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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### GENDER WAGE GAP AND SHARED PROSPERITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

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#### ABSTRACT

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a powerful driver for accelerating economic growth by unlocking the potential of women and men not only in Kenya but also at international level. Gender wage gap is a manifestation of gender wage discrimination against women or men at workplace. This discrimination is mostly demonstrated where qualified women are offered lower pay as compared to their men counterparts at the same level of work. The same situation is experienced at glass ceiling with larger gender wage gaps at the upper levels. Therefore, once the government has put in place its development policy framework, it is imperative to ensure execution of gender equality in order to address the problems of gender wage gap. However, despite great awareness and existence of gender equity in the policy documents and blue prints for National development agenda, particularly of the Kenya Vision 2030, the Big four agenda and the Global agenda on Sustainable Development Goal 5 on achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls and legal provisions in Kenya Employment Act 2007, gender wage gap has remained high at the work place in Kenya. Drawing on secondary data, this paper examines the root causes of gender wage gap and investigate gender wage gap and its implications on shared prosperity for sustainable development by exploring what can inform institutional policy decisions in order to narrow the wage differentials. The article argues that reducing gender wage gap has great positive implications on shared prosperity including access to new economic opportunities, opening spaces for decision-making and expanding human capital in education sector. To effectively achieve this reduction, enforcement mechanism is necessary by government and institutional managers on effective implementation of policy on gender equality if narrowing the gender wage gap is going to be achieved for sustainable development in Kenya.

#### INTRODUCTION

A number of studies have been done concerning gender wage gap in organizations. However, most efforts have been towards gender disparities, women empowerment and barriers to women career progression among others but there is limited information on the impact of gender wage gap on shared prosperity. This paper addresses the gap in literature by reviewing past studies to identify common themes related to gender wage gap and shared prosperity in Kenya. It therefore presents an argument that, reducing gender wage gap has great positive impact on shared prosperity and policy implication in Kenya. The gender wage gap has been a long-lasting issue in the labour market over the years across the globe. Generally, the number of women working in various job markets is far more than men; unfortunately, women are paid less than men at the same level. Therefore this means that wage discrimination is a reality because women are disadvantaged, they earn low incomes and cannot compete equally in acquisition of property due to low purchasing power.

In Kenya, a woman earns 55 shillings for every 100 shillings earned by a man for doing the same work (World Economic Forum Report (2017). While the situation has narrowed in developed countries, many Sub-Saharan countries have experienced a wide gap with a very slow pace of eradicating the problem. There is a growing consensus that reducing gender inequality is related to economic growth, poverty reduction and increased social welfare (UN Women, 2015). This study is based on the following two research objectives; firstly, to examine the root causes of gender wage gap. Secondly, to investigate gender wage gap and its implications on shared prosperity that can inform institutional policy decisions in Kenya. This paper therefore addresses the following two research questions:

- I. What are the root causes of gender wage gap in Kenya? and
- II. What are the implications of gender wage gap on shared prosperity that can inform institutional policy decisions?. This article is structured into five parts. Introduction: this presents

the background, rationale, objectives of the study. Conceptual framework and theoretical foundations for conceptualization and understanding of gender wage gap and shared prosperity. Methodology: this is the rationale for data and methods used in the study. Results and discussion: this discusses the root causes of gender wage gap and the implications of gender wage gap on shared prosperity for institutional policy decisions. Conclusions and recommendations: this presents the way forward on institutional commitment in implementation of policy on gender equality to narrow the gap for sustainable development in Kenya.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

**The Gender wage gap:** Brynin (2017) asserts that, gender wage gap is conceptualized as the difference between the average hourly pay of men and women working in the same level. The debate revolving around better explanation for the existence of inequalities in the society promoting the gender wage gap in labour market has remained uncertain and highly contested. The difference has major economic, political and social consequences on lives of women, girls and the entire society at large spanning from one generation to another (Abdou et al., 2019). The gender wage gap is unadjusted and is defined as the difference between median earning of men and women relative to median earnings of men. For decades now, working women are getting paid less than men. On average women are paid 80 cents for every dollar paid to men (OECD, 2017). Bishu and Alkadry (2017) contend that, gender pay gap is persistent across all sectors of the economy. However, women in the public sector enjoy a premium, which women in other sectors do not experience. The gender gap in human capital shows that, women are oftentimes punished for time away from work. According to World Bank (2016), Kenya performance in economic growth has experienced acceleration growth bolstered by modern services such as financial intermediation and mobile services. This has stirred demand for other services such as trade. However, gender discrimination threatens the ultimate goal. Gender equity is the impartial treatment of women and men so as to ensure equal enjoyment of privileges and rights allotted to members of either gender (Kibui et al, 2014).

According to the Kenyan Employment Act 2007 Section 3(1), the Kenyan statute applies to all “employees employed by any employer under a contract of service,” but excludes the armed forces, police and the National Youth Service and, most importantly, where the employer’s dependants are the only employees in a family undertaking. Since many women are employed in family undertakings, this is a serious limitation. The Act prohibits either direct or indirect discrimination on grounds of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, nationality, ethnic or social origin, disability, pregnancy, mental status or HIV status. The Section 27 of the Kenya Constitution 2010, prohibits discrimination against men and women by trying to address gender wage gap by providing general equality provisions in that, “women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres” (The Kenya Constitution 2010). However, these provisions are not sufficient to apply the principle of equal remuneration between men and women for work of equal value in practice. Kenyan Government and institutions are required to do more by taking steps to ensure that the categories of workers excluded from the Employment Act,

2007 are nevertheless guaranteed the right to equal remuneration for work of equal value (Fredman, 2013). This gender equality is critical in contributing towards achieving Sustainable Development. It is provided for in the policy documents and blue prints for National development agenda, particularly of the Kenya Vision 2030, the Big four agenda and the Global agenda on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. Legal provisions mandating equal pay for work of equal value have long been in place such as wage transparency; minimum wage setting mechanisms and collective bargaining that pay attention to gender equality but still gender pay gap continue to persist. However, unless such measures are compulsory or enforced, their relevance and effectiveness will remain low reducing gender pay gaps (ILO, 2019).

**Shared Prosperity:** Shared prosperity is the average annual growth in income among the poorest forty percent of the population in each country (World Bank 2013). It does not have a finishing line but rather a continuous growth of the wellbeing of the bottom 40% percent of the population in each nation irrespective of their level of development. Promoting shared prosperity can be defined formally as increasing ‘the growth rate of incomes in the bottom 40 percent of households’ which is viewed as a means of making economic growth more inclusive (Dollar et al. 2013). Promoting shared prosperity requires the principle of creating equal opportunity society since the essence is wellbeing of the less well off, today as well as sustainability for future generations. Globally, developed and developing countries have made positive progress in ensuring that everyone in society today as well as future generations participates in a dynamic process of continuing welfare improvement. The drivers for the average annual growth in income are a culmination of interconnected perspectives including; economic opportunities, decision making and human capital such as education and health, however, gender inequality in each perspective is a barrier to sustainable development (World Economic Report, 2017).

**Theoretical foundations:** The discussion in this article is informed by propositions of Grybaite (2010) and Lips (2012) theoretical approaches to gender pay gap. The authors argue that, the causes and challenges of gender wage gap can be understood by exploring a combination of the following three theories: Gender role theory, human capital theory and occupational segregation theory.

**Gender role Theory:** Differential gender roles are adopted early on in life and influence much of what happens in the home, school, personal relationships, family life and employment (Lips, 2012). Therefore men and women often follow different paths in education and employment, which lead to overall differences in pay. Segregation into traditional gender roles is often not a conscious choice for either women or men. Rather, these choices are constrained by social pressures and expectations, and are passed on from one generation to the next. Far beyond gender wage gap, the socially prescribed and embedded gender roles and relations that denote women and girls as care providers limit their opportunities, capabilities and choices, and so impede their empowerment. Men are motivated to align with their masculine identity; they are more likely to endorse the persistence of gender inequality as a way of affirming their status as real men. Unpaid care work is largely invisible across

public domain, even where legal barriers have been removed; women are still subjected to discrimination based on customary law.

**Human capital Theory:** This theory holds that, every person has some form of human capital. Human capital can be determined as the abilities and skills people have and taken through education, training and experience. These skills are the basis for the earnings they receive. Manning and Swaffield (2008) argue that gender pay gap was developed historically as a result of women having lower human capital than men in terms of lower knowledge, skills or job experience. This gave rise to lower productivity and therefore to lower wages for women. Men, on the other hand, had a comparative advantage when it came to investing time and resources in their education and careers, reflecting the wider social context. However, this male advantage in human capital has been shrinking over time due to growth in women's education (Goldin, 2008).

**Occupational segregation Theory:** Occupations that have high proportions of women working in them are often referred to as feminized. It has been found that the higher the proportion of women who work in an occupation, the lower the average pay within it, but although both men and women within feminized occupations experience lower pay, women are disproportionately affected than men (Blau and Kahn, 2003). Women tend to be over-represented in the following low-paid jobs the 'five Cs': cleaner, caterer, carer, cashier, and clerical worker. This concentration of women in jobs which do not require significant, if any, qualifications, and which are often part-time, lowers women's average pay relative to men's (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2007). Alkadry and Tower (2013) assert that, segregation based on the type of agency, occupation and position contributes to gender pay disparity. Agency segregation occurred when women dominated positions in a particular agency and earned less than their male counterparts in male dominated type agencies. As the name implies, occupational segregation occurred when women presence were in traditional type positions such as taking care of and/or teaching children, nursing or other health care professions. For example, supportive type positions that tend to pay women less than their male counterparts that were in a position of higher authority.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the research questions, this article relied on secondary data by extensive review of literature. This included documentary analysis for gathering information and making arguments in this article on gender wage gap and shared prosperity for sustainable development. The existing literature from journals, thesis, research papers, national and global reports and the Kenya Government Employment Act (2007) among others were deeply analyzed, summarized harmonized to develop this article. Petticrew and Roberts (2006) argue that literature review as research methodology has become increasingly relevant in the social sciences to synthesize evidence from past studies to answer questions about causes of problems and about people's experiences. Literature review is therefore, helpful to form conclusions about a subject matter based on findings from past studies, which could have otherwise been difficult to manage. In the same line of argument, Glass *et al.*, (1981) resent that such research tools help utilize findings from past studies to understand trends and predict cumulative findings on the position of a subject matter

of interest. The rationale to use this method is that, it helped to inform audience on the root causes of gender wage and the implications of gender wage gap on shared prosperity that inform policy makers and institutional managers who are responsible for making efforts for creating equal employment opportunity at workforce to close the gender pay gap.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The causes of the gender wage gap is attributed by a range of factors which include levels of educational attainment, seniority in the workplace, gender occupational segregation, and culture and traditional family roles, gender political empowerment and gender discriminatory social norms (World Bank, 2016). Many employers and industries still prioritize long, continuous, traditional work hours rather than flexible schedules, a preference that tends to put women with children at a disadvantage because women take time from work when they become parents (Goldin, 2014). In order to eradicate this inequality, both employers' policies and attitudes as well as employees' attitudes need to change in order to overcome stereotypes that exist in the workplace. Women need to work on confidence and negotiation skills in order to stand out for higher salaries (Hall, 2015). Perales (2013) observes that, occupational segregation is manifested by a stigma associated with occupational feminization, where the work done by women is socially and economically undervalued. Pay practices are socially constructed and lead to undervaluation of women's labor and pay is heavily influenced by social pressures and norms as well as by the actions of employers, governments and trade unions. The cumulative effect of many social norms and discrimination dictate women's responsibility for unpaid care work. Proactive measures to mitigate motherhood penalties and redistribute unpaid care work such as quotas and voluntary targets, mentoring and training specifically for women, as well as flexible working-time arrangements are central to acceleration of women's participation in managerial and leadership positions (ILO, (2019). Formulation of law frameworks that establish equal rights for women and men are the basis for achieving substantive gender equality in practice. While laws that discriminate against women and girls prior to entry into the labor market need to be repealed, as well as provisions preventing women from working at night or underground, or entering and progressing in a specific sector or occupation altogether (ILO, (2019). Discriminatory practices at work extend to all aspects of employment and occupation, including remuneration, career advancement, and social security provisions and coverage. Unfair treatment, such as abuse, harassment and discrimination, are among the major challenges facing the young working women. In Kenya, the government has institutionalized its commitment to reducing poverty and gender inequalities. The Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services (2004), the constitution of Kenya (2010), Kenya Vision 2030 and the current 'Big Four' agenda acknowledge gender equality as an important principle for sustainable development. Suda (2002) asserts that, legal and policy measures should promote equal opportunities for men and women through positive and affirmative action in all sectors of the economy where employers in public and private sector institutions reserve a certain proportion of post for men and women, while the law that prohibits women's employment in certain types of work or restricts the times when women can work should be reviewed and revoked. The constitution 2010 has many gender equity gains that provide the required legal

backing to ensure that both Kenyan women and men share equal enjoyment of resources, opportunities, rewards and social services (Kariuki, 2011). The gender wage gap impact negatively to the access of new economic opportunities since women cannot compete at equal platform with men. Graham and Chattopadhyay (2012) affirm that economic growth does not necessarily translate into gains in women's well-being; conversely, appropriate strategies particularly for poor and marginalized women are central to ensure equitable outcomes. This implies that, gender wage gap poses act as stumbling block to the achievement of shared prosperity through limited access to economic opportunities, decision making and access to quality education sector. Gender equality holds the potential to increase global gross domestic product (GDP) (Woetzel et al., 2015), and it has been shown that national economies lose out when a considerable part of the population cannot compete equitably or realize its full potential (Golla et al., 2011: 3).

According to the Brundtland Report (1987), entitled "Our Common Future of the World Commission on Environment and Development", sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs. In line with sustainable development, equal pay to both men and women means equal access to economic opportunities which is a key component of shared prosperity. Over the last two decades, the wage inequality and its implications on economic growth has been a concern in most of the developing and developed countries including Kenya. The difference is linked with existence of gender discrimination against women at workplace. (Cook and Razavi, 2012) assert that labor markets are complex institutions shaped by social norms, discriminatory forces and power inequalities. Ultimately, the insubordination greatly impacts on women, their children and the next generation. Wangare (2009) contend that, that there is perverse inequality in employment since men are more represented than women in almost all employment categories, and therefore affirmative action is perceived as the most ambitious attempt to put right the long history of gender discrimination.

Cook and Razavi (2012) argue that, equally discriminative is the unpaid care and domestic work inexplicably carried out by women. The unpaid and domestic work plays a significant role in human well-being and maintaining the labor force, and therefore in economic growth. However, unpaid work remains unrecognized in economic approaches and uncounted in official GDP calculations. Despite the government commitment in women empowerment, their contribution remains minimal calling for intervention. Staff and Jeylan (2014) point out that, due to motherhood, when women require time to go and take care of their children, women will settle for jobs that offer flexible schedules even if the wages offered are lower and this makes them earn less than men. Low wage employment rate in agriculture points to the fact that much of the female labor contribution in agriculture is unpaid and not reflected in the national statistics. Most of the women who work in commercial agriculture are usually engaged as casual labourers for very low wages. In order to raise the level of female incomes, rural investment and employment strategies should target women and pay greater attention to their enterprises, such as micro-enterprise development programmes which integrate a gender perspective and takes into account the needs and interests of women at the grassroots level (Suda, 2002). Wanjala and Were (2009) observe that, despite the fact

that, women stand to benefit more from employment creation in Agricultural sector in Kenya; most of these new jobs are informal with low wages. Therefore, policies for increasing productivity and raising women's skills in addressing the constraints that limit women's effective participation in the Kenyan labor market are important for allowing men and women to benefit equally from employment and growth economic opportunities. The gender wage gap compromises the process of opening spaces for decision making that concern ownership of resources in the society. (Klugman et al., 2014: 125) affirm that, the power to make substantive decision is a significant tool towards economic empowerment and ultimate sustainable development for men and women. The control of household resources like land and housing, access to economic opportunities, mobility outside of the home, and decision-making power is controlled by men. However, women's command over resources is severely curtailed through discriminatory legal and customary law provisions, some of which reinforce gender inequalities, as well as social norms and practices. Therefore, implementation of policy on gender equality in Kenya is vital for opening spaces for decision making and giving power, freedom and voice to all men and women.

Hunt and Samman (2016) emphasize that, women's economic empowerment as 'a process whereby women's and girls' lives are transformed from a situation where they have limited power and access to economic assets to a situation where they experience economic advancement. The gender wage gap is a stabling block for women and girls when it comes to access to quality education. According to the UNESCO (2015), access to quality education and training are key factors to economic growth and have important spill-over effects in breaking intergenerational poverty cycles, delaying marriage and childbearing and improving labor market outcomes later in life. Despite the countries achievement in gender parity in education at primary level, disparities in girls' secondary enrolment persist; in 2012 in Sub Saharan Africa, 84 girls respectively were enrolled on average for every 100 boys. Kenyan women form a minority of the country's decision making mechanism in all areas including management of the country's education system and that gender disparity continues to restrain the achievement of gender equity particularly in education development even with the enhanced accessibility since that only forms one part of educational opportunities (Kibui et al, 2014).

The process of women economic empowerment is very complex, it is composed of a set of core building blocks which inform policy and practice, and though no single intervention or actor can address all of its aspects. These include; education; skills development and training; access to quality and decent paid work; address unpaid care and work burdens; access to property; assets and financial services; collective action and leadership; social protection; labor market; fiscal policy, characteristics; legal, regulatory and policy framework and gender norms and discriminatory social norms (Hunt and Samman, 2016). This process leads to women's increased power and agency in the following areas: *Power within*: which is the knowledge, individual capabilities, sense of entitlement, self-esteem and self-belief to make changes in their lives, including learning skills for jobs or to start an enterprise; *Power to*: the economic decision-making power within their household, community and local economy (including markets) not just in areas that are traditionally regarded as women's

realm but extending to areas that are traditionally regarded as men's realm; *Power over*: the access to and control over financial, physical and knowledge-based assets, including access to employment and income generation activities and *Power with*: the ability to organize with others to enhance economic activity and rights (Rowlands, 1997). Kabubo (2003) stresses that, because of gender discrimination in wage setting, education and other demographic factors are important determinants of the choice of sector of employment and earnings, while favoritism towards men is pronounced in all sectors leading to a wide gender gap. Hence, need for investment in instruments that reduce gender inequalities in access to education supported by government policies that minimize favoritism towards men.

### Conclusions and Recommendation

This paper sought to address the following research questions; I. What are the root causes of gender wage gap? and II. What are the implications of gender wage gap on shared prosperity that can inform institutional policy decisions?

**Research questions I:** *What are the root causes of gender wage gap in Kenya??*

Arising from the literature reviewed, the wage gap is caused by a range of factors which include levels of educational attainment where men have access to education than women meaning earning more money; seniority in the workplace where few women reach top level management at glass ceiling, and if they do, gender discriminatory social norms still offers women less pay compared to men; gender occupational segregation, a stigma associated with occupational feminization where the work done by women is socially and economically undervalued; motherhood, when women require time to go and take care of their children; culture and traditional family roles; gender political empowerment and gender discriminatory social norms. Therefore, in order to eradicate this inequality, both employers' policies and attitudes as well as employees' attitudes need to change in order to overcome stereotypes that exist in the workplace. Government should commit to policies that support women empowerment through increased access to education and promotions and affirmative action while women need to work on confidence, negotiation skills in order to stand out for higher salaries.

**Research questions II:** *What are the implications of gender wage gap on shared prosperity that can inform institutional policy decisions in Kenya?*

The reduction in gender wage gap has great positive implications on shared prosperity such as creating new economic opportunities, opening spaces for decision making and expanding human capital in education sector which are building blocks of economic development. To achieve this reduction, there is need for the government, policy and institutional managers to enforce effective implementation of the legal framework on gender equality to reduce gender wage gap if shared prosperity is going to be achieved for sustainable development in Kenya. In order to raise the level of female incomes, rural investment and employment strategies should focus on women enterprises, such as micro-enterprise development programmes which integrate a gender-based perspective and takes into account the needs and interests of women at the grassroots level.

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