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Dr. Simon Thiaine Kubaison (Ph. D).
Meru University of Science and Technology
PO BOX 972-60200 Meru.

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Dr. Simon Thiaine Kubaison, PhD.
Meru University of Science and Technology
PO BOX 972-60200 Meru.

Abstract
Evidence of gender inequality and bias is all around us. Workplace prejudice has been found to affect workers’ salaries and career progression. Fighting gender stereotypes and prejudice by employers makes good business sense and in many countries, it’s a legal obligation. This study aimed at investigating three factors believed to influence gender equality at the workplace. These included culture, distribution of resources and interpersonal relations. Five select medium sized public and private sector organizations based in Meru County were investigated. Each selected organization employed over 100 workers. A total of 102 ordinary workers were randomly selected to participate in the study. Interviews and questionnaires were used as the main data collection tools. The study observed that women are more discriminated at the workplace. Culture plays a key role in perpetuating gender imbalance at the workplace due to men being dominant while women have been subordinate in the society. Further, outdated beliefs and separate gender roles have been responsible for holding women back. On distribution of resources, women were found to be under-represented in major decision making organs in the organization and suffered unequal access to economic resources. However, cases of pay based on gender were negligible. Regarding interpersonal relations, the study observed that cases of sexual harassment play a key role in advancing gender inequality. The study noted that gender inequality at the workplace was responsible for cases of hostile working atmosphere, worker conflicts, harassment of subordinates by superiors. Low productivity and slow growth of the organization. Various solutions to gender discrimination were recommended by the study. These include enforcing affirmative action in areas where there exists high discrimination against one gender. Individual organizations should invest in education, sensitization and mentorship programs to champion gender equality. Further, the government should enact more laws to prohibit gender discrimination practices. Organizations need to develop internal policies that punish offenders of gender discrimination and ensure a policy of equal-pay-for-equal work.

Introduction
The focus of this paper is to discuss some strategies that organizations employ to bridge the gap that is perceived to exist between male and female employees at the workplace. The sex discrimination often leads to the gender discrimination practices. Gender equality is achieved when men and women enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society. These include economic participation and decision-making, and when different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured. Gender equality is measured by looking at the representation of men and of women in a range of roles. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. (Article 1 of the universal declaration of human rights). It further states in Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Majority of Kenyans feel that the country is moving in the right direction on gender equality. The country’s
new Constitution, passed in 2010, provides a powerful framework for addressing gender equality. This Constitution provides that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective as well as appointive bodies should be of the same gender. However, there is still public concern over women’s continued discrimination in critical areas such as land ownership and inheritance, as well as election to political office (Kairu, 2017). Kenya is yet to meet the constitutionally accepted political membership threshold by both gender, especially in the major law making government organ, the National Assembly. Although the number of Kenyan women elected to parliament was better in the 2017 elections, compared to those of 2013, the numbers still fell short of the constitutional two-thirds gender requirement. Currently, the number of women in the National Assembly to 76, still short by 41 to make 117 or one-third of the 349 MPs — 290 elected, 47 woman representatives and 12 nominated members (Kairu, 2017).

This study was carried out among 102 select workers belonging to 5 medium sized organizations in Meru County; two leading cooperatives, two institutions of higher learning and the county government staff. The study was keen to investigate organizations that had engaged more than a 100 staff members. The sample consisted of 62 female and 40 male respondents. I used a survey method of investigation to explore the key factors in multi-sectorial organizations that influence gender inequity at the workplace. An interview schedule and a simple questionnaire were utilized to collect personal opinions and information relating to causes of gender imbalance in the organizations.

Causes of Gender Imbalance

Women in the developing countries still feel disadvantaged compared with their male counterparts on several fronts. MWIA (2002) identifies gender-specific factors that often disadvantage women, including, women’s lower status and social value in the households, Cultural factors, being excluded from decision making organs and reduced access to opportunities like education and equal participation in economic development.

Distribution of resources

Women still feel disempowered economically. Jayachandran (2015) noted that women in developing countries fare worse relative to men compared to women in developed countries on a variety of measures, ranging from college enrollment to control over one’s life. This is also true for Kenyan women although in some communities like Meru more women than men are involved in small-scale businesses.

Randstad’s report (2018) notes that Women in the United States earn on around 79 cents for every dollar that men earn but this gap is much worse for women of color. Overcoming this is critical for retaining women in the workplace. Economic development is characterized by better physical infrastructure, more advanced technology and higher household income Jayachandran (2015). Women in developing countries report having relatively less control over their lives than those in developed countries. There is particularly little freedom of choice for women in India, the Middle East, and North Africa.

Culture

Cultural practices all over the world have impacted greatly on lives of men and women. Culture has developed distinct roles for men and women in all societies. These have found their way into our modern workplaces. Many cultures practice patriarchy, in which a married couple lives near or with the husband’s parents. Once a woman gets married, she essentially ceases to be a member of her birth family and joins her husband’s family (Letitia, 2003). Under this system, parents potentially reap more of the returns to investments in a son’s health and education because he will remain a part of their family (Jayachandran, 2015) financial mindset about investing in daughters is encapsulated in an often-quoted Indian saying that “raising a daughter is like watering your neighbors’ garden.” This sentiment is echoed in a Chinese proverb that describes raising a daughter as “plowing someone else’s field.” In Kenya, the government had to intervene in 2010 and unveiled a new constitution that aimed at promoting the participation of women in economic development, anchored in affirmative action policies for all public organizations.

In a patrilineal system, names and property pass to the next generation through male descendants. This system puts sons on a higher footing than daughters, and the specific feature of land inheritance is especially likely to have effects on gender gaps (Joan, 2008). Just like in African continent, there is a parents’ strong desire to have a son in China and India, which may make girls perceived as unloved or unwanted. Although studies have shown that in general women have a longer life expectancy than men, this female advantage is somewhat smaller in poor countries (Jayachandran, 2015).
Interpersonal relations

Interpersonal relations involves the way members of a group relate with each other. Workplace discrimination is most directly attributable to HR practices (Hopcroft, 2009). People's conceptions of masculinity and femininity, ideas concerning the fairness of differential treatment or expectations of women and men, internalized schema that evoke different judgments of women's and men's actions, rules about proper male and female behavior applied to children – all these and more concern the influence of ideology on gender identities, differential treatment of women and men, and the organization and persistence of gender inequality (Burns & Katherine, 2010).

In organizations just like in our wider society, men and women find themselves performing certain roles in the workplace. For instance, in board meetings women enjoy serving snacks and drinks during break time. It naturally happens because of the societal expectations placed on them. It is not forced on them, and it is unlikely for any of them to feel offended. Men also have certain roles that they play consciously or unconsciously in organizations. Gender roles are the particular economic, social roles and responsibilities considered appropriate for women and men in a given society. Gender roles and characteristics do not exist in isolation, but are defined in relation to one another and through the relationship between women and men, girls and boys (MWIA 2002).

Organizations in Kenya use policy documents and legal provisions to guide workers on interpersonal relations. Such policies should however guard against gender-based tokenism or benevolent sexism, where you reward one gender in order to satisfy policies and legal provisions at the expense of quality performance. Jayachandran (2015) notes that concern for women’s and girls’ safety and “purity” constrains their physical mobility in many developing countries. It is difficult to say how much of the limited mobility is out of genuine concern for women’s welfare, aimed at protecting them from harassment and sexual violence, and how much is simply a way to stifle female autonomy.

Gender mainstreaming should be enhanced in all organizations. This is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences, an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes, in all political, economic and social spheres (Onsongo, 2006). While sex and its associated biological functions are programmed genetically, gender roles and power relations and the power relations they reflect are a social construct – they vary across cultures and through time, and thus are amenable to change. (MWIA 2002).

All organizations should emphasize on developing equal opportunity policies to promote the interests of the disadvantaged. Changing existing structural, organisational and institutional practices is necessary in order to accommodate the needs of women with multiple roles. One issue is the need to give young mothers flexible working hours (Onsongo, 2006). According to Jayachandran (2015), eliminating gender inequality might require explicit policy intervention. Moreover, one might not want to wait patiently as the problem of gender inequality resolves itself through economic growth. One type of gender-progressive policy is granting legal rights to women. A powerful example of this tool is India’s move to reserve political seats for women. A limitation of legal reforms is that enforcement is often weak. For example, the legal reform granting women rights to ancestral land. Thus, another policy approach is to try to change women’s attitudes, whether by creating a cadre of role models or by other means.

Discussion

Distribution of resources

The study paid more attention to pay, leadership positions and representation in key decision making positions or careers.62% of respondents felt that there was no disparity in pay for male and female employees working at similar level or grade. This is in contrast to studies carried out in the developed world where unequal pay dominates the cause of gender discrimination (Randstad, 2018).

On representation in key decision making organs, the study observed that there exists some disparity in the two cooperatives although women are coming up quite well. The male gender dominated the representation. For instance, more than two-thirds of the governing organs(directors) were found to be of the male gender. This was supported by the respondents where 66% felt that male gender dominated key positions in the management of organizations; thus indicating that the other gender was under-represented in the leadership of the workplace. There was however a more balanced representation in the universities and the county government. On accessing key positions 86% of respondents indicated that male gender was accessing more key jobs than their female counterparts, in the workplace. However, female employees had dominated low-key jobs in the same organizations, while managerial and technical jobs are largely controlled by men in the organizations surveyed. A
male university worker observed that in the university where he worked, the number of female workers exceeded that of male workers. “It is only that most of them occupy low key jobs while only a few work hard to get top positions. You cannot blame men for this situation.”

Culture
The study further sought to understand the role of culture in influencing gender equality. 57% of the respondents felt that family roles as prescribed by society influenced gender discrimination. To use the factor positively, 75% agreed with suggestion that no roles should be gender-based; The assertion being that society no longer prescribes some jobs as feminine or others masculine. Custom-based practices were found to influence the thinking of organizational members; while outdated ideologies and beliefs were also said to influence gender divide (66%). A female respondent working for a SACCO confessed: “When time came to make a decision to go for higher education, it was natural that my husband had to pursue his undergraduate studies before me. None of our family members suggested that I should go first. It was only after he graduated that I got an opportunity to advance mine. There were even some family members who felt that I did not need to go for more education”.

Family and kinship are potentially relevant to gender inequality in varied ways (Brines, 1994). Traditional ideas about the roles of girls and women restrict their contributions in the society. Some women have succeeded in resisting these practices and have been able to change communities positively through this resistance (Kathleen, 2009). It was noted that some members of organizations have formed cartel-like groups that manipulate members, including those in management. The groups are for advancing personal and group interests. In this study, 46% of respondents felt that collusion between members of the dominant group was responsible for advancing their interest at the expense of the minority. Half of the surveyed respondents indicated presence of harassment in the organizations by few members. Most theoretical approaches to gender inequality suggest that violence between women and men plays a role in sustaining inequality; some also point toward violence as an initial cause (Michael, 2005). However violence in the organizations surveyed was only manifest in form of psychological harassment as opposed to physical violence. Most of the cases went unreported and victims of harassment handled the matter in various ways; including resigning and looking for jobs elsewhere, letting the matter die naturally with time, or negotiating for truce informally. A female respondent working for a university revealed, “Majority of casual workers in our university are young women. Men easily find their way and get absorbed as permanent staff while we are left behind buoyed by the role of taking care of our young families. Men at this time outsmart us by attracting the eye of our supervisors. It therefore does not surprise us when male casuals are recommended for permanent jobs or extension of contract. Being a casual worker does not exempt us ladies from undertaking all household chores, regardless of how tired we are.”

The study further used an interview schedule to investigate the opinions of various respondents in regard to the effect of gender equality in their organizations. The benefits of gender equity at the workplace as envisaged by respondents were rated as follows: Gender equality would lead to expeditious growth of the organization (95%); gender equality would lead to higher Profitability (90%); gender equality would lead to individual’s higher performance (86%); gender equality would result into peaceful coexistence (71%) and gender equality would increase the rate of staff retention (66%).

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report has observed that the future of a Kenyan woman is looking bright. Kenyan rich women are taking over the man in the role of bread winning. Gender inequality could soon be a thing of the past for the country. Most women today make more than what their husbands make. Majority are going back to school to earn college degrees and doctorates. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are central to UNDP’s work and mandate, and a mean for attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNDP works on improving lives of women and their access to social, economic and legal rights. Globally, UNDP supports international and national efforts to mainstream gender and women’s empowerment, making women’s and men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension into all our areas of work guided by our Gender Equality Strategy (UNDP, 2017).

Strategies employed by organizations to promote gender balance.

The study noted that the five organizations surveyed had written policy statements warning workers against all forms of discrimination against their subordinates. Three organizations had established gender committees that regularly advised the management on gender issues. Four organizations investigated had developed suitable policies that protected workers
against sexual harassment by senior or junior members of the organization. Further, 80% of the respondents believed that their managements were working towards meeting the government pronounced policy on two-thirds gender rule on leadership positions. In the top organs of decision making, the appointments in these positions met this requirement by ensuring that neither gender exceeded two-thirds majority. These were university councils and senates for universities, while the county government had balanced gender in the boards of directors. The two universities, with a population of over 600 staff had only 6 cases of sexual harassment reported. However one could not rule out a possibility of few unreported cases. The number of these cases therefore sounds insignificant, but the institutions policy on anti-sexual harassment may have been responsible for this.

There was an argument that the affirmative action on gender balance at the workplace could be working against members of one gender, especially in cases where one may feel more qualified than a member of the other gender who is promoted or given a new position on the basis of balancing the gender representation in various positions of authority (Hyde, 2005). A respondent in the cooperatives sector questioned the rationale of giving out positions on the basis of gender at the expense of proven past performance. This assertion is supported by another respondent who said: “Discrimination against the boy child is now being extended to the workplace.”

Another male respondent protested: “If a position is given on the basis of representation and not ability, what is the use of good grades on our academic certificates or commendation from our appraisal reports. It is unfair to resort to a tokenism culture on the basis of gender. Public organizations are at risk of breeding mediocrity if this is not checked in good time.”

Probably the two most important general issues for consideration in our organizations involve the ways that women and men are unequal within families and the ways that family organization both contributes to and is influenced by gender inequality beyond the family institution (Kathleen, 2009).

Conclusion
Workers in every organization bring in distinct, sometimes conflicting values into the organization. There is need for organizations to develop organizational cultures that will help to deter all forms of gender discrimination which, to a large extent creates gender imbalance in the organization. Strong organizational cultures have policies that provide equal opportunities to all members regardless of race, religion, gender, economic background and social status. It should provide a chance to every member of the organization to discover themselves and develop their potential for personal and career growth. This will benefit the organization in the long run.

More opportunities should be provided to any gender that feels disadvantaged in the organizations. This can be realized easily if the management team develops policies that are not discriminative. For instance, some highly skilled working mothers face a dilemma when they are forced by circumstances to choose between taking up higher position offered by management and family roles. Quite a number decline to take up these positions. However, if the management would be more flexible to accommodate the needs of this working mother, it would lead to a win-win situation. None of the organizations surveyed was keen on giving these young mothers flexible-working hours arrangement as you would find it happening in the west. Organizations sometimes find it difficult to accommodate some employee needs due to competitive nature of their business, amount of work demanded from each job holder and pressure from shareholders or the appointing authority. There are cases that have been reported in the country where managements refuse to accommodate back or renew contracts for young female employees who find themselves expectant. They are replaced with male counterparts the moment they leave the work station to have babies.

Drawing from a national perspective, the government, through affirmative action has been able to balance the access to basic education between girls and boys in less than two decades. In some parts of the central province and the northern part of Meru County, the number of girls enrolled in primary schools has surpassed the number of boys. The same affirmative action has improved tremendously the access of higher education by female students, bridging the wide gap that existed in universities and tertiary institution up to early 1990s. The same affirmative action needs to be institutionalized in the workplace.

Empowerment programs targeting the disadvantaged gender need to be put in place. It is high time HR departments engaged workers in mentorship programs to champion gender equity in their organizations. This of course requires full support of the top managements. Various training programs can be initiated in-house to give an opportunity to all members of the organization to participate, re-discover their potential and experience personal growth. Training will create confidence in them and thus turning them into great future leaders.
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