

Impact of Gender-Inclusive Labor Policies on Women's Employment in Isiolo County, Kenya

LINA ELSIE MORAA & Dr. Muthoni Mainah*

Master of Arts in Public Policy and Administration, Kenyatta University, Kenya

Corresponding Author*

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ABSTRACT

The gender gap in Kenya's labour market has traditionally been in favour of men, with women being underrepresented in the formal segment of the market. Kenya has gradually come up with employment policies to rectify this problem and achieve gender equality in the market. While these policies are formulated at national level, part of the implementation is entrusted to county governments. However, the impact or effectiveness of these policies to achieve intended goal has hardly been interrogated mainly the context of county governments in Kenya. The study investigated the influence of gender inclusive labour policies on women employment, with a precise case study of Isiolo County. This study was anchored on the Empowerment Theory which argues that actions of empowerment ought to yield outcomes. The study adopted a descriptive survey method, targeting women working with the county government of Isiolo within its three Sub Counties namely, Isiolo, Merti, and Garbatulla. The study found that gender-inclusive labour policies in Isiolo County have had mixed success. While most respondents believed that implementing these policies has increased the number of women in the workplace or leadership positions, there still needs to be more awareness. Most respondents reported experiencing discrimination, including hiring bias, promotion denial, and unequal pay. The study also revealed barriers to women's career progression in the public sector, such as gender bias, lack of access to training, and work-life balance challenges. Moreover, respondents perceived the effectiveness of gender-inclusive labour policies as ineffective. A lack of awareness, insufficient training, and resistance to change are the main factors hindering their implementation. Further research and targeted interventions are recommended to address these issues, including promoting intersectionality, addressing unconscious bias, engaging male allies, and examining the effects of remote and flexible work arrangements.

Keywords: Gender gap, Labour market, Women underrepresentation, Employment policies, Gender pay gap, Labour absorption,

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Constitution of Kenya (2010) has demonstrated considerable effort to advance gender equality mainly through its stipulation of the two-thirds gender rule. This rule, contained in Article 27(8) of the constitution, requires that two-thirds of the members in all appointive and elective positions in the country should not belong to the same gender (CoK, 2010). The two-third gender rule is among the strides which have been made to create room for women's inclusion in leadership. The Government has also enacted laws besides this initiative to counter-cultural attitudes taken to be the barriers to women empowerment and gender equality (Kenya Law, 2020). These major strides have made Kenya compare favorably to other countries in Africa and beyond. Despite that, UNDP (2016) asserts that Kenya still lags on matters of women empowerment and gender equality. Positions in government institutions are not equitably distributed between men and women as required in the constitution.

According to World Economic Forum (2016), 144 countries were analyzed to close the gender gap and Kenya was ranked in the 48th position on matters of opportunity and economic participation, on the attainment of education it was ranked in the 116th position, on survival and health, it was position 83 and position 64 on matters related to the reduction of gender gaps more especially those intricately linked to political empowerment. Overall, Kenya was ranked in the 63rd position whereby earned income for women was seen decreasing but wage equality improving. This shows that Kenya has made strides in ratifying various policy frameworks to fight inequality but even so she has a long way to go. Although Kenya ranks 48th in matters of opportunity and economic participation, women continue to lag in economic empowerment and participation, many positions held in public service are mostly held by men while women occupy the least paying and fulfilling positions. Women access fewer than 30% of opportunities for formal work. (Republic of Kenya 2002). This study sought to analyze the gap that exists in the actualization of improved labor outcomes for women despite the frameworks in place, more especially the employment policy frameworks.

Kenya has been grappling with gender inclusion like most countries around the world. The country's rank of 109 out of 153 countries by the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report does not mean that the country has excelled in gender equality. Rather, it only means that Kenya has performed better relative to other countries. Women in Kenya face disproportionate challenges in education attainment, leadership representation, health outcomes, and labor market outcomes compared to their male counterparts (Abdullahi, 2016). Data indicates that women face endemic disadvantage in economic opportunities compared to their men in Kenya. The latter control almost half of all formal enterprises in Kenya compared to 32 percent controlled by women (Ndemo, 2018). On the contrary, women dominate the informal sector, controlling six out every ten informal businesses in the country (Ndemo, 2018). Unlike formal businesses, informal ventures are known to have extremely poor prospects for capital and finances, in addition to grim chances of survival (Davis, 2012).

At the core of the gender parity in the country are three factors namely systemic biases, unpaid labor, and gender stereotypes (KNBS, 2014; USAID, 2020). Women are not 'idle' or lack work to do. They stereotypically engage in unpaid work, especially in domestic contexts. This type of work denies women the essential income they need to enhance their bargaining power and lower their reliance on men for survival (Ndemo, 2018; USAID, 2020). Systematic factors such as poor enforcement of gender protection laws has also seen women continue to linger in inequality and gender-related struggles. According to Bettinger-López and Ezer (2021), Kenya has a lax and ineffective law enforcement concerning women affairs, which serves to prolong the undesirable plight of women.

The plight of gender parity in Kenya is worse in some communities than others. Men in those communities are assigned sophisticated and domineering roles while the latter are relegated to unpaid domestic duties (Abdullahi, 2016). The reality coupled with the ineffective enforcement of policies has led to the persistent plight of women as second-class citizens in the country. Overcome this problem necessitate measuring the progress made concerning the implementation of policies for the enhancement of women employment. Kenya's governance functions in two levels namely national government and county government. Each of these levels have a constitutional mandate concerning policy development (Abdullahi, 2016). Social and gender policies are formulated and enforced by the national government. However, the disparity in the severity of gender parity and biases means that effectiveness in the enforcement of those policies is easily differ by community or location (USAID, 2020). There is a need for local and region- specific assessment of the implementation of gender-inclusive policies as part of ensuring that women in Kenya are liberated and experience equal standards as their male counterparts.

Isiolo County is a county in the Eastern part of Kenya whereby according to the Census (2019), the county

was estimated to have a total population of 268,002. It is one of those counties said to be marginalized in terms of development given that there are only 35 kilometers of bitumen roads, 263.7 kilometers of murrum and 1,185.49 kilometers is covered by earth. In terms of education status, the county has 213 centers of Early Childhood Education whereby 5148 pupils have been enrolled. One hundred and four elementary institutions are available, 107 of which are public and 17 of which are private. There are 23 secondary institutions in the county, 16 of which are public and 7 of which are private. There are also two youth polytechnics, three universities, and two technical colleges in the county. Out of the entire population, only 13.7% have Reached Secondary school or higher, Census (2019). Looking at the employment statistics, only 45.9% are employed where men take up 27% and therefore fewer women are employed. Twenty-five percent of women in Samburu County are not economically active as compared to 17% of males who are not economically active. These observations occur amid devolution that birthed Isiolo County and provided the resources it needs to empower women and Youths in the counties.

Problem Statement

Isiolo County recently launched its Gender Policy with a 5-year strategic vision aimed at improving the stake for women in the county (Wairimu, 2022; CREAM, 2022). This policy was launched amid other national gender policies with a similar goal and a myriad of legal tools enacted to improve the plight of women who have unnecessarily been under the shadow of men (CREAW, 2022). Scarce assessment has been made concerning the county's implementation of national gender-inclusive policies that have been enacted in the last decade. Out of the seven positions for the County Executive Committee, only two were occupied by women since 2017, which raises pertinent questions about women employment in the county amid gender-inclusive policies (Isiolo County Government, 2022). Abdullahi (2016) noted that the workforce in Northern Kenya counties -of which Isiolo is part -was dominated by men with women retreating to domestic and stereotypical assignments. As the county embarks on a new gender policy, there is a need to examine whether currently enacted gender inclusive policies have influenced women employment in the county. Representation of women in the workplace has been an endemic problem for women in Kenya. According to Mulwa and Gichana (2020), gender differences between men and women in Kenya contribute to almost eighty percent of all unemployment cases. The unemployment or underemployment status of women have been attributed to stereotypical issues such as marital status, residence, age, and non-labor income (Mulwa & Gichana, 2020). While policies have been enacted to overcome this problem, their implementation is not certain and requires empirical research.

Published literature fails to explicate the implementation of gender-inclusive policies and their role in the risk (or lack of) of women employment, not only in Isiolo but also in Kenya. Preliminary research suggests that only Low and Sánchez-Marcos (2015) have examined the effect of a policy on female labor market outcomes, albeit with a precise focus on maternity policies. Notably, the study was focused on member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) whose socioeconomic situation and gender-inclusion progress varies from Kenya. Baizan et al. (2013) examined the effect of gender policies on fertility, a variable that cannot be considered a labor outcome. This study sought to fill this gap by examining the influence of gender-inclusive policies on women employment in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature

This study was be premised on the employment theory.

This theory is built upon the construct of empowerment to link individual competencies, strengths, and natural systems to social and economic policy (Turner & Maschi, 2015). Empowerment theory highlights the role of oppression in denying the marginalized people an opportunity to be productive and making them

powerless. Power, according to this theory, is wielded by entities in form of personality, wealth, and influence and can produce intended effect on others (Christens, 2012). This theory positions empowerment as an outcome where individuals are out of the state of powerlessness (Turner & Maschi, 2015). However, achieving this outcome necessitates a process or activities to which it becomes subject (Christens, 2012). These activities may include the pursuits of individuals and entities who purpose, or goal is to remove oppression and give people power of being.

However, based on this theory, there are no specific processes, structures, or activities that ought to be undertaken for empowerment to be achieved. Processes and activities aimed at achieving the empowerment goal ought to be based on the specific context of oppression (Christens, 2012). This premise allows for the utilization of this theory in different empowerment incidences such as the empowerment of women in Isiolo County. In the present scenario, this theory is adapted to the use of gender-inclusive policy as a tool for empowering women and promoting equality in their labour outcomes to those of their male counterparts. While the gender-inclusive policy serves as the process for achieving empowerment, it does not guarantee that the target group was empowered ultimately. To that effect, women employment and involvement in county affairs is used as the outcome of the aforementioned process.

Notwithstanding, this theory assumes that empowerment processes must always yield an outcome, intended or unintended. This assumption is held by the fact that this theory does not accommodate the role of personal initiatives towards being empowered. For instance, while necessary policies could be in place to encourage employment of women, it takes an individual initiative to apply for those jobs. Nonetheless, this study addressed this assumption in the conceptual framework, by factoring social-cultural and individual factors as the moderating variables.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

As labour force participation tends to increase for women with economic development, the association is not consistent and direct at the country level. There is a considerable variation across less developed countries in the absorption of women and men into the labor force. Verick (2014) investigated female labour participation in less developed countries and found out that female labour participation to be a significant driver for growth and development. Women enter the workforce in less developed countries as a coping mechanism in response to disturbances, women participation is the result of various individual and macro factors and access to quality education more especially beyond secondary is key to improving women's employment outcomes.

In reality, women spend more time on unpaid care work as compared to men. Gendered societal norms reinforce the idea that unpaid care labor is a female concern, and as a result, women across all geographic areas, socioeconomic groups, and cultures spend a disproportionate amount of their time fulfilling the demands of their reproductive and domestic responsibilities. Therefore, Ferrant, Pesando, and Nowacka (2014) investigated unpaid care work to identify the gap in gender gaps analysis of labor outcomes. It was shown that in countries where women do most of the unpaid care work, women are not more likely to be working for pay, and those who do work are more likely to be working in the informal or part-time sector, earning less than their male counterparts. Therefore, the gender disparities in unpaid care work contribute to wider wage inequities.

Social cohesiveness was the subject of Spoonley et al. (2005)'s research because of its prominence in policy comments concerning the effects of immigrant settlement. In this research, we analyzed how the notion of social cohesiveness is used in the policy arena in New Zealand and discussed some of the literature on the topic. The study uses the provided indicator framework to assess the degree of social cohesiveness and the success of the settlement process from the perspectives of both the host community and the immigrant

population. Even though that is the case, the current study focused instead on social factors in general and how they influence labor outcomes for women in Kenya. Employees of Isiolo County was the main focus of the study.

At the same conference, Acs and Szerb (2007) presented a study on entrepreneurship, economic growth, and public policy. The goal of the conference was to increase attendees' familiarity with the interplay between entrepreneurship, economic growth, and public policy, as well as the nuances that arise at different points in a country's economic development. Using both micro and macro data from GEM, the authors in this special issue undertake analysis and provide various useful policy recommendations. First, countries in the medium income range need to work on expanding their human capital, improving access to advanced technologies, and fostering the growth of entrepreneurial spirit. Given that the primary drivers of company development are perceptual variables that are challenging to modify in the near run, it is vital to initiate policies early. Second, easing entrance rules in developed economies would not always lead to more high-potential businesses. It's possible that high-performance businesses may need both labor market reform and financial sector liberalization to thrive.

Spratt (2009) conducted a barrier analysis on policy implementation in three states in the US. A conceptual framework and pilot test were used in the analysis. It was found out that mass organizations, provincial governments, media, community service providers, and those impacted directly by the policy tend to only play a peripheral role in the formulation of the policy. Even though that is the case, these actors play the main role in the implementation stage. Challenges which arise during policy implementation include management, program planning, communication, scale-up, and advocacy whereby people have to learn first on the policy. Policy formulation, as well as implementation processes support, is important for these institutions to ensure their success.

Another study by Weaver (2010) asserts that where there is effort duplication and bureaucratic infighting, formulation and implementation of policies become a hard task. The existing agencies desire together with their political patrons is to ensure that there is the protection of their constituencies and jobs. This leads to responsibility allocation for the implementation of programs that reflect realities of political power distribution more than what is needed for effective and efficient administration. It is also noted from the study structures of the programs with multiple approvals by agencies and having different objectives can be at a stalemate and inaction as poor mechanisms for coordination between multiple implementing agencies lead to delay and breakdowns in delivery of programs, poor delivery of services, cost overruns and bureaucratic runarounds.

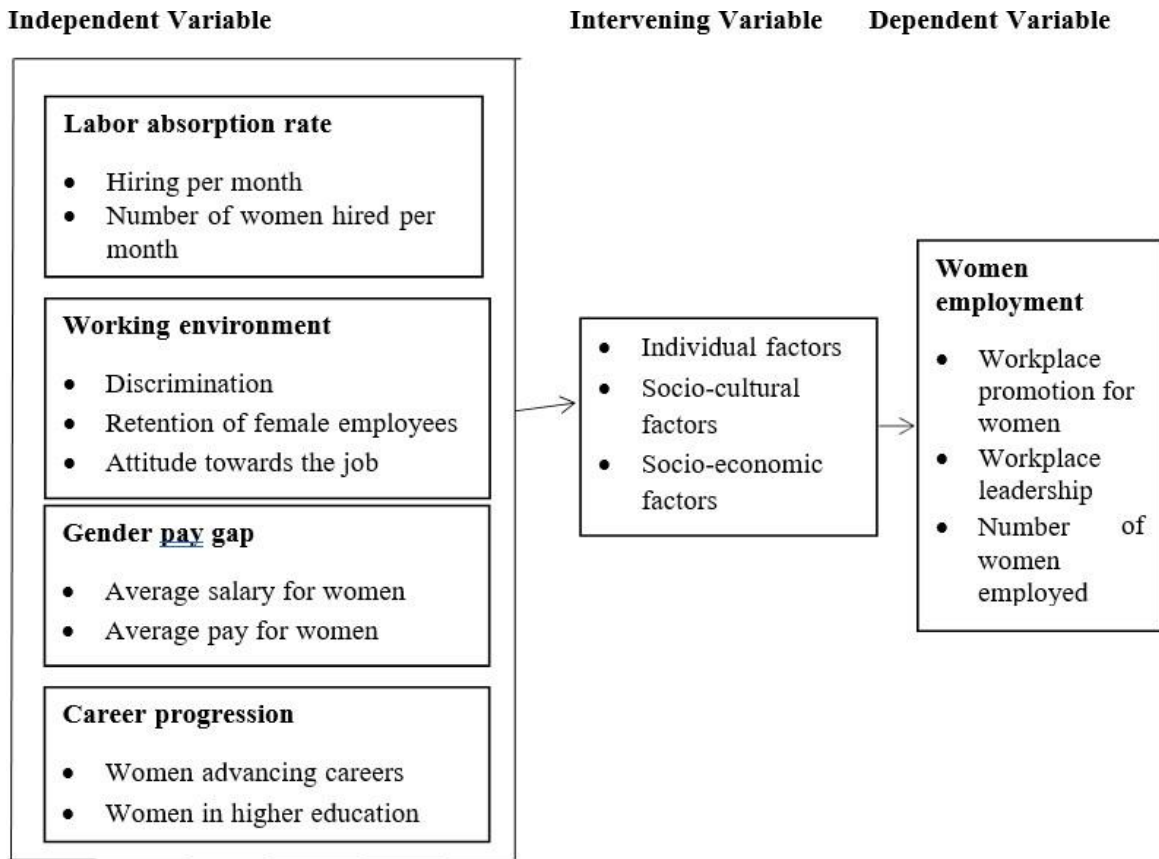
Ndua (2013) conducted a study in Kenya focusing on the challenges facing the implementation of policies in the culture sector. The study sought to find out the challenges facing policies implementation in the culture sector and to examine the context within which the culture sector policies were implemented as well as who the actor was. The study reviewed previous studies related to the development of policies and their implementation. The themes which were reviewed included literature on policy formulation, government policies, policy implementation as well as policy coordination. Both primary and secondary data were used, and it was found out that each institution operated independently even though their responsibilities and tasks are similar. It was also found out that there is duplication of policies that overlap each other hence making the implementation process difficult. Other challenges include limited awareness of policies within the sector, inadequate funding in the sector, and inadequate management of the human resource in the sector.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework refers to a written or a visual presentation of key variables so as to give a narrative or graphical presentation of their relationship in a study. The conceptual framework for this study guides how the study was conducted with respect to the underlying aim and objectives. The independent variable

for this study constitutes the implementation of labour policy for women empowerment while the dependent variable was female labour outcomes. The social-cultural factors in Samburu made up the intervening variables as showed in the framework.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Author

The intervening variable has been added to this framework to ensure that factors outside the scope of gender inclusive labour policies are considered as part of the factors that can influence labour outcomes for women in the workplace. It is anticipated that the efficiency with which the labour policy is implemented affects how women blend and participate in workplaces. Individual factors such as attitude towards the plight of women and availability of opportunities for women could also influence whether an individual embraces women employment. They can also affect the determining factors such as the education level that women need to participate in the labour force at all positions and their likelihood of rising the ranks. Moreover, ensuring necessary awareness concerning the policy framework can also help ensure the right treatment and facilitation for women in the workplace.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was conducted using a descriptive research design. This design is considered for studies of this magnitude in that it allows a researcher to easily utilize both qualitative and quantitative research methods in the actualization of the study (Lewis, 2015). This design benefit this study in that the study sought to explore the effects of the implementation of labour policies on women’s employment. It is worth acknowledging that, which some information around this aim can be quantified, other pieces such as lived experiences may

not. As such, the design gave the author the flexibility needed to collect data that optimally addressed the research questions.

Target Population and Sampling

The study was carried out in Isiolo County in Northern Kenya as given in the map below: Isiolo County has been selected since it is one of the northern Kenya counties where there is marginalization, and the society is therefore lagging in various development initiatives in relation to other parts of the country. This has seen issues like Education, women empowerment, and equality taking a back seat and so it would be a better region of focus.

The study targeted female respondents working under the Isiolo County Government either at its headquarters or from three Sub Counties offices at Isiolo town, Merti, and Garbatulla. This population was considered ideal in that it is accessible and easier to sample compared to the public. Moreover, this group of people was of particular interest because they were a subset of the county's employees and may have faced unique challenges and opportunities related to their gender. A range of job titles and responsibilities were likely to have been held by this group, but their employment with the county government made them a distinct population for research purposes. Valuable insights into gender equality and empowerment issues relevant to this specific community could have been gained by understanding the experiences and perspectives of women working within this local government context.

The sample size was computed using the following formula according to Yamane (1967):

$$n = N / (1 + N * e^2)$$

$$n = 1300 / (1 + 1300 * 0.1^2)$$

$$n = 1300 / (1 + 1300 * 0.01)$$

$$n = 1300 / 14$$

$$n \approx 92.86$$

Where: -

$$N = \text{Target Population} = 1300$$

$$n = \text{Sample size}$$

$$e = \text{significance level} = 10\%$$

The author accommodated an extra 14 respondents to the computed sample size to allow for incidences such as refusal to participate in the research and uncompleted questionnaires. As such, a total of 107 respondents were targeted in this study.

Data Collection

At first, the ethical committee at the Kenyatta University Graduate School had to approve the research. In addition, a permit was requested from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). Furthermore, a research permit was sought from the approving authority to access employees of the Isiolo County Government offices. As previously mentioned, after being granted licenses, research instruments were tested for validity and reliability in a pilot study. Following this, the primary field data collection event was conducted. Considering the limitations of COVID-19, the researcher could use several

data collection methods, such as internet-based surveys, to collect sufficient data for the study.

Data analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to identify elements that explain a particular phenomenon (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). Data processing was performed before data analysis. This included the identification of mistakes or omissions through data editing and the categorization of data into several categories. The researcher was able to obtain a relevant description of the phenomenon distribution thanks to descriptive statistics. To identify the first, second, and third objectives, an inferential analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and the independent samples t-test. Using descriptive statistics, the fourth aim was identified. The data was presented using frequency tables, percentages, graphs, and pie charts.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Demographic profiles

Information regarding the demographic characteristics of the respondents was collected to provide the researcher with deeper information of the participants. This information entailed the age of respondents, years of experience, department affiliation, and education level as showed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Demographic profile of the respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
Age group	Under 25 years	5	5.40%
	26 to 35 years	43	46.20%
	36 – 45 years	37	39.80%
	Over 45 Years	8	8.60%
	Total	93	100.00%
Level of education	Below high school	2	2.20%
	High school or equivalent	11	11.80%
	Some college or technical school	43	46.20%
	Bachelor’s degree	31	33.30%
	Graduate or professional degree	6	6.50%
	Total	93	100.00%
Years of employment in the county government	Under a year	37	39.80%
	One to three years	13	14.00%
	Three to five years	31	33.30%
	Over five years	12	12.90%
	Total	93	100.00%

Department or Ministry Affiliation	Finance and Economic Planning	7	7.50%
	Health Services	19	20.40%
	Agriculture and Livestock	13	14.00%
	Public Works and Infrastructure	21	22.60%
	Trade, Tourism, and Cooperative Development	6	6.50%
	Education and Vocational Training	6	6.50%
	Environment, Water and Natural Resources	13	14.00%
	Lands, Housing, and Physical Planning	8	8.60%
	Total	93	100.00%

The author measured the ages of the respondents in cohort ranges from under 25 through to “over 45”. Most respondents were within the 26 to 45-year-old age range, with 46.2% of respondents falling within the 26 to 35-year-old age cohort, and 39.8% were within the 36 to 45-year-old age cohort. A relatively small proportion of respondents were within the under 25-year-old age cohort (5.4%), which may indicate that the sample surveyed may not be representative of the overall population in terms of age distribution. Additionally, only 8.6% of respondents were within the over 45-year-old age cohort. Most respondents (79.5%) indicated completing at least some college or technical school, with 46.2% having completed some college or technical school and 33.3% holding a bachelor’s degree. A relatively small proportion of respondents indicated education levels below high school (2.2%) or a graduate or professional degree (6.5%).

It is worth noting that the percentage of respondents who had completed high school or its equivalent is relatively low (11.8%), which may indicate that either the sample surveyed has a bias towards individuals with higher levels of education or that there may be a higher level of education required for the jobs related to the survey. A significant proportion of the respondents had been employed at the county for under a year (39.8%). Only a small proportion of respondents had been employed for over five years (12.9%), which may indicate that there are fewer opportunities for long-term career growth within the organization. It is notable that a relatively high proportion of respondents (33.3%) had been employed for three to five years, which may indicate that there are some opportunities for career growth within the organization. This observation could also be a result of a lack of opportunities for career advancement outside of the county government.

The Health Services department had the highest proportion of respondents (20.4%), followed by the Public Works and Infrastructure department (22.6%) and the Agriculture and Livestock department (14.0%). The Finance and Economic Planning department had the lowest proportion of respondents (7.5%), followed by the Trade, Tourism, and Cooperative Development department (6.5%) and the Education and Vocational Training department (6.5%).

Descriptive Statistics

Gender-equality experiences

The study first examined the gender equality experiences of the respondents in the workplace. This assessment formed the basis for interrogating other variables such as gender-pay gap, career progression, and workplace experiences of the respondent.

Salary Range	Frequency	Percentage
Below KES 50,000	37	39.8%
KES 50,000 to KES 100,000	28	30.1%
KES 100,000 to KES 150,000	19	20.4%
KES 150,000 to KES 200,000	5	5.4%
Above KES 200,000	4	4.3%
	93	100.0%

most of the respondents had a salary below KES 100,000 as 69.9% of the respondents selected a salary range below KES 100,000 (39.8% for below KES 50,000 and 30.1% for KES 50,000 to KES 100,000). Only a small proportion of respondents (9.7%) had a salary above KES 150,000 (5.4% for KES 150,000 to KES 200,000 and 4.3% for above KES 200,000). It is also notable that the highest proportion of respondents (39.8%) selected a salary range below KES 50,000, suggesting low income for women working at the county. According to Equileap (2019), women in Kenya earn at least 33% less than their male counterparts doing the same job. The data also showed a gradual decrease in the percentage of respondents as the salary range increases, indicating that fewer women earn higher salaries in the county.

the author assessed the awareness level of the respondents regarding gender-inclusive policies that have been actively implemented at the county government. The outcome of this assessment as available in Table below.

Awareness of gender-inclusive labour policies in Isiolo County Government	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	6	6.5%
No	71	76.3%
Unsure	16	17.2%
Total	93	100.0%

A vast majority of respondents (76.3%) were unaware of gender-inclusive labour policies in their organization, while only 6.5% were aware, and 17.2% are unsure. Based on the survey responses, there is a need for the County Government of Isiolo to improve communication and awareness of their gender-inclusive labour policies. By doing so, they can foster a more inclusive work environment, promote diversity, and ultimately improve overall employee satisfaction and productivity.

The researcher further examined the awareness of the respondents regarding the specific policies currently under implementation in Isiolo County. The author provided the respondents with the pre-selected list of policies and requested them to indicate against the policies of which they were aware. The outcome is as showed in Table below.

Gender-inclusive policies in Isiolo County Government	Aware	Unaware
Equal pay for equal work	6.5%	93.5%
Parental leave and flexible work arrangements	30.1%	69.9%
Anti-discrimination and harassment policies	39.8%	60.2%
Training and career development programs	28.0%	72.0%
Work-life balance initiatives	23.7%	76.3%

Considering the analysed data, the Isiolo County Government faces a challenge in raising awareness of gender-inclusive policies among employees. The survey revealed low awareness levels across several crucial policies namely equal pay for equal work (6.5%), parental leave and flexible work arrangements (30.1%), anti-discrimination and harassment policies (39.8%), training and career development programs (28.0%), and work-life balance initiatives (23.7%). The lack of awareness regarding these policies perpetuates the corresponding equality vices namely gender wage gap, and hinders recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce. It also results in underreporting of discrimination incidents and stymies professional growth of women working at the county offices. Additionally, uninformed employees are more likely to experience burnout and reduced job satisfaction. It is essential for the Isiolo County Government to increase awareness and implementation of these gender-inclusive policies to foster a more inclusive and equitable work environment.

Policies or practices in this workplace that perpetuate gender biases or discrimination	Frequency	Percentage
Hiring practices	68	73.1%
Promotion and advancement criteria	69	74.2%
Pay and compensation practices	69	74.2%
Performance evaluations	63	67.7%
Work assignments and opportunities	59	63.4%

Based on the analysed data, the county workplace experiences cases of gender biases or discrimination in hiring practices (73.1%), promotion and advancement criteria (74.2%), and pay and compensation practices (74.2%). The county also experiences gender discrimination in performance evaluations (67.7%) and work assignments and opportunities (63.4%). The most significant issues are promotion and advancement criteria and pay and compensation practices. Addressing these biases is crucial for creating a more inclusive and equitable work environment

Women labour absorption in Isiolo County Government

The study examined whether gender-equality policies had resulted in any change in the absorption of women labour at the county government. The author posed this question directly to the respondents based on their experience at the county. Their feedback is as showed in the Figure below.

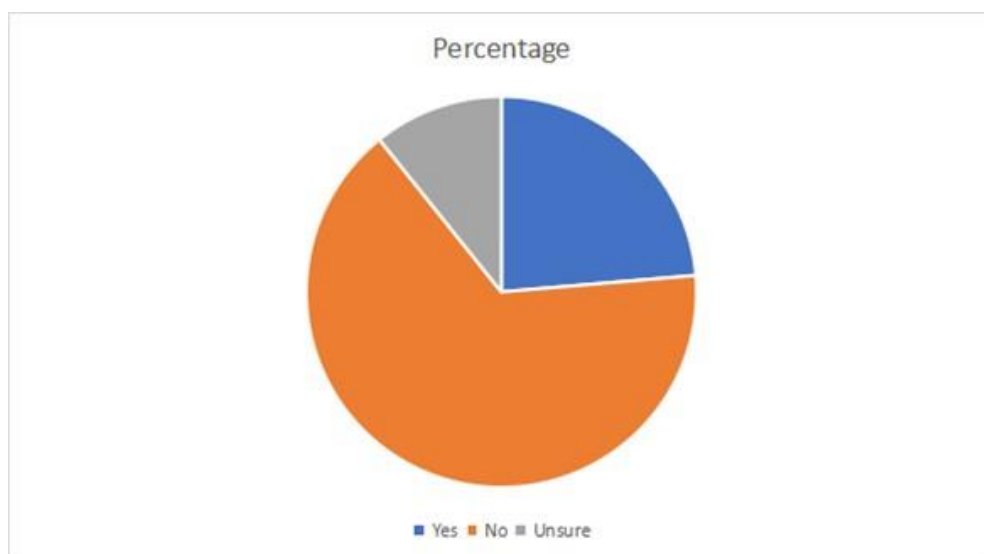


Figure 2: Effect of gender policies on women population in the workplace

Most respondents (65.6%) believed that gender-inclusive labour policies had positively impacted the number of women in the workplace or leadership positions. However, 23.7% did not agree with the posed sentiment, and 10.8% were unsure. The observation suggests that there is a general perception of improvement, but further efforts may still be needed to ensure an equitable work environment. This observation was consistent with a survey by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, which noted that the proportion of women employed in the public sector, which includes county governments, increased from 39.1% in 2015 to 41.6% in 2019 (KNBS, 2020). Notably, the figures by KNBS are representative of all county governments in Kenya. The researcher examined the nature of work performed by the respondents at the county government. The intention was to establish whether the respondents had been employed on a contract basis or on a full-time basis as showed in Figure below.

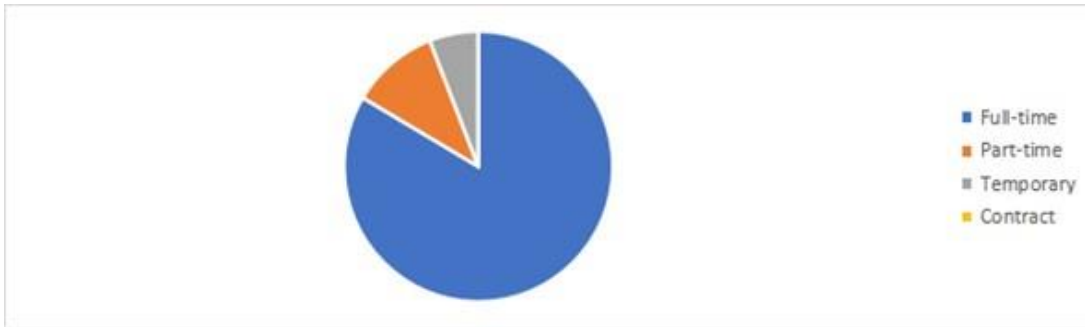


Figure 3: Nature of employment

Commendably, 83.5% of the surveyed employed were employed in the county on a full-time basis. Slightly below 11% of the respondent were working with the county government on a part- time basis while 5.9% were working of a temporary basis. None of the surveyed respondents was working with the county government on a contractual basis. According to Verick (2014), the involvement of women in the county affairs was bound to yield growth and development for the county. As highlighted in the reviewed literature, female labour participation is a significant driver for growth and development. It was therefore commendable to observe not only had the county attempted to involve women in its labour ranks but also embrace most women in full- time basis.

Women work environment in Isiolo County Government

The study also set out to examine whether the gender-equality policies had contributed towards making the work environment. This assessment was based on an array of workplace practices namely promotion denial, hiring biases, lack of career development opportunities, and sexual harassment. The inquiry was aimed towards establishing whether the workplace at the Isiolo County Government had become more conducive for women because of inclusive policies. The outcome of this assessment is presented in the table below.

Table 2: The work environment for women in Isiolo County Government

	Frequency	Percentage
Promotion denial	68	73.10%
Hiring bias	66	71.00%
Sexual harassment	57	61.30%
Job segregation	70	75.30%
Discrimination based on stereotypes	67	72.00%
Lack of career development opportunities	88	94.60%
Pregnancy and maternity discrimination	79	84.90%

The analysed data revealed various forms of gender discrimination experienced by women in the Isiolo County Government workplace. Promotion denial (73.1%) and hiring bias (71.0%) demonstrate that women often face barriers to advancement and recruitment. Sexual harassment (61.3%) appeared to be an issue, negatively affecting women’s safety and well-being at work in the county offices. Slightly above three-quarters of the respondents indicated a persistent trend of women occupying lower-paying or less prestigious positions in the county, while men dominated higher-paying and senior roles.

Stereotype-based discrimination was also a challenge experienced by 72.0% of the surveyed women working with the county government. This exposed underlying biases in the county’s workplace that question women’s commitment and capabilities. Considering the feedback obtained, the most prevalent issue was the lack of career development opportunities (94.6%), which significantly hindered women’s career growth. Lastly, pregnancy and maternity discrimination was an issue experienced by 84.9% show that women continue to be penalized for taking time off due to pregnancy or maternity leave. These findings underscore the importance of addressing gender discrimination in the workplace and emphasize the need for continued efforts to promote equality and inclusion.

The researcher further examined the experiences of the respondents in the workplace through a series of sentiments. The respondents were required to either agree or disagree with these sentiments or indicate indecision as showed in the Table below.

Workplace experience	Yes	No	Not sure
In your opinion, are women given the same opportunities for training and professional development as men in this workplace?	34.4%	38.7%	26.9%
In your opinion, are women given the same opportunities for advancement and promotion as men in this workplace?	3.2%	52.7%	44.1%
Have you ever witnessed or experienced instances where women were not given credit for their work or contributions in the workplace?	49.5%	36.6%	14.0%
In your opinion, are women given the same level of respect and recognition as men in this workplace?	30.1%	26.9%	43.0%
In your opinion, do male and female employees receive equal pay for equal work in this workplace?	17.2%	36.6%	46.2%

The analysed data revealed mixed perceptions of gender equality in the workplace. Only 34.4% of respondents believed women had equal opportunities for training and professional development in the county, while 38.7% disagreed and 26.9% were unsure regarding this sentiment. A significant concern was the low percentage (3.2%) of respondents who felt that women had equal opportunities with their male counterparts for advancement and promotion, with 52.7% disagreeing and 44.1% uncertain. This observation suggested that the respondents hardly experienced new experiences in the workplace relative to their male counterparts.

Nearly half (49.5%) of the respondents noted that they had witnessed or experienced denial credit for their work, a sentiment refuted by 36.6% of the respondents. In terms of respect and recognition, 30.1% believed women were treated equally, 26.9% disagreed, and 43.0% were unsure. Finally, only 17.2% thought there was equal pay for equal work, while 36.6% disagreed and 46.2% were unsure. These findings are indicative that while some progress has been made in improving the workplace for women in the county, further effort is needed to address disparities and foster a more inclusive workplace for women.

	Strongly agree (%)	Somewhat agree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Somewhat disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
The organization has policies and practices that promote gender equality and inclusion.	8.6	11.8	23.7	37.6	18.3
The organization provides equal opportunities for men and women to be hired and promoted.	3.2	9.7	12.9	58.1	16.1
The organization provides equal pay for men and women who perform the same job.	3.2	8.6	5.4	44.1	38.7
The organization provides training and development opportunities that are accessible and inclusive for both men and women.	38.7	28.0	8.6	20.4	4.3
The organization has a culture that promotes respect, inclusion, and diversity, including gender diversity.	2.2	29.0	18.3	19.4	31.2
The organization has clear policies and procedures to address issues of gender discrimination or harassment.	0.0	3.2	12.9	64.5	19.4
The organization provides work-life balance programs that are inclusive and accessible to all employees, regardless of gender.	54.8	15.1	2.2	16.1	11.8
The organization values and seeks input from both men and women in decision-making processes.	35.5	20.4	2.2	24.7	17.2

There were mixed opinions on gender-inclusion in the workplace. Most respondents disagreed that the county government promoted gender equality and inclusion (56.9%) and provided equal opportunities for hiring and promotion of women (74.2%). Most respondents also do not believe there is equal pay for equal work (82.8%). However, 66.7% agreed that the organization provided accessible and inclusive training and development opportunities for both men and women.

Opinions on the organization’s culture promoting respect, inclusion, and diversity were divided, with 31.2% strongly disagreeing and 29.0% somewhat agreeing with the posed sentiment. Most of the surveyed women (83.9%) disagreed that the county had clear policies and procedures to address gender discrimination or

harassment. In contrast, 69.9% agreed that the organization provided inclusive and accessible work-life balance programs which were favourable to women. Lastly, 55.9% indicated belief that the county government valued and sought input from both men and women in decision-making processes. These findings highlighted the need for continued efforts to address areas of concern and promote a more inclusive work environment.

Gender-pay gap in Isiolo County Government

The researcher further examined the gender-pay gap experiences of the respondents. Two sentiments were used to gauge the opinions of the respondents regarding the reality of gender-pay equality at the county government. The feedback of the respondents is presented in Table below.

	Yes	No	Not sure
Have you experienced Unequal pay when working for the county?	71.0%	18.3%	10.8%
In your current position, have you ever been told that you are not being paid the same amount as a colleague of the opposite gender who is performing similar work to you?	66.7%	11.8%	21.5%

The analysed data revealed that unequal pay was a significant concern in the county. Most respondents (71.0%) indicated having experienced unequal pay during their time working for the county. This meant that they were paid less than their male counterparts for performing the same job with the same level of experience and qualifications. Furthermore, 66.7% of the respondents indicated been told that they are not being paid the same amount as a colleague of the opposite gender who is performing similar work. Only a small percentage of respondents noted that they had not experienced (18.3%) or been informed about (11.8%) pay disparities. These findings emphasize that unequal pay remains a pressing issue that needs to be addressed to ensure a fair and equitable work environment for all employees, regardless of their gender.

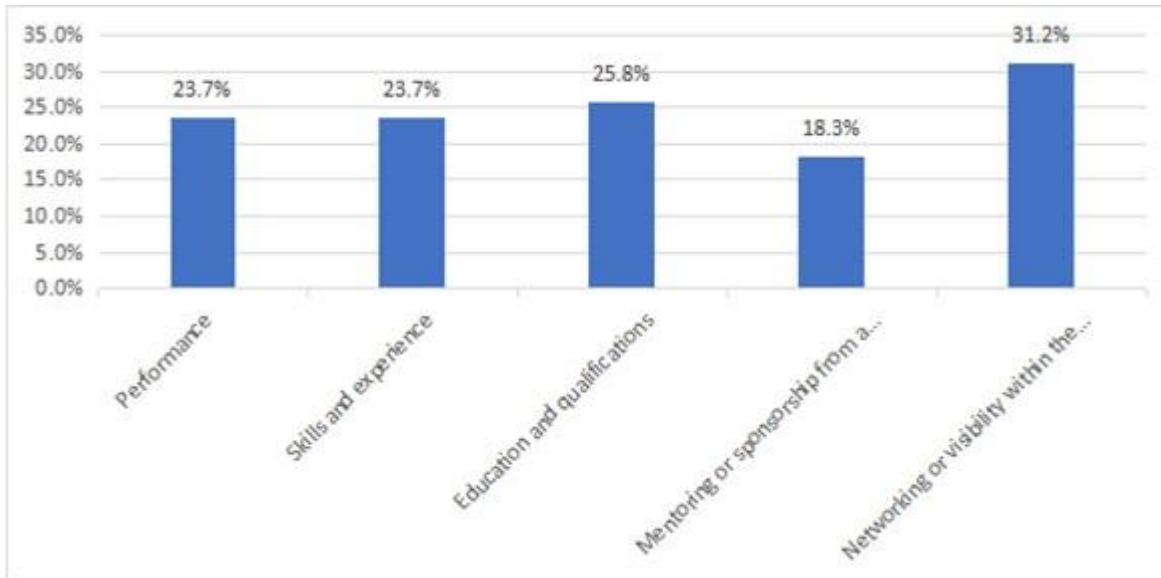
Career progression on women employment

The author further examined the career progression experience of the women at the County Government of Isiolo. The author posed to the respondents whether they had received any promotions or job advancements during the time you've worked with the county government. The outcome of this inquiry is as showed in the table below.

		Frequency	Percentage
Received promotion	Yes	17	18.3%
	No	76	81.7%
	Total	93	100.0%
Duration of receiving promotion	Up to 3 years	4	23.5%
	3 to five years	5	29.4%
	More than five years	8	47.1%
	Total	17	100.0%

A small percentage of respondents (18.3%) noted that they had received promotions or job advancements, while the majority (81.7%) had not. Among those who experienced career progression, 23.5% received their first promotion within 3 years, 29.4% between 3 to 5 years, and 47.1% took more than 5 years. The findings revealed that career advancement opportunities may be limited for women working at the county

government. The data highlighted the limited opportunities for career advancement within the county government and the varying timeframes for those who experienced the career progression. In addition to this analysis, the author examined the perceptions of the respondents concerning their beliefs about recent progression experiences. The outcome of this assessment is presented in the Figure below.



The data revealed that various factors contributed to women’s most recent promotion or job advancement in Isiolo County government. Performance and skills/experience both played a significant role, each accounting for 23.7% of the responses. Education and qualifications were also important, with 25.8% of respondents attributing their advancement to these factors. Mentorship or sponsorship from a supervisor or colleague is another contributing factor, cited by 18.3% of women. Networking and visibility within the organization were crucial as 31.2% of respondents attribute their career progress to these aspects. This observation underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach to support women’s career growth, considering multiple factors such as performance, skills, education, mentorship, and networking.

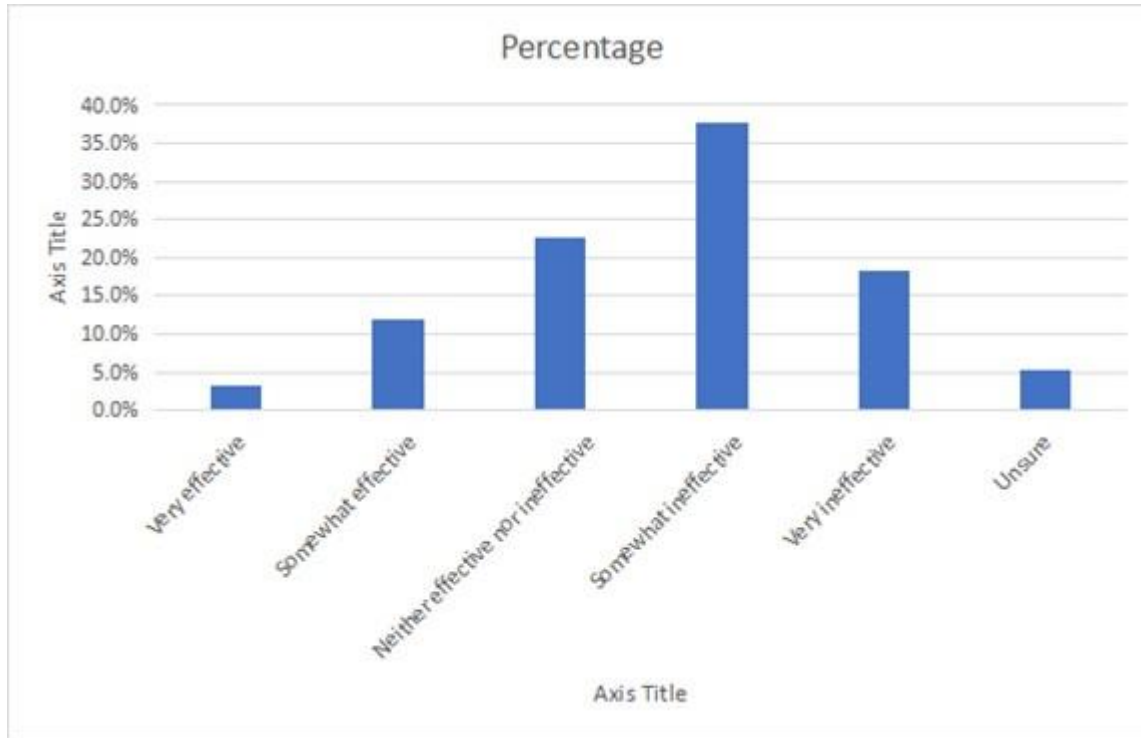
Another assessment concerned the barriers hindering career progression for women working at the County Government of Isiolo. The researcher based this assessment on the predominant attributes of the study namely gender biases, inadequate access to proper training, lack of mentorship, and challenges regarding work-life balance. The outcome of this assessment is presented in the Table below.

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender bias or discrimination	80	86.0%
Lack of access to training or professional development opportunities	84	90.3%
Lack of mentoring or sponsorship opportunities	75	80.6%
Work-life balance challenges	51	54.8%
Limited visibility or networking opportunities	58	62.4%

The data indicated that several barriers impede women’s career progression in the public sector. A significant percentage of respondents (86.0%) identified gender bias or discrimination as a major obstacle. Additionally, 90.3% of respondents pointed to a lack of access to training or professional development opportunities as a barrier. Other notable factors include the absence of mentoring or sponsorship opportunities (80.6%), work-life balance challenges (54.8%), and limited visibility or networking opportunities (62.4%). Addressing these barriers is crucial for fostering an inclusive and supportive environment that promotes women’s career growth in the public sector.

Effectiveness of gender-inclusive policies

Another inquiry regarded the effectiveness of the current policies concerning gender-inclusiveness from the perspective of the respondents. The respondents were required to indicate the level of effectiveness of the current gender-inclusive policies implemented or recognised by the county government. The outcome of this assessment is presented in the Figure below.



The data indicated that most respondents perceived the gender-inclusive labour policies in their organization to be somewhat ineffective (37.6%) or very ineffective (18.3%). In contrast, only a small portion of respondents consider these policies very effective (3.2%) or somewhat effective (11.8%), while 22.6% find them neither effective nor ineffective. These findings suggest that organizations should re-evaluate and enhance their gender-inclusive labour policies to better support and promote gender equality in the workplace.

Based on the above feedback, the research sought to establish the causes or factors driving the ineffectiveness of the gender in-equality policies. The responses were measured through frequencies and percentages as showed in the Table below.

Table 3: Factors hindering effectiveness of gender inclusive policies

	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of awareness or understanding of policies	73	78.5%
Insufficient training or education on gender equality issues	87	93.5%
Resistance to change from management or colleagues	61	65.6%
Insufficient resources to support policy implementation	37	39.8%

The data highlighted lack of awareness or understanding of policies (78.5%) as one of the factors impeding the effective implementation of gender-inclusive labour policies in the county government. Other factors include insufficient training or education on gender equality issues (93.5%), resistance to change from management or colleagues (65.6%), and inadequate resources to support policy implementation (39.8%). To

enhance the effectiveness of these policies and promote a more gender-equal workplace, organizations should address these obstacles by raising awareness, providing training, encouraging support from management, and allocating sufficient resources.

CONCLUSION

This study's first objective was to examine the effect of gender-inclusive labour policies on women's labour absorption in Isiolo County. The findings suggest that most respondents perceive the gender-inclusive labour policies in their organization to be somewhat ineffective or very ineffective. This implies room for improvement in implementing and enforcing these policies. By addressing the challenges and barriers identified, such as lack of awareness or understanding of policies, insufficient training, resistance to change, and inadequate resources, Isiolo County may be able to increase women's labour absorption. The second objective sought to establish the effect of gender-inclusive labour policies on the working environment on women's employment: Most respondents identified gender bias or discrimination, lack of access to training or professional development opportunities, and lack of mentoring or sponsorship opportunities as barriers to women's career progression in the public sector. By effectively implementing gender-inclusive labour policies, organizations can address these barriers and create a more supportive working environment for women, increasing women's employment.

The third objective sought to examine the effect of gender-inclusive labour policies on the gender pay gap. A significant number of respondents experienced unequal pay or were aware of unequal pay in their workplace. This indicates that the current gender-inclusive labour policies have not been successful in closing the gender pay gap in Isiolo County. Strengthening these policies and ensuring their effective enforcement can help reduce the gender pay gap. Lastly, the study sought to explore the effect of career progression on women's employment. The data shows that most women have not received promotions or job advancements during their time working with the county government. Furthermore, the survey results indicate that women face various barriers to career progression, such as discrimination, lack of training, and limited networking opportunities. Addressing these barriers and supporting women's career advancement can lead to a more diverse and inclusive workforce, promoting greater gender equality in Isiolo County.

It is crucial to address important issues that can advance gender equality and the efficacy of gender-inclusive labour regulations to create a more equitable and welcoming workplace in Isiolo County. Increasing management's and employees' knowledge and comprehension of these regulations is an essential first step. This can be accomplished by holding regular training sessions, workshops, and seminars that highlight the significance of gender equality and provide direction on how to implement and enforce the policy. Equal access to chances for training and professional development for men and women must also be made a priority. By providing networking opportunities, skill-development classes, and mentorship programs, women can enhance their careers and create a more equitable workplace. Another important concern is addressing the gender pay gap. It entails assessing current practices to ensure conformity with equal pay laws and effectively enforcing them. Disparities can be found and fixed with the use of transparent reporting of pay structures and regular audits.

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