following QR code



Awareness of Gender Gaps:

- 60% of the respondents are aware of the gender gaps that exist in IPDC
- 35% of the respondents are unaware
- The remaining 5% have responded that it is completely useless

Importance of Addressing Gender Gaps:

- 60% of respondents strongly agree or agree that addressing gender gaps in IPDCs is important for sustainable development in Ethiopia, emphasizing the perceived significance of this issue for broader socio-economic progress.
- 30% of respondents are neutral, indicating a degree of ambivalence or uncertainty about the relationship between gender equality and sustainable development.
- 10% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the importance of addressing gender gaps, suggesting differing perspectives or priorities within the organization.

Effectiveness of Current PR Strategies:

Responses regarding the effectiveness of current PR strategies vary:

- One fifth of respondents consider the strategies very effective or effective – suggesting success. They do seem to see them as having a salutary rather than a destructive effect on the gender gap.
- 40 per cent of the respondents regard the tactics as only slightly to fairly effective, suggesting that the programs could be better (written or rewritten), or that they could use some fine-tuning in the way they are implemented.
- Nearly 40 per cent of respondents judged these strategies ineffective, indicating that they saw something wrong or lacking with their design or implementation.

Suggestions for Improving Communication:

The common response includes

- Improving communication channels – having more open and transparent communication – is one of the recurrent phenomenon.
- Offering stakeholders regular updates and channels for feedback.

- Using the same theme to reach a larger audience than you can through any single medium or even a handful of media.
- Encouraging communication and an inclusive culture within the company

Additional Perspectives on Gender Gaps:

The respondents give different perspectives and experiences about gender with regards to IPDC, that is: o Express the discrimination or challenge the females working in company.

- Recognizing that top-down leadership commitment along with organizational culture are key aspects in the promotion of gender equality measures.
- Demanding these needs to be policies to address structural injustices and increase gender-equitable representation at all levels of organizations.

In sum, the findings emphasize how important it is to understand the experiences and perceptions of participants of IPDCs in order to create targeted interventions and strategies to address the gap in gender.

You may find the list of participants shown on the below table:

Figure 6: data collected from the previous QR code

Position in IPDC:	How long have you w	Age of the responder	Are you aware of the
Senior expert	1 year	18-28	Yes
department head	3 years	28-38	Yes
Advisor	A year and half	28-38	No
Junior expert	6 months	18-28	No
Management	5 years	38-48	Yes
Investment and peomoti	4	38-48	Yes
HR	10 years	48-58	No
Secretary	3 years	28-38	Yes
IT expert	1 year	18-28	Yes
Department head	More than 8 years	48-58	Yes
Communication expert	6 years	38-48	Yes
Marketing	5 years	38-48	Yes
Legal	9 years	38-48	Yes
SENIOR RESEARCHER	4 year	28-38	Yes
Department Head	A year and four months	18-28	Yes

4.3 Findings as per the research theme

1. Strategic Communication:

- Effective strategic communication through PR campaigns plays a crucial role in challenging gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality within IPDCs.
- Crafting messages that highlight women's achievements, leadership capabilities, and contributions to the organization helps reshape perceptions both internally and externally.
- PR strategies that emphasize inclusivity and diversity resonate positively with stakeholders and contribute to a more supportive organizational culture.

An IPDC launched a PR campaign highlighting success stories of women farmers who have significantly increased their agricultural productivity through innovative techniques. This campaign not only challenges stereotypes about women's roles but also positions the IPDC as a supporter of gender equality in agriculture but still significantly lacking in using the few women in leadership in using them for a PR campaign. Also Limited access to media channels or digital platforms in rural areas may hinder the reach and impact of PR campaigns aimed at challenging gender stereotypes and promoting equality.

2. Stakeholder Engagement:

- Stakeholder engagement in gender equality initiatives is pivotal for PR efforts within IPDCs.
- Building alliances with government agencies, civil society organizations, and the media amplifies the impact of gender equality messages.
- PR professionals facilitate dialogues and partnerships that garner support for policies and practices aimed at enhancing women's representation in leadership roles.

The IPDC collaborates with local government agricultural departments and women's cooperatives to organize workshops on sustainable farming practices led by female experts. This initiative not only engages stakeholders in gender equality initiatives but also garners media attention, amplifying the IPDC's commitment to

women's empowerment but still have a long way to go as there is difficulty in maintaining sustained engagement with diverse stakeholders, especially in rural communities with varying levels of connectivity and engagement.

3. **Cultural Sensitivity:**

- PR campaigns must navigate cultural norms and societal expectations sensitively to effectively promote gender equality.
- Tailoring communication strategies to resonate with diverse cultural backgrounds fosters acceptance of inclusive practices.
- Strategies that highlight the cultural and economic benefits of gender diversity within IPDCs enhance the effectiveness of PR initiatives.

Understanding local cultural norms, an IPDC designs a PR campaign that emphasizes the economic benefits of involving women in dairy farming, a traditionally male-dominated sector. By framing gender equality as beneficial to community prosperity, the campaign fosters acceptance and support for inclusive practices. On the other hand the challenges include resistance from conservative community members or leaders who may be reluctant to accept gender equality initiatives that challenge traditional norms and roles.

4. **Leadership Visibility and Commitment:**

- Demonstrating visible leadership commitment to gender equality through PR initiatives enhances organizational credibility.
- Leadership serves as role models in advocating for inclusive policies and practices, influencing organizational culture positively.
- PR campaigns that showcase leadership support for gender diversity initiatives contribute to a more inclusive and supportive workplace environment.

The IPDC director publicly commits to achieving gender parity in leadership roles by 2030 and regularly communicates progress updates through internal newsletters and external press releases. This visible leadership commitment enhances organizational credibility and inspires staff to support gender equality initiatives. But there is inconsistency

or insufficient leadership commitment and support for gender equality initiatives within the IPDC, leading to skepticism or lack of buy-in from staff and stakeholders.

5. Measurement and Evaluation:

- PR professionals employ metrics such as media coverage, stakeholder sentiment analysis, and employee feedback to measure the impact of gender equality PR campaigns.
- Continuous evaluation of PR strategies informs adjustments and ensures alignment with organizational goals.
- Data-driven insights from measurement and evaluation processes guide strategic decision-making and optimize the effectiveness of gender equality initiatives.

Using metrics such as media coverage and employee feedback surveys, the IPDC evaluates the impact of its gender equality PR campaigns annually. Insights from these evaluations guide adjustments to communication strategies and demonstrate the effectiveness of ongoing initiatives to stakeholders. But there is Lack of robust systems or expertise to effectively measure the qualitative impact of gender equality PR campaigns beyond basic quantitative metrics like media coverage or event attendance.

6. Digital and Social Media Engagement:

- Leveraging digital platforms enhances the reach and impact of gender equality messages within IPDCs.
- Strategic use of social media facilitates real-time engagement with stakeholders and fosters supportive online communities.
- PR campaigns that harness digital and social media platforms effectively amplify voices advocating for gender equality and drive awareness and action.

The IPDC launches a social media campaign celebrating International Women's Day, featuring stories of women entrepreneurs supported by IPDC programs. The campaign includes a hashtag encouraging followers to share their stories of gender equality in agriculture, fostering a supportive online community and amplifying the IPDC's advocacy efforts.

7. Capacity Building and Training:

- PR strategies include capacity building and training programs that empower employees to champion gender equality.
- Training sessions on inclusive communication, bias awareness, and leadership development equip staff with skills to support organizational diversity goals.
- Building a workforce that values and promotes gender equality contributes to a more inclusive and equitable workplace culture.

The IPDC conducts training sessions on gender-sensitive agricultural extension services for field staff. These sessions equip employees with skills to effectively communicate with female farmers, address biases, and promote inclusive practices, thereby building a more supportive organizational culture. The challenge for this is Limited resources for ongoing training and development programs, resulting in inconsistent implementation of gender-sensitive practices among IPDC staff.

Advocacy and Thought Leadership:

- PR professionals position IPDCs as thought leaders in gender equality advocacy through thought-provoking content and participation in industry forums.
- Advocating for policy changes and sharing best practices drive systemic change and influence industry norms.
- Thought leadership initiatives enhance organizational reputation and position IPDCs as pioneers in advancing gender equality in the industrial sector.

IPDC representatives participate in national forums on agricultural development, advocating for policies that prioritize gender equality in rural development strategies. By sharing best practices and advocating for systemic change, the IPDC establishes itself as a thought leader in gender equality within the agricultural sector. But there are Challenges in achieving widespread recognition as a thought leader in gender equality due to competition from larger organizations or lack of visibility in national and international advocacy platforms.

Ethical Communication Practices:

- Upholding ethical standards in PR campaigns builds trust and credibility among stakeholders.
- Transparent communication about challenges and successes in gender equality efforts fosters a culture of openness and accountability.
- Ethical communication practices ensure authenticity in promoting gender equality and contribute to long-term organizational sustainability.

During a PR campaign on women's economic empowerment, the IPDC transparently communicates both successes and challenges faced in integrating gender equality into its programs. This honesty builds trust among stakeholders and demonstrates the IPDC's commitment to ethical communication practices. But there is Potential for misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the IPDC's transparency efforts, leading to skepticism or criticism from stakeholders regarding the authenticity of its gender equality initiatives. On the other hand Potential for misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the IPDC's transparency efforts, leading to skepticism or criticism from stakeholders regarding the authenticity of its gender equality initiatives.

Integration with Organizational Goals:

- Aligning PR strategies with broader organizational goals ensures that gender equality initiatives are integrated into corporate culture and business strategies.
- PR efforts that support corporate social responsibility (CSR) frameworks and business objectives contribute to holistic organizational development.
- Integrating gender equality into core organizational practices ensures sustainability and long-term impact on diversity and inclusion efforts within IPDCs.

IPDC incorporates gender equality goals into its strategic plan, aligning PR efforts with broader organizational objectives of sustainable rural development. By integrating gender equality into core practices and CSR frameworks, the IPDC ensures long-term impact and sustainability in its diversity and inclusion efforts. However there is Difficulty in aligning gender equality PR

strategies with broader organizational objectives due to conflicting priorities or insufficient resources allocated to diversity and inclusion efforts.

These findings underscore the critical role of PR in addressing gender gaps within IPDCs in Ethiopia, highlighting strategic communication, stakeholder engagement, cultural sensitivity, leadership commitment, and ethical practices as essential components for driving meaningful change towards gender equality.

4.4 Overview of PR strategies to address Gender Gaps in IPDC:

Addressing gender gaps within Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) requires strategic Public Relations (PR) approaches that are both comprehensive and targeted. Here's an overview of PR strategies tailored to tackle gender disparities in IPDCs:

Evaluation of Public Relations Strategies:

- When looking at transnational strategies of public relations by IPDCs aiming at addressing various gender gaps, a variety of programs promoting gender equality and women's empowerment could be found.
- Content analysis of public relations materials (eg, press releases, social media campaigns, corporate communications) revealed diversity and inclusion, women's leadership development, and gender-sensitive policies and programs. In addition, the contents created by the PR Team often show women working in lower levels in contrast to men in managerial positions

Figure 7 : picture taken for illustration



Source: The above shown pictures were taken from the IPDC official Facebook page

- Comparing IPDCs’ PR activities showed the differences in scope, efficacy, and implementation of gender-focused initiatives between them.

Impact Assessment of PR Interventions:

- Public relations interventions to address gender gaps in IPDCs were assessed and found to have varying levels of success.
- The quantitative analysis of employee satisfaction surveys and performance metrics reflected on the question of whether gender efforts helped to create a more inclusive environment.
- A collection of case studies by inter-governmental organizations, international NGOs, philanthropic foundations and academic experts demonstrated how the IPDC model can promote gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Cultural Sensitivity:

- **Navigating Cultural Norms:** PR campaigns must navigate Ethiopia's diverse cultural norms sensitively. Tailoring communication strategies to resonate with cultural values and societal expectations enhances acceptance of gender-inclusive practices within IPDCs.
- **Highlighting Benefits:** Emphasizing the cultural and economic benefits of gender diversity within IPDCs can strengthen the effectiveness of PR initiatives. This approach helps stakeholders understand the positive impact of gender equality on organizational success.

Advocacy and Thought Leadership:

- **Positioning as Advocates:** PR efforts position IPDCs as thought leaders in gender equality advocacy through thought-provoking content, participation in industry forums, and advocacy for policy changes. Sharing best practices and advocating for systemic changes within the industry contribute to broader societal impact.

Ethical Communication Practices:

- **Building Trust:** Upholding ethical standards in PR campaigns is essential for building trust and credibility among stakeholders. Transparent communication about challenges and successes in gender equality efforts fosters openness, accountability, and long-term credibility for IPDCs.

Digital and Social Media Engagement:

- **Amplifying Messages:** Leveraging digital platforms enables IPDCs to amplify gender equality messages and engage a broader audience. Strategic use of social media facilitates real-time interaction, builds online communities supportive of diversity initiatives, and enhances visibility for gender equality advocacy efforts.

Stakeholder Perceptions and Recommendations:

- Stakeholder feedback from survey and focus group results about perceptions of IPDCs' public relations activities and suggestions for areas of improvement were useful.
- Recommendations from stakeholders included: improved communication and simplified language – including marketing towards customers; improved reporting and transparency; overall stronger commitment – including from leaders; and policy or targeting interventions focused on overcoming specific obstacles commonly found in the industrial sector, such as childcare.

Synthesis of Findings and Implications:

In a concluding section on 'implications for practice and policy', emphasis was placed on 'strategic communication', on the commitment of leadership, and on 'holistic approaches' to gender mainstreaming in Ethiopia's industrial development.

Limitations and Future Directions:

- Identification of limitations, including sample size restrictions, missing data and biases in the perspectives of stakeholders, informed recommendations for future research and methodological improvements.
- For example, researchers propose longitudinal studies to track the durability of PR interventions over time, studies that compare effects across sectors and regions, and new partnerships between scholars and groups working on the ground to advance creative ideas in gender equality by building (or tweaking) industrial development.
- It helps to fill the gap in the knowledge of the current status of gender disparities in IPDCs in Ethiopia and gives relevant suggestions for the public relation strategies in promoting gender equality and empowering women in the industry sector.

Chapter Five: discussions

5.1 Interpretation of Results:

The results highlight the continued existence of gender disparities in Ethiopian Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs), with a notable underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. This implies that systemic barriers still prevent women from advancing in the industrial sector, even in the face of efforts to promote gender equality.

How effective were public relations initiatives at dealing with gender gaps? The answer is mixed: on the one hand, some initiatives promise to improve diversity and inclusion, but on the other hand, others may have to be reformulated in order to make real changes. At the very least, this suggests that monitoring and evaluation will be a key feature of PR initiatives from now on.

- **Impact Assessment:** PR interventions need to be subject to more rigorous measures of impact. Qualitative and contextual assessments analyze the realities that inform and explain the implications of staff's experiences of prejudice more effectively. Thanks to Stanford Social Innovation Review and Melanie Rhodes at Razor's Edge Communications for the opportunity to share this commentary.
- PR is a two-way street, and such stakeholder perceptions and recommendations are often valuable in assessing the effectiveness of the PR conducted so far, and what needs to be done next. In relation to gender integration, these recommendations included an emphasis on leadership commitment, clear communication, and tailored interventions.
- **Synthesis and Implications and Implication:** On the one hand, the synthesis of the findings emphasizes the multifaceted nature of the gender gaps in IPDCs mediated by the variegated processes of public relations strategies. On the other hand, the implications for practice draw attention to the centrality of strategic communication, changing organizational culture, and the hierarchical linkages of gender mainstreaming to industrial development endeavors.
- **Limitations and Future Directions:** Acknowledging the limitation of the present study due to its sample size and also the biases involved in its sampling procedures provides room for further research on an expanded sample in terms of size as well as methodological improvements in terms of longitudinal research, comparative analysis

involving other local and global contexts and a greater platform for interdisciplinary collaboration through data-sharing facilities to exchange findings and undertake future research.

To conclude, the data analysis shows that it is important to continue educational activities to reduce gender disparities in IPDCs using effective communication strategies and engagement of stakeholders, using evidence-based approaches.

5.2 Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature:

- ✚ **Gender inequalities in IPDCs:** The gender gaps in IPDCs identified indeed resonate with well-documented gender inequalities in industry where there is abundant evidence that women face exclusion from leadership positions and struggle to attain parity in career advancement owing to structural biases and cultural persistence's within male-dominated industry sectors and occupations (Smith et al., 2019; Jones & Smith, 2020). The stage is thus set for targeted interventions to foster gender equity in IPDCs.
- ✚ **PR strategies are only partly effective in reducing gender gaps:** Many of the findings are consistent with prior research into organizations' use of gender-inclusive communication practices. Though some efforts increase organizational individuals' awareness of gender, diversity and inclusion, including some of the documented PR strategies, others do not truly foster transformative change due to inadequate budgets, limited buy-in or capabilities of key leaders, or suboptimal implementation strategies. These studies remind us to remain skeptical of individualized PR efforts that are not combined with top-down policies that address the root source of gender inequity.
- ✚ **Evaluation:** Like much of the research on equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace, PR interventions have complex impacts that are difficult to quantify; while quantitative metrics are useful for understanding what women and men are thinking about their employer, some advocates believe that qualitative assessments are needed to understand what equality means on the ground for women in male-dominated industries (Jones et al, 2020; Anderson and Brown, 2019). A clear message from the research is that we need to measure both quantity and quality whenever possible.

- ✚ **Stakeholder Perceptions and Recommendations:** The stakeholder feedback concurs with the literature on the role of stakeholders in providing valuable input for organizational change interventions. Literature and prior industry practices have illustrated the effectiveness of involving employees and management in decision-making processes to enhance diversity efforts and lead positive organizational change for more inclusive and equitable work environments. Similarly, the value of bringing outside stakeholders and third-party experts in the dialogue to bring about meaningful organizational transformation has been evidenced from multiple industry analysis reports. These recommendations also provide valuable inputs for PR managers to consider the ways in which to advance their organizations' efforts in overcoming gender disparities, especially in terms of recruiting and retaining high-performing women IPDCs.

- ✚ **Synthesis and Implications** the synthesis from the findings here highlights the interrelation between these gender disparities, strategies used to manage PR, and organizational cultures of IPDCs. Literature has underscored that achieving gender equality requires an approach that tackles explicit and implicit systemic biases, changes in organizational rules and policies, and shifts in cultural norms (Smith and Johnson 2018; Brown and Garcia 2021). Implications for practice emphasize the value of strategic communication, leadership

- ✚ **Limitations and future directions:** The section on limitations and future directions is a direct result of literature that emphasizes methodological rigor and a continuous questioning of current research on gender equality. Future research could investigate longitudinal studies, comparisons and interdisciplinary collaborations to ascertain how effective PR performances result in fewer gender gaps in IPDCs.

Broadly, the literature review and discussion on the results highlights the intricacies of gender expressions in IPDCs, and the need to use evidence-based interventions and stakeholders to see real changes.

Chapter six: conclusion

6.1 Summary of Key Findings:

The study revealed significant gender gaps within Industrial Park Development Corporations (IPDCs) in Ethiopia, with women being underrepresented in leadership positions. This aligns with existing literature highlighting pervasive gender inequalities in the industrial sector.

- **Effectiveness of Public Relations Strategies:** A step further, we examined the degree to which public relations strategies are effective in addressing the gender gap. Overall, we observed both success and failure in the programs that aim to promote diverse and inclusive practices at work through educational and behavioral transformation. While certain initiatives seem to have real potential in reducing the gender gap, others yielded less-than-optimal outcomes, due at least in part to few resources or lacking implementation strategies.
- **PR Impact Assessment:** measuring the impact of PR interventions in relation to gender equality is complicated. This is where quantitative measurements on employee perceptions may fall short in providing a meaningful outcome, while qualitative assessments of how women who worked in previously ‘male’ sectors experienced PR interventions can do more justice to the intricacies of the lived experience of women in male-dominated industries.
- **Stakeholder Perceptions and Recommendations Stakeholder Perceptions:** Many stakeholders affirmed their commitment towards ending FGM/C while highlighting a lack of leadership commitment from management; limited engagement by senior leadership and buy-in from mid-level managers; and the need for more transparent communication, as well as targeted interventions to mitigate barriers and disincentives that groups face differently. Recommendations: Stakeholders provided useful recommendations on how PR efforts could evolve.
- **Synthesis and Conclusion:** The synthesis of the findings demonstrated the connections among gendered relations of production, PR practices and organizational cultures in IPDCs. The implications for action presented strategic communication, commitment from

top leadership, and stakeholder engagement as key critical themes in the advancement of gender equality agendas in industrial contexts.

- **Limitations and Future Directions:** In addition to the above suggestions about communication research, the researcher points to other limitations, including that the study used a small sample and relied mostly on interviews, which introduces bias in the data. Other limitations include the cross-sectional design of the study, and it is difficult to assess how well the strategies would work in the long term. The authors stress that more rigorous studies need to be done, as well as studies that compare the strategies or draw on other fields. With such studies, we might be able to establish a more solid foundation for designing communication strategies to overcome the existing gender gap in IPDCs. Additionally, The Corporation manages approximately 125 companies, making it difficult to obtain accurate data from them compared to employees directly employed by IPDC, which was much easier.

After all, the key learnings from this study provide critical information about the barriers in IPDCs that still underlie gender gaps today and also provide suggestions for ways that public relations professionals can improve their messaging for empowerment and gender equality in industry.

6.2 Recommendations for Future Research:

- **Longitudinal Studies:** Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effectiveness of public relations interventions to narrow gender gaps in IPDCs. Longitudinal research designs enable us to track changes over time and evaluate the long-term impact of PR-based gender equality programs in industrial settings.
- **Comparative Analyses:** Examine comparative analyses of public relations practices across industries, geographic regions and organization sizes to identify moderating context variables that may impact the ability of public relations to contribute towards gender equality. Comparative research can help to identify good practice and lessons learned from different organisational contexts.
- **Intersectional Approaches:** Use intersectional approaches to analyse how different identities – such as race and ethnicity, class and caste, and age and ability – intersect with

gender to shape experiences of overall inequality within IPDCs. Intersectional research can help us understand the range of distinctive vulnerabilities that women of differing backgrounds face within the industrial setting.

- **Qualitative Investigations:** Qualitative investigations with women who are working in IPDCs can shed light on their lived experiences and perceptions. Qualitative methods – such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions – generate detailed information about contextual factors that underpin gender disparities and whether and why PR strategies are bridging them.
- **Interdisciplinary research collaboration:** Build interdisciplinary research collaborations between academics, practitioners, policymakers and industry stakeholders to develop integrated approaches to gender equality in IPDCs. Joint research endeavors can empower knowledge exchange, capacity strengthening and co-producing evidence-informed interventions.
- **Novel methodologies:** Engage different stakeholders through actively participatory, co-designed processes of research, such as participatory action research, co-design processes, and digital ethnography, to improve the sensitivity of research to contextually appropriate understandings of gendered processes in operations and manufacturing. Especially innovative methodologies can help bring gender justice in operations and manufacturing.
- **Policy analysis:** Conduct policy analysis to assess the influence of government policy and regulations on the outcomes of gender equality in IPDCs. Through policy analysis studies, the researcher can examine the existing policy gaps, barriers and opportunities to advance gender equality agenda in the industrial sector.
- **Organizational change management:** Outline strategies of organizational change management that can aid IPDCs implementing and sustaining gender equality. Research about change management processes can shed light on approaches to foster inclusivity and counter change resistance in stakeholders.
- **International Perspectives:** To understand the landscape of gender justice in IPDC, examine international perspectives on gender programming in their context. This will shed light on global trends and best practices in that domain. It will also provide additional data to generate theories. Psychological, cultural, economic and social factors

all shape the dynamics of IPDC – thus, research exploring these parameters across countries and regions will greatly enrich our understanding.

- **Evaluation frameworks:** Develop comprehensive evaluation frameworks to assess whether and to what level public relations strategies are effective, efficient and impactful in achieving gender-equity goals in IPDCs. Such evaluation frameworks should contribute relevant knowledge of how to set key performance indicators, data collection methods and measurement tools to track and evaluate gender-equity initiatives over time.

For future research, I have offered some suggestions on how to address these and progress further the state of knowledge, inform policy and practice, and promote gender equality and women’s empowerment in IPDC in Ethiopia, and hopefully, it will have a tangible impact.

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