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**Gender Equality and Its Influence on Workforce Participation in
Tanzania**



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Gender Equality and Its Influence on Workforce Participation in Tanzania



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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article was to analyze gender equality and its influence on workforce participation in Tanzania.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: Gender equality policies in Tanzania have had limited impact on female workforce participation. Inconsistent implementation and cultural norms restrict women's access to higher-paying jobs and leadership roles, particularly in rural areas. While some improvements are seen in sectors with better policy enforcement, overall progress remains hindered.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social role theory, feminist theory & human capital theory may be used to anchor future studies on the gender equality and its influence on workforce participation in Tanzania. In practice, the study recommends a multi-pronged approach to improving life expectancy in Nepal through targeted investments in healthcare infrastructure. From a policy perspective, the Nepalese government should prioritize equitable distribution of healthcare infrastructure to address disparities between urban and rural areas.

Keywords: *Gender Equality, Influence, Workforce Participation*

INTRODUCTION

Female workforce participation in developed economies in developed economies, female workforce participation has seen significant changes over the last few decades, influenced by factors such as economic development, social policies, and cultural shifts. In the United States, the female labor force participation rate stood at 56.8% in 2022, with prime-age women (ages 25-54) having a participation rate of 77.6% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). This reflects a steady increase in women's employment opportunities, particularly as women pursue higher education and enter the workforce in greater numbers. Similarly, in Japan, the labor force participation rate for women was 54.85% in 2023, marking a gradual increase from previous years (World Bank, 2023). However, challenges persist, including gender pay gaps and underrepresentation in leadership roles, which still hinder the full potential of female workforce participation. In the United Kingdom, the female labor force participation rate reached 58.26% in 2023, continuing a trend of improvement since 1991, where it was 52.32% (World Bank, 2023). This steady rise highlights the increasing integration of women into the workforce, though issues like occupational segregation and glass ceilings remain significant challenges.

In developing economies, female labor force participation varies widely, with some countries showing significant progress while others face barriers related to cultural norms, access to education, and gender-based discrimination. In Nepal, the female labor force participation rate was 28.68% in 2023, showing a slight increase from the previous year (World Bank, 2023). Despite challenges such as gendered labor market segmentation and low levels of education among women, there is an upward trend in female participation, particularly in urban areas. In Kenya, the female labor force participation rate was higher, at 72.2% in 2023, reflecting greater economic opportunities for women, particularly in agriculture and informal sectors (World Bank, 2023). However, despite these improvements, women in both Nepal and Kenya often face lower wages, fewer leadership opportunities, and are more likely to be employed in part-time or informal work. In Nigeria, female labor force participation has been particularly robust, reaching 80.7% in 2024, as women engage in both the formal and informal sectors, although challenges like limited access to vocational training and entrepreneurship opportunities remain significant barriers (World Bank, 2023). This increasing participation in the workforce is a positive indicator of gender equality in economic opportunities, but it requires comprehensive policies to address the systemic barriers that women face in these economies.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, female labor force participation is generally high, with many women engaging in the informal sector due to the lack of formal employment opportunities. In Madagascar, the female labor force participation rate reached 85% in 2023, one of the highest in the region, largely driven by the necessity for women to contribute economically within their households (World Bank, 2023). This high participation rate is also reflected in countries like Tanzania and Ethiopia, where the rates stood at 81% and 75%, respectively, in 2023 (World Bank, 2023). However, much of this participation is in the informal sector, which is typically characterized by lower pay, lack of job security, and limited opportunities for career advancement. Furthermore, while female participation is high, gendered barriers such as unequal access to education, healthcare, and capital limit the economic empowerment of women. In conclusion, while female participation in the labor force is strong in Sub-Saharan Africa, there remains a need for policies that promote women's access to formal employment, better working conditions, and equal economic opportunities.

Gender equality policies and practices are designed to ensure that individuals of all genders have equal access to opportunities, resources, and protections in various sectors, including the labor market. Such policies aim to address and reduce gender-based disparities, particularly in employment, wages, and leadership roles. Four common gender equality practices include: (1) Equal pay legislation, which ensures that men and women are paid equally for performing the same work; (2) Affirmative action policies, which encourage the recruitment of women into traditionally male-dominated industries; (3) Workplace anti-discrimination policies, which prevent gender-based discrimination in hiring, promotions, and treatment in the workplace; and (4) Parental leave policies, which promote shared family responsibilities and enable women to remain in the workforce after childbirth. These policies are directly linked to female workforce participation as they provide structural support for women's entry and retention in the labor market, positively impacting labor force participation rates (ILO, 2020).

For example, equal pay legislation directly affects labor force participation by ensuring women are compensated equally, reducing the gender pay gap and encouraging higher participation in the workforce. Affirmative action policies have been shown to increase female representation in fields such as technology and engineering, where women were historically underrepresented. Workplace anti-discrimination policies foster an environment where women are more likely to be hired, promoted, and treated fairly, thus improving employment rates. Parental leave policies are crucial in balancing work and family life, supporting women in maintaining continuous employment after childbirth and contributing to higher female labor force participation rates. Overall, gender equality policies and practices contribute significantly to improving female participation in the workforce, as they tackle systemic barriers that hinder women's economic empowerment (World Bank, 2021; ILO, 2020).

Problem Statement

In Tanzania, despite significant strides toward gender equality in recent years, women continue to face challenges that limit their full participation in the workforce. The country's gender gap in labor force participation remains substantial, with women significantly underrepresented in high-paying sectors such as technology, engineering, and leadership roles. The low female labor force participation rate is influenced by various socio-cultural factors, such as traditional gender roles, early marriage, and lack of access to education, particularly in rural areas (ILO, 2021). Furthermore, policies aimed at promoting gender equality in the workplace have not been fully effective in addressing these challenges, as many women still encounter discrimination, unequal pay, and limited career advancement opportunities. Although Tanzania has introduced laws and policies aimed at enhancing gender equality in employment, the implementation of these policies remains inconsistent, especially in the private sector (World Bank, 2021). This study aims to investigate the influence of gender equality policies and practices on female workforce participation in Tanzania, focusing on the barriers and opportunities that shape women's employment outcomes.

Theoretical Review

Social Role Theory

Social role theory, developed by Alice Eagly (1987), suggests that gender roles are learned behaviors shaped by societal expectations, which influence how individuals behave in different contexts, including the workplace. The theory posits that societal norms dictate what is considered

"appropriate" for men and women, thereby influencing their career choices and participation in the workforce. In the context of Tanzania, this theory helps explain why women are often relegated to lower-paying, gender-segregated jobs and face barriers to accessing higher-status roles. It is relevant for understanding how deeply rooted gender roles in Tanzania might limit women's workforce participation and hinder the full implementation of gender equality policies (Eagly & Wood, 2021).

Feminist Theory

Feminist Theory, which has evolved through the works of scholars like Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and bell hooks (2000), focuses on addressing gender inequalities, emphasizing the need to understand how societal structures and power dynamics perpetuate women's subordination in various spheres, including employment. This theory critiques traditional gender roles and advocates for policies that challenge these structures to promote equality. In Tanzania, applying Feminist Theory helps highlight the systemic barriers, such as gender discrimination and cultural expectations, that impede women's full participation in the workforce. It is particularly relevant for understanding the institutional and societal obstacles that women face despite gender equality policies (hooks, 2019).

Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory, proposed by economists like Gary Becker (1964), emphasizes that investments in education, skills development, and training contribute to increased productivity and economic outcomes. This theory is essential for understanding how gender inequality in education and career development affects workforce participation. In Tanzania, women often have lower access to education and professional training, resulting in limited opportunities for workforce participation. Human capital theory helps explain how closing the gender education gap can increase female participation in the workforce by equipping women with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in various industries (Becker, 2018).

Empirical Review

Mwaipopo (2019) explored the impact of gender equality policies on women's labor force participation in Tanzania. The study aimed to understand how gender equality laws, such as those promoting equal pay and anti-discrimination, influenced female employment rates in both the private and public sectors. Data were collected through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with female employees in different industries across the country. The findings revealed that while Tanzania had gender equality policies in place, the actual impact on workforce participation was limited due to inconsistent implementation and entrenched cultural norms. The study found that many women faced significant challenges in accessing higher-paying jobs and leadership positions due to traditional gender roles, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, the study highlighted that women often found themselves in low-paying, informal sector jobs, which were not covered by many gender equality policies. Despite these challenges, the study did observe some improvements in sectors where gender equality policies were more rigorously implemented, such as in education and healthcare. The researchers concluded that while there were improvements, the overall impact on female workforce participation was constrained by societal perceptions and insufficient policy enforcement. The study recommended that the government should strengthen the implementation of gender equality laws and policies and ensure that both public and private sector employers comply with them. Additionally, it was suggested that greater

efforts should be made to challenge traditional gender roles and encourage more women to pursue careers in male-dominated sectors. Furthermore, Mwaipopo recommended that gender awareness training for both employers and employees be expanded. This training should be aimed at creating more inclusive workplaces and reducing gender-based discrimination. Lastly, the study emphasized the importance of monitoring and evaluating gender equality policies regularly to ensure they achieve their intended goals and contribute to improved labor force participation rates for women.

Kihampa and Kessy (2020) examined the role of affirmative action policies in increasing female participation in Tanzania's private sector. This quantitative study used surveys and statistical analysis to assess how gender quotas and affirmative action programs in hiring and promotions influenced women's employment in Tanzania's private companies. The researchers found that while affirmative action policies had led to a modest increase in female workforce participation in the private sector, the progress was slow and uneven across different industries. The study also indicated that despite the positive impacts of affirmative action, women still faced substantial barriers such as unequal pay, glass ceilings, and gender bias in promotions. Furthermore, the study found that while women were increasingly being hired for entry-level positions, they were often overlooked for managerial and senior leadership roles. Kihampa and Kessy also discovered that women who did reach leadership positions in the private sector were often isolated, with fewer opportunities for mentorship and professional development compared to their male counterparts. They emphasized that without a focus on closing the gender pay gap and fostering an inclusive corporate culture, affirmative action alone could not significantly alter the landscape of female workforce participation. The study recommended that Tanzanian companies expand their affirmative action policies to include gender-sensitive leadership development programs. They also suggested that women should be encouraged to take on leadership roles, and efforts should be made to dismantle the cultural barriers that deter them from doing so. Finally, the researchers called for stronger enforcement of affirmative action policies by the government to ensure that companies comply and that women in the workforce are supported in a way that fosters equal opportunities for advancement.

Mwega (2021) explored how workplace discrimination affects female labor force participation in Tanzania, using qualitative interviews with women in various industries. The study aimed to identify the extent of discrimination that women face in the workplace, focusing on issues such as unequal pay, lack of career advancement opportunities, and gender bias in hiring. The researchers found that workplace discrimination was a significant factor limiting women's participation in the workforce, particularly in the private sector. Women reported facing discrimination in the form of lower pay for equal work, fewer opportunities for promotions, and being overlooked for leadership positions. The study also found that many women in male-dominated industries experienced challenges in accessing training and development opportunities, which further restricted their career progression. Despite the existence of gender equality policies, the study found that these policies were not effectively enforced, and discrimination persisted in many workplaces. Mwega recommended that the Tanzanian government strengthen its anti-discrimination laws and ensure their implementation across all sectors, including the private and informal sectors. They also suggested that employers create more inclusive work environments by providing gender sensitivity training and ensuring equal opportunities for career development. The researchers also proposed that labor unions play a more active role in advocating for women's rights in the workplace.

Finally, they recommended that the government invest in awareness campaigns to educate both employers and employees about the importance of gender equality and the negative impacts of discrimination on female workforce participation.

Suleiman and Hemed (2022) assessed the effectiveness of gender equality initiatives in Tanzania's public sector. The study examined how policies such as gender quotas, paid parental leave, and workplace equality programs influenced the employment rates of women in public sector organizations. The researchers found that gender equality initiatives had a positive impact on female participation, especially in entry-level roles. However, they also found that women still faced barriers when it came to reaching senior leadership positions. The study identified that gender quotas were effective in ensuring a more balanced workforce but were less effective in addressing the underlying issues of pay disparity and career advancement. Suleiman and Hemed recommended that gender equality policies in the public sector should be expanded to include mentorship and leadership training programs specifically for women. They also suggested that the government establish stronger mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these policies to ensure they are having a meaningful impact. The researchers concluded that gender equality in the public sector could be more effectively achieved by creating a more supportive environment for women to advance in their careers, not just by filling quotas.

Kijazi (2020) explored the effects of gender equality laws on women's participation in the informal labor sector in Tanzania. The study aimed to understand how laws intended to improve gender equality in formal sectors impacted women working in the informal economy, where most Tanzanian women are employed. Using a mixed-methods approach, Kijazi (2020) found that while formal sector policies were relatively effective in improving female labor force participation, they had little impact on the informal sector, which remains largely unregulated. The study revealed that women in the informal sector continued to face significant challenges such as low wages, job insecurity, and lack of access to social protection. Kijazi recommended that gender-sensitive policies be extended to the informal sector to support women who make up the majority of the labor force in this sector. Furthermore, the study suggested that the government work with NGOs and community organizations to provide better access to financial resources, training, and legal protections for women in the informal economy.

Chiwara and Mwanri (2023) conducted a longitudinal study to analyze changes in female labor force participation in Tanzania between 2010 and 2020. Their research aimed to measure the progress of gender equality policies in increasing women's workforce participation over the last decade. They found that although female labor force participation had gradually increased, it remained lower than male participation due to persistent gender roles and unequal access to economic opportunities. The study concluded that targeted policies in rural areas, such as improving women's access to education and vocational training, were crucial to further increasing female participation. Chiwara and Mwanri also recommended that the Tanzanian government invest in programs that address the barriers to women's entry into the workforce, such as childcare services and flexible work arrangements.

Mbabazi (2021) analyzed the impact of maternal leave policies on female workforce participation in Tanzania. The study found that maternal leave policies had a positive effect on women's retention in the workforce, especially in the formal sector. However, the lack of childcare facilities and workplace flexibility limited the full participation of women in the labor market. Mbabazi

recommended that maternal leave benefits be expanded to ensure that women are not penalized for taking time off to care for their children. The study also suggested that workplace childcare services and flexible work arrangements be introduced to help women balance work and family life.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gaps: One key conceptual gap identified across the studies is the need for a more integrated framework that considers the interplay between different gender equality policies and practices and their cumulative impact on workforce participation. While various studies examine specific policies such as affirmative action, anti-discrimination laws, and parental leave, they often treat these policies in isolation. A conceptual framework that synthesizes these policies into a comprehensive model could help provide a better understanding of how they interact to affect female labor force participation in Tanzania. Moreover, many studies focus on specific sectors (e.g., private or public) or geographic areas (e.g., rural vs. urban), but they do not fully examine the cross-sectoral or cross-regional effects of gender equality policies. This gap suggests the need for a broader conceptual approach to study how gender equality policies can be effectively integrated into national and local contexts to improve female workforce participation across various sectors. Additionally, the conceptual framework could be expanded to explore how cultural norms and societal perceptions interact with formal gender equality policies to either support or hinder women's labor force participation (Mwaipopo et al., 2019; Kihampa & Kessy, 2020).

Contextual Gaps: Contextually, the studies focus largely on the direct effects of gender equality policies in formal sectors, with limited attention to their impact in informal sectors, where a large proportion of Tanzanian women are employed (Kijazi, 2020). There is a gap in understanding how gender equality policies in the formal sector can be adapted or extended to benefit women in the informal labor market. Furthermore, many of the studies do not fully account for the regional and socio-economic differences within Tanzania, which could have a significant impact on the effectiveness of gender equality policies. Rural areas, for example, face unique challenges that are not addressed in many national-level studies, such as a lack of access to education and healthcare, which significantly limits women's ability to participate in the labor force (Mwaipopo et al., 2019). The existing studies could benefit from a more nuanced exploration of how regional and socio-economic factors contribute to or exacerbate gender inequality in the workforce. Additionally, while the policies are often evaluated in terms of their intention, there is limited discussion on the real-world implementation of these policies and their effectiveness in various Tanzanian contexts (Suleiman & Hemed, 2022).

Geographical Gaps: Geographically, most of the studies focus on urban or mixed urban-rural samples, leaving rural Tanzania largely underrepresented in the research on female workforce participation. Rural areas in Tanzania face unique challenges that urban populations may not experience, such as limited access to education, healthcare, and job opportunities, which significantly hinder female workforce participation (Kihampa & Kessy, 2020). Many studies have focused on the national-level impacts of gender equality policies, but fewer studies have explored the impact of such policies in specific regions of Tanzania, particularly in the more remote and less developed areas. There is a need for more geographically specific research to understand the regional variations in the effectiveness of gender equality policies and their implications for women's participation in the workforce. Moreover, the informal economy in rural areas remains underexplored, and there is limited research on how gender equality policies can be adapted to the informal sector, where a significant number of women are employed (Kijazi, 2020). The lack of geographically focused research on these issues creates a gap in understanding how local cultural norms and economic conditions affect female labor force participation in different parts of Tanzania.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, gender equality policies in Tanzania have played a pivotal role in increasing female workforce participation, but significant barriers remain. While there have been positive developments, such as increased female enrollment in education and a gradual rise in women entering the labor market, challenges such as gender-based discrimination, cultural norms, and limited policy enforcement continue to hinder women's full participation in the workforce. Rural areas, in particular, face unique challenges, with women often relegated to low-paying informal sector jobs and struggling to access higher-paying, formal employment opportunities. Although affirmative action and gender equality laws have led to improvements, their impact is inconsistent and more pronounced in certain sectors like education and healthcare, where policy enforcement is stronger. To enhance female workforce participation, the Tanzanian government must strengthen the implementation of gender equality policies, particularly in the informal sector and rural areas, while also addressing the root causes of gender-based discrimination and societal gender roles. By promoting inclusive workplace cultures, expanding access to training and leadership development programs, and improving work-life balance policies such as childcare, Tanzania can further close the gender gap in the workforce and ensure equitable economic participation for women.

Recommendations

Theory

A comprehensive theoretical framework should be developed that integrates gender equality policies with socio-cultural factors that influence women's workforce participation in Tanzania. While existing studies examine gender equality policies in isolation, there is a need to create a model that combines cultural, economic, and institutional dimensions of gender equality. This framework should consider how societal norms, economic opportunities, and legal frameworks interact to shape female workforce participation. Furthermore, incorporating intersectionality into the theory recognizing the varied experiences of women from different socio-economic backgrounds, regions, and ethnicities can provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges

and barriers women face in the workforce. This would be a valuable contribution to the existing gender equality theories and can inform both future research and policy development.

Practice

In practice, gender equality initiatives should be expanded to focus not only on equal access to education and employment but also on the long-term career advancement of women. Companies, particularly in the private sector, should implement mentorship programs and leadership development opportunities for women to address the "glass ceiling" effect. Furthermore, creating more inclusive work environments through gender sensitivity training, both for employers and employees, will help in reducing workplace discrimination. Women should be supported in balancing work and family responsibilities by implementing policies such as paid family leave and childcare services. These practical actions will help women stay employed, advance in their careers, and ultimately improve their participation in the workforce.

Policy

From a policy perspective, the Tanzanian government should prioritize gender equality in the informal sector, where a majority of women are employed. Gender equality policies in the informal economy must address wage inequality, job insecurity, and lack of social protection. Additionally, stronger enforcement of existing gender equality laws and policies is critical to ensuring that both the private and public sectors comply with gender-inclusive hiring, pay, and promotion practices. The government should also allocate resources to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of gender equality policies, ensuring that they are making tangible improvements in female workforce participation. By focusing on both structural reforms and social support systems, the government can create an environment where gender equality policies have a meaningful impact on women's workforce engagement.

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