Published January 2026

Women's Leadership in Economics in Kenya

REPORT BY Dr Katindi Sivi and Thitu Mwaniki

This report was produced by Co-Impact.

Co-Impact brings together local changemakers and funders from around the world to make health, education, and economic systems stronger and more inclusive—creating impact that lasts. Our commitment to advancing gender equality and women's leadership is central to this goal.

A key part of our mission is advancing women's leadership and gender equality in law and economics. These fields play a powerful role in shaping public policy and determining how resources are allocated, decisions that ultimately affect people's rights and the quality of services they receive. Our goal is to not only see more women rise into leadership roles in institutions of economics, law, and justice, but also to ensure they are supported to lead with confidence, influence, and agency. We believe this is essential to building a more just and inclusive society.

This report is the second in a four-part series we commissioned in 2024 to examine women's journeys and leadership contributions within the fields of law and economics in Kenya and Nigeria. Through this series, we aim to deepen our understanding of women's lived experiences—including the barriers they face in navigating their careers and advancing to leadership positions where they can shape and influence the law and the economy. While this report is not intended to be a definitive research study, it seeks to complement and contribute to the growing body of work on women's leadership in law and economics in Africa. We hope the stories and experiences featured here inspire you to see the promise and potential of a world where women lead as equal partners in advancing just, equitable, and inclusive societies.

www.co-Impact.org
info@co-Impact.org

All photos are courtesy of Co-Impact. Photos were taken at the stakeholder validation roundtable on The Status of Women's Leadership in Economics in Kenya, convened in Nairobi on October 17th 2024.

Published January 2026

Contents

Glossary of Terms[1]

Agency: the capacity of women and girls to take purposeful action and pursue goals, free from the threat of violence or retribution.

Barrier: A stumbling block, a wall, a bump, a hindrance. This can take the form of a financial need, discouragement or any other thing (action or words) that hinders or slows down the participant's move from one point to another.

Economics: Covers the branch of knowledge concerned with the production, consumption, and transfer of wealth. Economics includes related fields like Human Resources, Banking, Finance, and Accounts.

Economics sector: For the purposes of this study, the economics sector comprises think tanks such as policy and research think tanks, university departments of economics, development organisations, business and finance and related advocacy organisations.

Enabler: is a stepping stone, a platform, a helping hand. This can take the form of a scholarship, mentorship, encouragement or any other thing (action or words) that helps the participant move from one point to another.

Feminist lens: A feminist lens is a critical perspective that analyzes literature, historical events, and social structures through the lens of gender, focusing on the experiences and roles of women while examining issues of power, inequality, and representation.

Gender barriers: Socially-constructed obstacles whether in the individual, societal or organisational dimensions, that obstruct women by hindering their empowerment and exacerbating gender disparities.

Gendered division of labour: The institutional rules, norms and practices that govern the allocation of tasks between women and men and girls and boys, which is seen as variable over time and space and constantly under negotiation.

Gender enablers: Socially-constructed opportunities whether in the individual, societal or organisational dimensions, that enable a particular group of people (in this case, women) by facilitating their empowerment and increasing gender equity.

Gender equality: The concept that women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realising their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development.

Gender norms: Accepted attributes and characteristics of male and female gendered identity at a particular point in time for a specific society or community. They are the standards and expectations to which gender identity generally conforms, within a range that defines a particular society, culture and community at that point in time. Gender norms are ideas about how men and women should be and act. Internalised early in life, gender norms can establish a life cycle of gender socialisation and stereotyping.

Gender-specific roles: Social and behavioural norms that, within a specific culture, are widely considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex. These often determine the traditional responsibilities and tasks assigned to men, women, boys and girls. Gender-specific roles are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy, occurrence of conflict or disaster, and other locally relevant factors such as ecological conditions.

Individual barriers and enablers: Individual enablers and barriers include personal characteristics and traits like attitudes, personality, values, and other extrinsic factors such as access to education that either facilitate or obstruct progress in the workplace.

[1] Referenced from UNICEF. (2017). Glossary of Terms and Concepts. UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia

Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

Intersectionality: An analytical framework for understanding how different aspects of a person's social and political identities, such as race, ethnicity, migratory status, religion or belief, age, class, caste, and gender identity, combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. An intersectional lens is critical in understanding the complexity and particularity of inequalities.

Leader: A person with agency and power (influence) in a particular sphere.

Leadership: Leadership is the ability to inspire, influence, and guide individuals or groups toward achieving shared goals, regardless of formal position or authority.

Organisational barriers and enablers: Organisational barriers and enablers relate to an organisation's practices and result from how a company is set up and run to enable or obstruct women's inclusion, equity and leadership opportunities.

Re-entry: In this context, it is the process of women coming back into the work space after leaving to give birth and take care of the family

Representation: Can mean the portrayal of gender roles, characteristics, and stereotypes in various contexts or the number of women among the members of an intervention's target group – for example, the percentage of females in an economics class.

Sex-disaggregated data: Data that is cross-classified by sex, presenting information separately for men and women, boys and girls. When data is not disaggregated by sex, it is more difficult to identify real and potential inequalities. Sex-disaggregated data is necessary for effective gender analysis

Sexual harassment: Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that violates your dignity, makes you feel intimidated, degraded, or humiliated, and creates a hostile or offensive work environment. It is about how you feel rather than the intention of the harasser. This can include physical contact, invasion of personal space, suggestive remarks, stalking, unwanted comments on dress and appearance, jokes of a sexual nature, or the display of sexually offensive material in a public space.

Societal barriers and enablers: Societal barriers and enablers are a result of how people relate with one another in society.

Foreword

This report is part of a four-part series commissioned by Co-Impact in 2024 to deepen our understanding of women's leadership journeys in law and economics across Kenya and Nigeria. Grounded in evidence, these reports examine institutions spanning the Judiciary, Legislature, Attorney General's offices, academia, private firms, public economic institutions, banks, think tanks, professional bodies, and development organisations. They offer a comprehensive view of where women are leading, where gaps persist, and how institutional policy and societal factors shape women's entry, retention, and advancement.

At the current pace, the United Nations estimates it will take 140 years to achieve gender parity in workplace leadership and 47 years to reach equal representation in national parliaments.

In law and economics, women are graduating in strong numbers and building deep expertise, yet they remain underrepresented in leadership. These two domains matter because law shapes how rights are protected and justice is delivered, while economics determines how resources are allocated, which priorities are funded, and whose needs are reflected in national development strategies. Leadership in these fields influences the rules, incentives, and structures that affect millions.

The findings of these reports make clear that the issue is not a lack of talent or ambition. It is institutional.

Structural and informal barriers continue to shape how women advance and sustain leadership. Gender-blind appraisal systems, unequal access to mentorship and professional networks, workplace cultures that inadequately account for caregiving responsibilities, opaque promotion pathways, and entrenched leadership norms all contribute to unequal outcomes. In economics, women are disproportionately filtered out before reaching senior technical and policy influence. In law, representation does not consistently translate into authority, visibility, or long-term retention at senior levels.

Importantly, these reports make one point clear: progress cannot be left to chance. At Co-Impact we believe that advancing women's leadership requires deliberate institutional reform. Symbolic representation is not enough. Institutions must move beyond compliance toward genuine transformation in reforming appraisal systems, reshaping workplace cultures, strengthening mentorship, dismantling informal power networks, and creating clear pathways for advancement. Only then will women not just enter leadership spaces but lead and thrive in them.

For funders and practitioners committed to systems change, this body of work highlights a critical opportunity. Investing in women's leadership in law and economics is not only a matter of equity; it is fundamental for durable institutional reform and inclusive development. When women lead, institutions become more responsive, governance becomes more legitimate, and policy decisions better reflect the realities of diverse communities.

We are deeply grateful for the leadership and long-term partnership of the Gates Foundation, whose sustained investment enables this work. We thank the authors for their rigorous research, the women who generously shared their experiences, and our partners across Kenya and Nigeria who continue advancing women's leadership.

We hope this body of work contributes meaningfully to evidence, dialogue, and collective action toward institutions in which women not only enter leadership spaces — but thrive and lead.

Mary Wandia
Co-Impact Regional Director, Africa.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Economics and its related fields—such as trade, accounting, finance, banking, insurance, and investment—are the engines that drive economic development, shaping how resources are allocated, wealth is generated, and opportunities are distributed. These disciplines influence everything from job creation and market access to social mobility and financial inclusion. However, to ensure that economic growth benefits all segments of society, it is essential to recognise and address the unique needs and challenges faced by women. Increasing women's representation and leadership in these fields is crucial for designing inclusive economic programs and services that level the playing field and prevent the entrenchment of gender disparities. When women have a voice in economic decision-making, policies are more likely to be equitable, fostering sustainable growth that benefits not just women but entire communities and economies. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to economic development must include a deliberate focus on gender inclusion to create a more balanced and prosperous future for all.

To that end, Co-Impact commissioned a study to understand the status of women in leadership in economics and related professions in Kenya. The report brings out the experiences of women in different age cohorts and different stages of their career journeys. In understanding those journeys, we can construct a picture of the barriers and enablers that women in economics face in their entry, progress, and advancement to leadership.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1. Assess the status of women in leadership in economics in Kenya.
2. Interrogate the legal framework and institutional policies/regulations that shape women's participation in economics.
3. Identify the gender-intentional strategies and practices that support women's leadership in economics.
4. Analyze the barriers that hinder women's leadership in economics.
5. Explore collaborative strategies to support and enable women's leadership in economics in Kenya.

Overall, the findings of this study are intended to inform Co-Impact's strategy and programming to advance women's leadership in economics in Kenya.

1.3 Women in Leadership in Global and African Context

Recent studies show that more women are rising to top leadership positions in economics and business than in the past. Research by the IBM Institute for Business Value and Chief (2023) indicates that the share of organizations formally prioritizing the advancement of women into leadership roles has nearly doubled—from 25% in 2021 to 45% in 2023. Perceptions have also shifted: in 2019, fewer than 30% of men believed a woman was as likely as a man to become a CEO, but by 2023 this had increased to 54%.

Despite this progress, women remain significantly underrepresented in middle management, making it harder to build a strong pathway for future female leaders.

Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

Data from the World Economic Forum (2023) shows that women hold only 32.2% of senior leadership positions worldwide. The IBM study further reports that, by 2023, only 12% of women occupied top executive roles such as CEO or CFO (the C-suite), and another 12% served on executive boards globally.

The IBM study also found that women held 40% of leadership roles among junior professionals and specialists at the entry point of the leadership pipeline, a level approaching gender parity. However, too few women progressed to the next leadership tier. This pattern is echoed in other research, including the Women in Economics Index 2023, which highlights a 10 percentage point drop in the transition from junior professional to senior professional roles for women. This stage of progression is especially critical, as it serves as the main feeder into C-suite and executive board positions (IBM Institute for Business Value & Chief, 2023). Therefore, if organizations were making substantial progress in advancing women into middle management roles, the proportion of female executives would be notably higher.

Various studies have alluded to the fact that if we continue at the current trajectory, it will take between 50 and 100 years to attain gender parity in leadership.

The IBM study (2019) said it would take 54 years to achieve gender parity globally.

McKinsey Global Institute (2019) said that with a gender parity score of 0.58 (which suggests high levels of inequality in various dimensions including participation in employment, leadership and politics), it would take nearly 140 years to achieve gender parity in Africa.

The Global Gender Gap Report (2023) stated that Sub-Saharan Africa's parity is at 0.682 and with the current rate of progress, it will take 102 years to close the gender gap in the region.

Significant differences in gender equality exist across Africa, with Namibia achieving a gender parity score of 0.802, the highest on the continent, while Chad has the lowest score of 0.57 (Global Gender Gap Report, 2023). Bridging the gender gap is widely recognised as crucial for enhancing Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth across Africa, hence the need to implement strategies to advance gender equality (Glass, C., & Cook, A. (2016); Kinyanjui, M. (2019)). Nevertheless, women in Africa face considerable challenges in accessing leadership roles, particularly within the formal economy. As noted by Opoku, Anyango, and Alupo (2018), entrenched gender biases and the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions have significantly hindered progress towards achieving gender parity in career development.

Additional factors contributing to gender disparities in career advancement among African women include cultural norms and values that impede progression, limited access to training and professional development programs, and unconscious biases (Lituchy, T. R., Galperin, B. L., & Punnett, B. J. (2016). Material and financial barriers, such as restricted access to land ownership, credit, and other financial resources, also obstruct women’s economic empowerment (Opoku et al., 2018). Musyoka, Ochilo, Ntirampeba, Mutuku, Mugambi, Matata, Niyongere, Habindavyi, Ndayihanzamaso, Ndishimiyimana, Bundi, Vos, & Terefe (2024) observed that women disproportionately shoulder the burden of unpaid care work, reducing their time, energy, and opportunities for economic advancement.

An Africa-wide survey, conducted among 312 women by Education Sub Saharan Africa [ESSA], (2021) revealed that the greatest barrier to women’s leadership across all sectors is socio-cultural expectations, as indicated by the majority of respondents (32%). This was followed by lack of mentorship opportunities (28%), lack of networking opportunities (22%) and gender stereotypes (20%) as shown in figure 1.

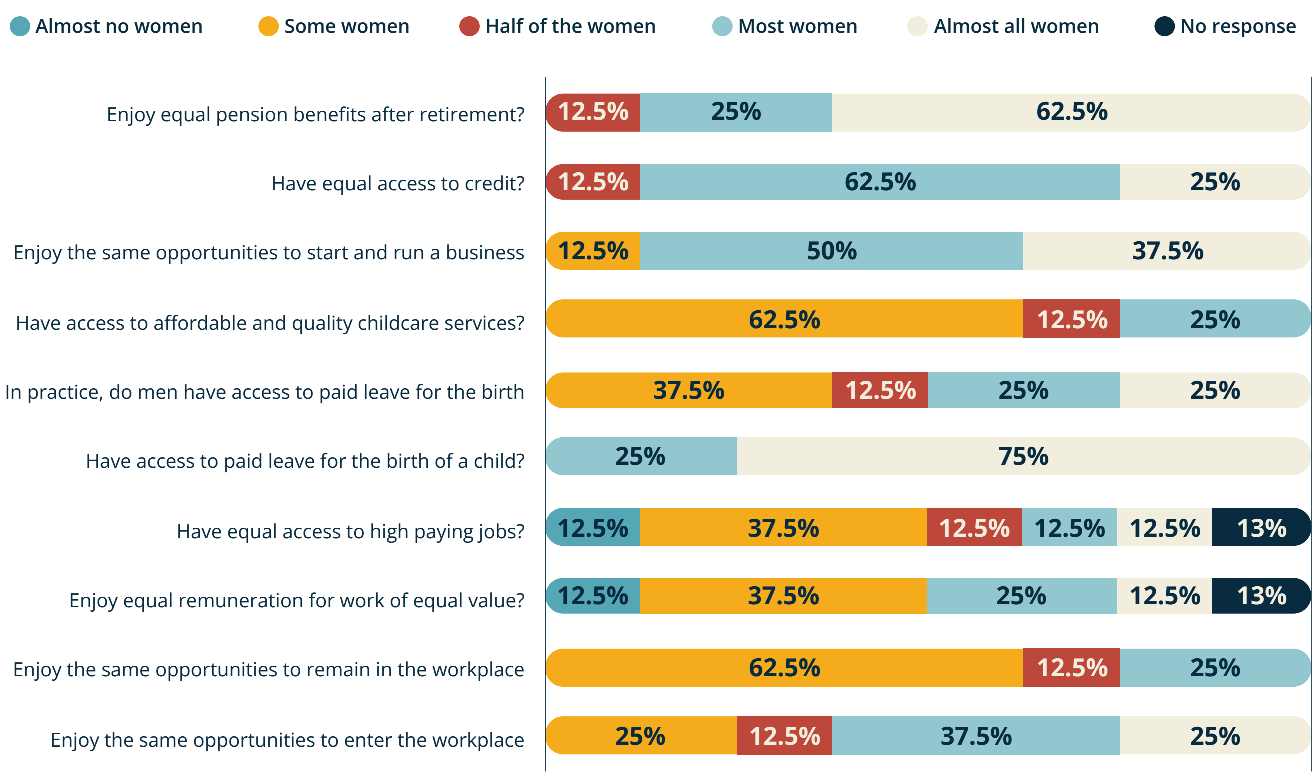
FIGURE 1: BARRIERS TO FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA

Source: Education Sub Saharan Africa [ESSA], (2021) Consequently, Soares and Sidun (2021) stress the importance of addressing these barriers and fostering inclusive environments to support the career development of women in Africa. According to ESSA (2021), the most important actions that support leadership development for women include:

- scholarships
- leadership training
- gender-sensitive organisational/ structure policies
- networking
- mentoring

Organisations have generally taken some steps in an attempt to close the gender leadership gap between men and women. In terms of treatment in the workplace for example, over half of people interviewed in a World Bank report said that almost all women had access to paid leave for the birth of a child (75%) and they enjoyed equal pension benefits after retirement (62.5%). Over half of people interviewed reported that some women in their organisations enjoyed the same opportunities to remain in the workplace (62.5%), and had access to affordable and quality childcare services. 12.5% of those interviewed said that almost no women enjoyed equal remuneration for work of equal value and another 12.5% said that almost no women had equal access to high paying jobs, as shown in figure 2.

FIGURE 2: PERCEPTION OF TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE



Source: World Bank, 2024

The distribution of power within the profession still has a large gender bias, which has far-reaching implications on decision-making processes and should be taken into account by organisations across the academic, public and private sectors"

1.4. Women in Economics Globally and in Africa

According to the Women in Economics Index 2023[2], women are dramatically under- represented in all leadership positions in economics;

"The distribution of power within the profession still has a large gender bias, which has far-reaching implications on decision-making processes and should be taken into account by organisations across the academic, public and private sectors" (p. 1).

According to the index, globally, women make up only 8% of top authors of academic economics literature, 21% of leaders of economics think tanks and 22.3% of faculty members in top economics departments. In the private sector, women make up 20.9% of chief economists of the biggest global companies, 7.1% for insurance companies and 26.3% for banks. In the public sector, women make up 11.7% of central bank governors, 16.5% of finance ministers, 21.4% of national economic advisory councils and 22.7% of chief economists of international economic institutions.

Africa and Oceania show the highest representation of women in the academic economics sector. Women account for 13% and 15% of authors in economics literature in these regions, compared with the global average of 8%. They also hold a larger share of faculty head positions—49.7% in Africa and 32.7% in Oceania—relative to the global benchmark of 22.3% in top economics departments.

Despite this strong representation, a leaky pipeline persists within economics departments. Although Africa leads at all levels, the drop-off between entry-level and senior positions is significant. As shown in Table 1, in regional top departments, women comprise 75% of research fellows and 61% of entry-level staff, but only 41% of senior management roles.

Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

[2] Buehler, D., Formella, C., García, Q., Kretschmer, S., Raith, J., Seidlitz, A., Singh, Y., Sondergeld, V., Takahashi, Y., Weilage I., and Zillur, K. (2023). The Women in Economics Index 2023. Berlin, The Women in Economics Initiative e.V.

TABLE 1: LEAKY PIPELINE IN THE ACADEMIC ECONOMICS SECTOR

GENDER	WOMEN		MEN		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
ACADEMIC SECTOR						
Research fellows	29	34.5	55	65.5	84	100
Entry level	142	30.0	331	70	473	100
Senior level	186	17.9	853	82.1	1,039	100
Total	357	22.3	1,241	77.7	1,598	100
REGIONAL TOP DEPARTMENTS						
AFRICA						
Research fellows	3	75	1	25	4	100
Entry level	39	60.9	25	39.6	64	100
Senior level	38	40.9	55	59.1	93	100
Total	80	49.7	81	50.3	161	100

Source: Women in Economics Index, 2023

Among the top 100 global companies—which continue to show a decline in the number of women chief economists across industries and countries, along with persistent gender gaps on corporate boards—Africa does not feature at all. In the public sector, the region similarly lags behind: Africa has the lowest share of women serving as Central Bank Governors (4.3%) and remains among the regions with the lowest representation of women in Ministries of Finance.

WOMEN IN ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS IN THE KENYAN CONTEXT

Similar gender gaps in advancement to leadership positions have also been reported in the Kenyan context (World Economic Forum, 2023). The Global Gender Gap Report (2023) ranked Kenya at 77 out of 146 countries with an index of 0.708 with an increasing gap of 0.021 and a -20 decline in ranking from 2022. The reports showed significant inequalities between males and females in education attainment, health outcomes, representation in parliament, and participation in the labour market. According to Statista (2022), the gender gap index indicated that women were 27% less likely to get the same opportunities compared to men. As such, gender disparity in the Kenyan workforce was high with women holding only 18-30% of leadership positions in the country despite a high rate of labour force participation (UN Women – Africa, 2023). In the private sector, only 22% of leadership positions were held by women (Rotich, 2021). In the public sphere, women only occupied 30.8% of political positions, lower than Uganda (34.8%), Tanzania (36.9%), Burundi (38%) and Rwanda (61.2%) (Rotich, 2021).

The Women, Business and the Law, 2024 index measures barriers that inhibit women's economic empowerment, such as women's legal rights, policy instruments designed to support the implementation of these rights, and how these rights are realised in practice. Kenya scores 70 (out of 100) in the WBL 2.0 legal frameworks score, which is higher than the global average (64.2) and higher than the Sub-Saharan Africa regional average (57.4).

As shown in figure 3, one of the lowest scores for Kenya is on the indicator measuring laws affecting childcare. The WBL 2.0 supportive frameworks score for Kenya (45 out of 100)

FIGURE 3: WOMEN, BUSINESS AND LAW, 2024 INDEX

WBL 2.0	SAFETY	MOBILITY	WORKPLACE	PAY	MARRIAGE	PARENTHOOD	CHILDCARE	ENTREPRENEURSHIP	ASSETS	PENSION
Legal frameworks score	50	100	50	100	100	50	25	75	75	75
Supportive frameworks score	25	66.7	33.3	50	66.7	33.3	25	66.7	33.3	50
Expert opinions score	25	75	50	25	75	81.3	25	75	75	100

Source: World Bank 2024

is higher than the global average (39.5) and higher than the Sub-Saharan Africa regional average (24.5). Safety and childcare score the poorest followed by the workplace, parenthood, and assets. The WBL 2.0 expert opinions score for Kenya (60.6 out of 100.0) is lower than the global average (65.7) and higher than the Sub-Saharan Africa regional average (54.6). Women's safety, pay and childcare score very poorly.

According to the Women, Business and the Law 2024 index (Figure 3), more than half of those interviewed said that most women have equal access to credit (62.5%) and the same opportunities as men to start and run a business (50%). However, Agwaya and Mairura (2019) argue that apart from differential access and control over resources like education and employment, access to credit and cash income were major underlying sources of inequalities between male and female-owned businesses. For example, in Kenya male ownership of licensed businesses was 1.5 times that of women (Sivi, 2022). Conversely, unlicensed businesses, synonymous with small-scale trading or informal micro-enterprises, were predominantly owned by those with primary education and below, and female ownership was twice that of men (RoK, 2016), thus access to formal credit was limited.

On average, women also engaged twice as much as men in the sectors having most unlicensed businesses, such as agriculture, waste management, and wholesale and retail. Although female-owned businesses were one and half times more likely to shut down than male-owned ones, they accounted for 81% of employment reported in the MSMEs, and attracted twice the number of female employees (RoK, 2016).

1.5 Women's Representation in Political Leadership

According to Sivi (2016), the main political systems formerly used in Kenya to elect political leaders revolved around the First Past the Post (FPTP) electoral system, the Proportional Representation (PR) system, and the party system. In a FPTP system the winning candidate is the one with the most votes, while all votes for other candidates are discounted and the rest of the votes garnered by the other candidates do not count. This system has encouraged a 'winner-take-all' mentality.

The true essence of the PR system, on the other hand, was that every vote counts and everyone should have the right to fair representation, but PR did not fully achieve those goals in Kenya because reserved seats were allocated to parties based on the number or the proportion of elective seats won, rather than the number of votes received (FIDA, 2013). Thus, the big political parties that had more 'male capture' tended to reward their cronies (Geisler, 2004). Additionally, only 12 PR seats were reserved between 1963 and 2013, and these were too few to make a difference and increase the level of women's representation (FIDA, 2013).

Thus, FIDA (2013) confirms that the FPTP and PR systems used since independence were ineffective in enhancing women's political representation in Kenya. It is quite astonishing to note that while women make up over 50% of Kenya's population, between 1963 and 2012, Kenyan voters only elected 54 women (including the re-elected) to Parliament. Only 25 women were nominated to Parliament through the PR system throughout this period. As shown in table 2, the overall proportion of female participation between independence and 2012 was dismal. According to Nzomo (2003), the electoral playing field has always been tilted heavily in favour of men.

There are many reasons, including:

- persistent social resistance and/or lukewarm acceptance of women's participation in political leadership;
- the culture of electoral violence that tends to be harsher towards female than male candidates;
- feminisation of poverty that renders women more financially constrained than their male counterparts;
- lack of adequate political socialisation for leadership that manifests itself in women's exclusion from strategic political information and general inability in the art of public oratory and populist campaigning;
- and women's marginality in mainstream party hierarchy, hence their inability to shape rules of engagement which are defined and organised around male norms and values.

FIDA (2013) attributed low political participation and women's exclusion from higher elective offices to patriarchal culture and the electoral system.

TABLE 2: WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN PARLIAMENT FROM INDEPENDENCE TO 2012

PARLIAMENT	TOTAL NUMBER OF ELECTED MPS	NUMBER OF ELECTED WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT	NUMBER OF WOMEN NOMINATED IN PARLIAMENT	TOTAL NUMBER OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT	TOTAL NUMBER OF MEN IN PARLIAMENT
1963–1969	117	0	0	0	117
1969–1974	158	1	1	2	156
1974–1979	158	4	2	6	152
1979–1983	158	5	1	6	152
1983–1988	158	2	1	3	155
1988–1992	188	6	1	7	181
1992–1997	188	6	1	7	0
1997–2002	210	4	5	9	181
2002–2007	210	11	7	18	0
2007–2012	210	15	6	21	201
TOTAL REPRESENTATION ACROSS THE YEARS	1755	54	25	79	1676
% REPRESENTATION BY GENDER ACROSS THE YEARS	100	3.1	1.4	4.5	95.5

Source: ECK records (various issues) as quoted by Kanyinga, 2014

The 2010 Constitution enshrined affirmative action principles such as the two-thirds gender rule, expressed in two parts of the Constitution: the Bill of Rights and the general principles of the electoral system. The principle dictates that 'not more than two-thirds of the members of appointive and elective bodies shall be of the same gender[3].' These provisions require the State to take legislative and other measures designed to redress any disadvantage suffered by individuals or groups as a result of past discrimination[4]. Separate provisions create reserved positions for women in the National Assembly, Senate, and county assemblies[5]. The 2010 Constitution also provides that women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural, and social spheres. Equality is defined as a fundamental right and it implies similarity of treatment.[6] It prohibits discrimination on the basis of, among others, disability and age[7]. It demands participation, inclusiveness, and protection of minorities and marginalised groups[8] and demands that legislative and policy measures be taken to facilitate their implementation. This inclusion is extended to the following: persons with disabilities (PWDs), youth, and minorities and marginalised groups.[9]

The policies significantly increased women's representation through nomination and election of women as shown in table 3. This is a great improvement from the earlier political participation of women over 50 years.

Parties are the main pathway for women's entry into the political arena. Countries can restore public trust in representative structures and reduce the concentration of political power by developing stronger vehicles for formal political participation through parties (Oyugi J, 2003). It is on this basis that women need to join parties. However, political parties in Kenya tend to bias candidate nomination in favour of those who have accumulated personal political capital and resources based upon personal status or external group support. In most cases, the beneficiaries of these biases are men. Party elections are also held arbitrarily and at the party officials' whims. In some cases, the elections are simply not held. Thus women, as newcomers to parties who have fewer resources, find it more difficult to catch up with established men (Oyugi J, 2003).

TABLE 3: ELECTION RESULTS AND NOMINATIONS IN THE 2013 AND 2022 ELECTIONS

	MP'S			SENATORS			GOVERNORS		MEMBERS OF COUNTY ASSEMBLIES		
	2013		2022	2013		2022	2013	2022	2013	2022	
	ELECTED	NOMINATED	ELECTED AND NOMINATED	ELECTED	NOMINATED	ELECTED AND NOMINATED			ELECTED AND NOMINATED	ELECTED	NOMINATED
Men	274	7	268	47		46	47	40	1368	1336	99
Women	16	5	81	0	16	21	0	7	82	105	625
Total	290	12	349	47	18	67	47	47	1450	1441	724
% men	94%	81%	76.8%	100%	72%	68.7%	100%	85.1%	94%	92.7	13.7
% women	6%	19%	23.2%	0%	28%	31.3%	0%	14.9%	6%	7.3	86.3

Source: Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, IEBC records, various.

[3] Articles 27(8) and 81(b), Constitution of Kenya (2010).
[4] Article 27(6), Constitution of Kenya 2010.
[5] Articles 97(1)(b), 98(1)(b) - (d), and 177(1)(b), Constitution of Kenya (2010).
[6] Article 27(3), Constitution of Kenya (2010).
[7] Article 27(4), Constitution of Kenya (2010).
[8] Article 56, Constitution of Kenya (2010).
[9] Article 100, Constitution of Kenya (2010).

An audit of parties in Kenya revealed that women are not only poorly represented in their structures, but they mostly occupy low positions where they cannot influence key decisions. According to Oyugi J (2003), women on average comprised 77% of party secretariats, 30% of party founding members, 26% of National Delegates Conferences/ Congresses, 17% of National Governing Councils, 17% of heads of party branches, and 18% of National Executive Committees. However, as shown in table 4, this varies widely across parties. This performance of women in parties is attributed to the challenges discussed earlier.

TABLE 4: WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL PARTIES

POLITICAL PARTY	FOUNDING MEMBERS			REPRESENTATIVES IN NDC			REPRESENTATIVES IN NGC			REPRESENTATIVES IN NEC			REPRESENTATIVES IN SECRETARIATS			HEADS OF PARTY BRANCHES		
	Women	Men	% of women rep	Women	Men	% of women rep	Women	Men	% of women rep	Women	Men	% of women rep	Women	Men	% of women rep	Women	Men	% of women rep
NARC	1		100				70	130	35	4	16	20				10	30	25
FORD - P	1	3	25	200	870	19	20	301	6	3	30	9				4	103	4
LDP	1	3	25															
KANU		2	-	1200	3000	29				2	37	5						
NPK	1		100	30	30	50	8	7	53	8	7	53						
FORD - K	5	7	42	700	2900	19	7	213	3	6	40	13	2	3	40			
Saba saba	3	6	33				12	24	33	2	10	17						
KENDA	1	3	25										8		100	6		100
LPK	1	1	50	325	325	50	30	30	50	7	7	50				20	20	50
FORD - A										5	19	21					39	-
PICK		3	-															
Shirikisho	1	5	17	33	72	31				4	25	14					7	-
Total	**15**	**33**	**31**	**2488**	**7197**	**26**	**147**	**705**	**17**	**41**	**191**	**18**	**10**	**3**	**77**	**40**	**199**	**17**

Source: The Women Shadow Parliament – Kenya (WSP-K, Updated)

1.6 Women's Representation in the Public Service

According to the Economic Survey 2024, and as shown in table 5, a third of Cabinet Secretaries (35%) and Chief Administrative Secretaries (30%) were women while 23% of Principal Secretaries were women. The proportion of CEOs of Constitutional commissions and Independent offices neared gender parity (40%). At the County level, only County Executive Committees managed to surpass the one third threshold (32%). The judiciary, up to this point, has done remarkably well in maintaining gender parity.

TABLE 5: WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

DECISION-MAKING POSITION	WOMEN	MEN	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE WHO ARE WOMEN (%)
NATIONAL LEVEL				
Cabinet Secretaries	7	13	20	35%
Chief Administrative Secretaries	9	21	30	30%
Principal Secretaries	12	40	52	23.1%
CEOS of Constitutional Commissions and Independent Offices	4	6	10	40%
Regional Commissioners	2	6	8	25%
County Commissioners	5	42	47	10.6%
National Assembly Speakers	0	2	2	0%
National Assembly Clerks	0	2	2	0%
COUNTIES				
Deputy Governors	8	39	47	14.9%
County Secretaries	5	41	46	10.9%
County Executive Committee Members	130	277	407	31.9%
County Assembly Speakers	1	46	47	2.1%
County Assembly Clerks	4	43	47	8.5%
JUDICIARY				
Supreme Court Judges	3	4	7	42.9%
Court of Appeal	10	9	19	52.6%
High Court Judges	79	72	151	52.3%
Magistrates	298	244	542	55%
Kadhis	0	52	52	0%

Source: Economic Survey, 2024

Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

1.7 Women's Representation in the Formal Sector

According to the Kenya Economic Report (2020) limited access to education limits employment options and women's involvement in decision-making. As a result, in Kenya, working women as a whole are more likely than men to find employment in the services sector, and less likely than men to do so in the productive sector. In 2017, 74.5% of all working women were working in the service sector compared to 64.2% of all working men. As employers of women in the service sector, the Ministry of Education and related agencies were leading by 36% followed by 12% in public administration, 11%, 10% and 9% in health/social work, household activities and wholesale/retail trade respectively (Kenya Economic Report, 2020).

1.8 Women's Representation and Leadership in Higher Education

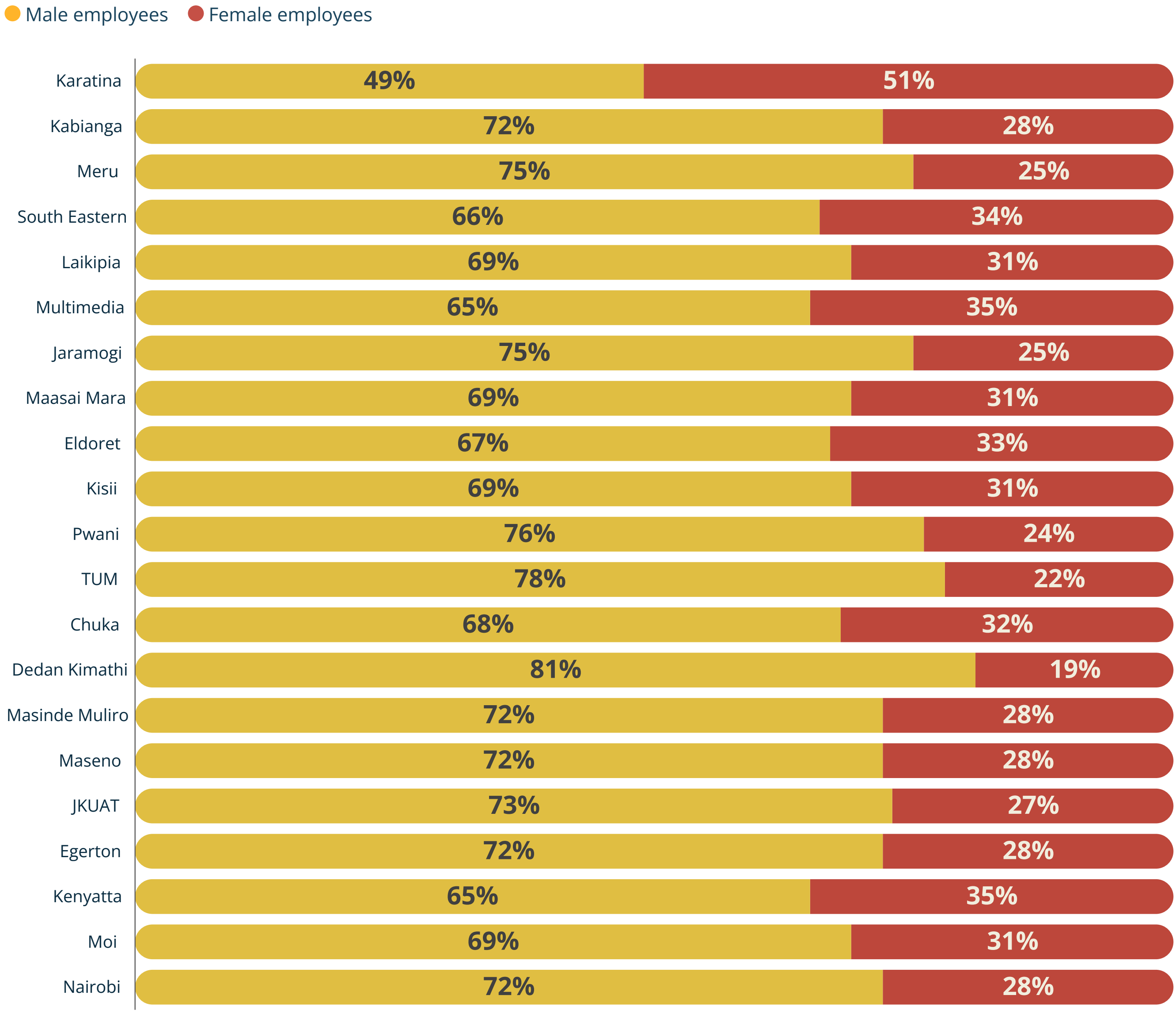
According to Mitullah, Forojalla, Basheka, Vieira do Nascimento, Jallow, Awol, & Feddal (2023), policy frameworks and various legislations have enhanced the implementation of programs aimed at improving women's education from primary school to university. In higher education some progress has been made, but the institutions are lagging behind on gender parity, more so in leadership positions.

Women's participation in higher education is directly linked to enrollment and completion rates of school as well as their engagement in the labour market. A study by Psacharopoulos and Patrinos (2020) found that women's level of education correlates to their opportunities in the labour market. According to this study, any year of school above average ultimately increases wages for girls by 1,020% (sic). However, imbalances due to factors noted above have dictated the course for the few that transit to universities and those who pursue their education beyond the bachelor's degree. Ultimately, the penetration of the labour market, even from within the higher education system, is a struggle.

Many women are employed in the education sector, but there is a vast difference in the numbers of males and females in the institutions of higher learning. This is demonstrated by data from the 22 public universities in Kenya, in which only Karatina University is slightly above (51%) the expected gender parity as shown in figure 4. Dedan Kimathi University (19%), Technical University of Mombasa (22%), Pwani University(24%), Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology (25%), and Meru University of Science and Technology (25%) are lagging at 25% and below in academic staff representation of women.

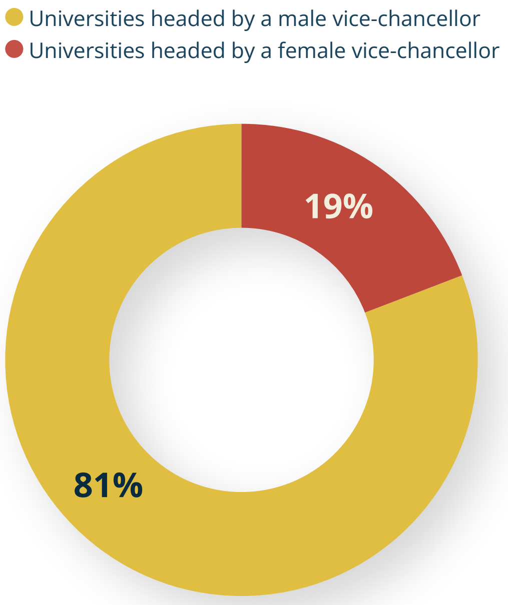
There is also a gender imbalance in university governance. An examination of the leadership in public universities over the past ten years shows male dominance. Out of the 32 public chartered universities only six universities have ever been headed by female vice chancellors (18.8%) compared to 26 male-led universities representing 81.2%. These six are Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Pwani University, Technical University of Mombasa, University of Eldoret, Machakos University and Kirinyaga University as shown in figure 5. Women vice chancellors are about one third (29%) compared to 71% male vice chancellors.

FIGURE 4: GENDER DIVERSITY IN ACADEMIC STAFF IN PUBLIC CHARTERED UNIVERSITIES



Source: Kenya Economic Report, 2021

FIGURE 5: UNIVERSITY TOP LEADERSHIP (VICE-CHANCELLOR) BY GENDER



Source: Mitullah, Forojalla, Basheka, Vieira do Nascimento, Jallow, Awol, & Feddal (2023)

From the UNESCO study of a sample of seven universities, and as shown in figure 6, there is an average female to male representation in university councils of 37% to 63%. In central management, there is an average of 32% female and 68% male representation. A very low female representation was registered among the university deans, directors and principals at an average of 25% against a male majority of 75%.

In the case of professors, the University of Nairobi, with the highest (107) number of professors had only 18 women professors, representing 17% against the majority (83%) men. In terms of proportions, there is a low representation of women among associate professors in public and private universities. University of Nairobi tops the list with the highest number (220) of associate professors, 49 of whom are women representing 22% against a majority (171) of men representing 78%.

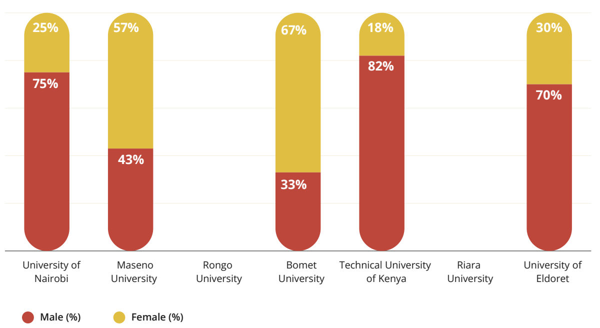
There are multiple factors that hinder women's participation in higher education and in reaching leadership positions. A Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is a key requirement to obtain a top leadership position in institutions for higher education in Kenya (Onyambu, 2019). Onyambu's study found that the majority (71%) of PhD holders in Kenyan universities are male against 29% female representation. This skewed proportion contributes in part to the gender outlook in higher education.

The main considerations when hiring for positions of leadership included:

- academic qualifications and experience (100%)
- potential leadership qualities (86%)
- formal preparation (71%)
- effective management skills (57%)
- next step for upward mobility (57%)
- affirmative action compliance (43%)
- reward for hard work (29%)
- expertise in community relation and good mediation skills (14%)

However, maternal household engagement, limited time for participation in research and related activities—a requirement for upward mobility—as well as lack of child care and women-friendly facilities within universities, are inhibiting factors for women (Mitullah, et al., 2023). There has been limited administrative commitment on the part of universities to address gender inequality in leadership positions. More effort is needed to increase the number of women in leadership in higher education (Mitullah, et al., 2023).

FIGURE 6: COMPOSITION OF VARIOUS LEADERSHIP POSITIONS BY GENDER IN A SAMPLE OF 7 KENYAN UNIVERSITIES



Source: Mitullah, Forojalla, Basheka, Vieira do Nascimento, Jallow, Awol, & Feddal (2023)

2 Literature Review

This situation of partial progress, where gender dynamics are no longer simply about powerful men and disadvantaged women, has created a more complex reality. It highlights the need for a new approach that goes beyond traditional strategies focused only on advancing gender equality at the top.

2.1 The Complex Dynamics brought about by Partial Progress

According to Orloff, A. S., & Shiff, T. (2016), from the early 1970s onwards, socialist or labour feminists tended to focus on fundamental overhaul of the political economy and shifting the gendered division of labour by encouraging women to work for pay and men to participate in care and domestic work. Since World War II, manufacturing has declined as service sector employment has risen, driven importantly by outsourcing work formerly done by housewives to paid service workers, who often migrate from rural areas to take up this work. This contributes to women's increasing employment levels, but also to increasing income inequality[10]. Thus the gendered division of labour has increased for women as they juggle employment and care work.

Boris, E., & Parreñas, R. S. (2010) point to the fact that some women have achieved economic success by appropriating the labour supply of less well-paid women service workers, thus perpetuating the same inequalities they address against men: class, racial and educational domination. A commitment to feminist principles like gender/social justice, to engage with the struggles of the most marginalised people, requires that the advance to gender equality should not see the world solely as dichotomised in terms of female injury and male subordination. The pursuit of gender equality must acknowledge that there are multiple and intersectional forms of inequality and domination, and that there are widening gaps between the situations of the advantaged and the disenfranchised.

Liberal feminists are focused on reforming capitalist and democratic institutions by eliminating discrimination and exclusion, bringing women into the polity, the labour force and ultimately, the very heart of power. However, incorporation of women into elite positions of authority in the corporate sector, civil society, and politics, without fundamentally changing the rules of the game, has implications. The increasing shift from state-funded and publicly-provided social services and benefits to market-based remedies for social problems undermines gender equality because of lack of supportive services. Greenwood &Hinings (2006) argue that most organisational change theories that address changes in gender equality engage at the superficial level. Women therefore end up "playing in the men's field", which leads to appropriation by, and complicity with, socially conservative movements and neoliberal political elites. Although an increasing number of women therefore occupy positions of formal authority and power, no fundamental structural change is realised, obstructing gender equality (Orloff, A. S., & Shiff, T. (2016)). Very few organisations dare to explore the likelihood of revolutionary or fundamental and transformational change that will turn them in a new direction. At the core of such

[10] Women's income inequalities have widened over the last few decades (McCall, 2001), and women's labour force participation levels vary substantially by education, with highly-educated women participating at higher levels than their less-educated counterparts.

Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

change is intersectionality and the voice for marginalised groups, where profound impact on gender change is realised (Benschop, Y., & Verloo, M. (2011)).

The debate on structure and agency pertains to the question: is social inequality the effect of societal structures or the effect of individual choices and actions? Scholars debate how individual or collective actors are able to escape structures that are theoretically conceived as the unintentional but inescapable result of human activity. Applied to institutional change goals, this means that gender equality strategies primarily target individuals or structures and only rarely transcend this dichotomy.

Lastly, literature reviews posit that studies of gender inequality in paid work and organisations offer insightful descriptions of patterns. While knowledge about gender inequalities has grown, scholarly research tends to focus on the description, analysis, or deconstruction of the status quo, capturing the absence of women in top positions without diagnosing how organisations systematically lose them on their way to the top - where actual initiatives of gender transformations lie. To this end a review of enablers and barriers impacting gender equality and by extension women's career advancement identifies four main domains:

1. **Individual level** e.g leadership style, risk aversion, and personal ambition.
2. **Organisational level** e.g. corporate culture, ideal worker concept, and access to networks and mentoring opportunities.
3. **Societal level** e.g. perceptions of men and women in the context of societal norms, cultural practices, work-life balance practices and sexism.
4. **Governmental level** e.g. policies and legal frameworks.

The key concepts from this literature review, described in Table 6, are used later in this report to analyze barriers and enablers affecting women's rise to leadership positions in economics in Kenya.

TABLE 6: FRAMEWORK OF BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO WOMEN'S RISE TO POSITIONS OF LEADERSHIP

LEVEL	BARRIERS	ENABLING FACTORS
Governmental	Inadequate labour laws and regulations	Effective labour laws and regulations
	Lack of adequate work-life balance policies	Adequate work-life balance policies
	Lack of adequate parental leave and benefits	Adequate parental leave and benefits
Societal	Obstructive general norms and cultural practices	Enabling general norms and cultural practices
	Unsatisfactory work-life balance practices	Satisfactory work-life balance practices
	Family responsibilities/ Motherhood as an obstacle	Family support
	Sexism, patriarchy	Cultures that value and appreciate women's unique perspectives and contributions
Corporate	Masculine corporate culture	Gender-inclusive corporate culture
	Lack of company leadership commitment to diversity	Company leadership commitment to diversity
	Lack of acceptance of the use of diversity policies and practices	Acceptance of the use of diversity policies and practices
	Lack of flexible work arrangements	Flexible work arrangements
	Lack of adequate re-entry opportunities	Adequate re-entry opportunities
	Lack of networks	Sufficient networks
	Lack of mentoring	Access to mentoring
Individual	Lack of efficient leadership skills	Efficient leadership skills
	Risk aversion	Risk-taking
	Imposter syndrome	Ambition

3 Methodology

3.1 Study Instruments and Data Collection

To address the study's objectives, a **purposeful sampling methodology** was employed, selecting respondents based on their relevance to advancing women's leadership in economics in Kenya. This method prioritised stakeholders with the capacity to influence, inform, or catalyse systemic change in this area, ensuring that participants could provide valuable insights into the ecosystem of women's leadership within economics in Kenya.

A list of stakeholders to be consulted was drawn up, of women and of initiatives that are either focused on economics, or may be working on, are interested in, or have enormous potential to advance women's leadership in economics in Kenya. The targeted stakeholders included but were not limited to:

- Critical institutions that influence public policy, resource allocation, national priorities, and gender issues;
- Academic institutions that serve as the main pipeline for economists in Kenya;
- Supporting institutions that serve economic constituencies, such as professional associations, networks or convening agencies that create formal and informal pathways;
- Supporting institutions, such as accountability organisations, and behavioural economics firms using nudge techniques to change institutional practices such as hiring, retention, and professional development;
- Individual Kenyan economists in strategic positions.

Online questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions were carried out with selected stakeholders to learn about their paths to leadership in economics. These tools helped identify the barriers and enablers they experienced, how gender-responsive strategies were being integrated into organizational culture, how gender equity was reflected in workplace policies and practices, and what good practices, aspirations, and areas for change they saw. All the research for the study was conducted in 2024.

3.2 Demographic Characteristics

To determine the sample, women in leadership (WIL) were identified by their titles and roles in their workplaces or in the economics domain such as CEO, Director, Founder, Manager, Expert etc. However, as the study progressed, we realised that it was also important to capture the stories of women yet to get into leadership in economics, to provide insight on intergenerational pathways. The study therefore included female university students as well as recent graduates in economics. This study therefore is based on a sample of women who are already leaders in economics and some who are yet to be. The sample consists of a total of 29 women.

Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

Age range: The ages of the women in the sample size ranged from 20 to approximately 65 years of age.

Sectors: The study interviewed people working in public universities, banks, public think-tanks, development INGO, micro-finance institutions (MFI's), consulting firms, government, quasi-government institutions and students.

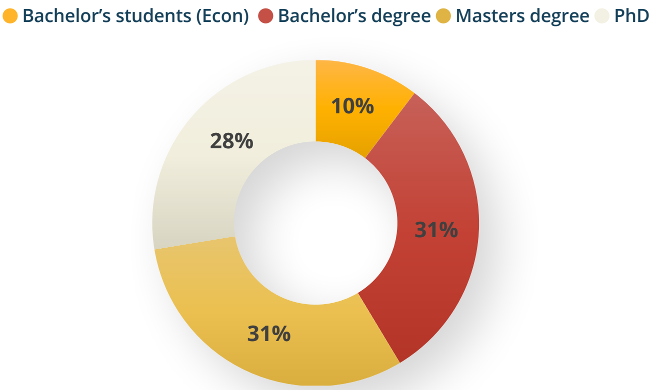
Highest Levels of Education: Three of the respondents were female students taking economics related subjects in universities. Nine women had a Bachelor's degree (either in pure economics or economics with finance and mathematics). Nine had a Master's degree and eight had a PhD as shown in figure 7.

The professional breakdown: A number of these women were holding two jobs simultaneously, for instance, a job lecturing in a university and a job in consulting. Some women held three jobs; lecturing, running their own consulting firms and holding a fixed contract with an INGO or private sector firm. Those working in the public sector full-time were not holding other jobs. Figure 8 therefore captures the primary job the respondent first identified with.

3.3. Convening a Roundtable Meeting

Co-Impact organized a roundtable with key leaders, policymakers, and experts working in economics in Kenya. The meeting provided a space for sharing knowledge, networking, and discussing the draft report. It also helped validate the findings and gather additional feedback from about 50 participants, including the Principal Secretary of the State Department for Gender and Affirmative Action. Insights from the roundtable were gathered and also incorporated into this final report.

FIGURE 7: HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF RESPONDENTS



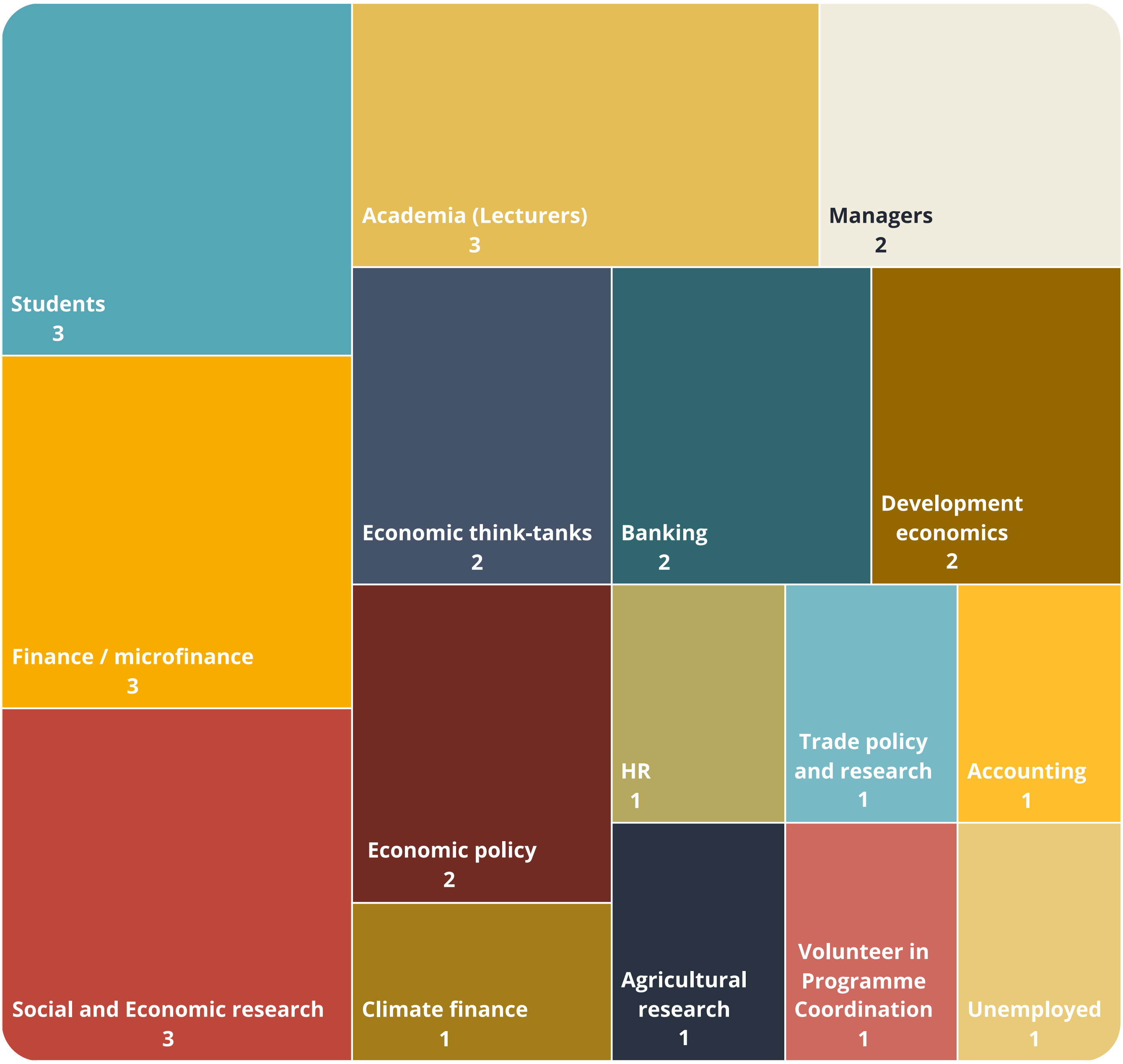
Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

3.4 Data Analysis

A strategic review and analysis of information gathered informed our findings on barriers and supportive leadership strategies for women in leadership in economics.

IMPORTANT NOTE
This is a predominantly qualitative study where 29 in-depth interviews were conducted. The issues brought out are captured in graphs for purposes of showing patterns and precisely capturing the information provided. While we do not claim that the study is a statistical representation of the entire population, the trends observed are confirmed by earlier quantitative studies that have been referenced in section 1.4 of this report.

FIGURE 8: PROFESSIONAL BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS



4 Summary of Key Informant Findings

4.1 Initial Motivators into Economics

For most women we interviewed, the journey into the field of economics began in secondary school. Their aptitude and interest in mathematics coupled with encouragement from their teachers led them to select economics as a field of study for their undergraduate degree. The process of selecting a university degree in Kenya requires students to indicate their preferences in their final year of high school (Form 4), based on their academic performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination, which ultimately determines admissions.

Interestingly, nearly all the women in the study initially aspired to careers in law, medicine or engineering, largely due to family preferences. When they did not gain admission to these fields, many shifted to economics as a second choice. For almost all women, secondary school was the first time they were hearing of economics as a study option. Two respondents, both in the 20-25 age range, chose economics after being inspired by successful economists they knew. One woman in her 30s drew inspiration from her mother, who exemplified qualities she admired, such as organisational skills and professionalism.

Contrary to common perceptions, none of the women expressed concerns about their ability to tackle the more challenging units in economics, such as trade, public finance, monetary policy, finance, and econometrics, which are traditionally seen as rigorous. In fact, 60% of the participants favoured these quantitative units, appreciating the challenge they presented, and preferred them over more qualitative courses. Additionally, the women frequently collaborated with their male peers, demonstrating equal competence in understanding and helping each other with complex material in economics. This finding challenges traditional literature, which often underestimates women's enthusiasm for and aptitude in mathematical and quantitative subjects within economics. However, some participants did face discouragement from family members when choosing economics as their field of study.

4.2 Pathways into Economics

Our interviews revealed several pathways that women take into economics. The most

Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

notable pathway was formal education. Most of the respondents on the formal economic pathway to the PhD level ended up with scholarships in an economic field and so were able to advance their economics studies to the highest level.

A second group did not study economics as a main but as a minor subject. This group suggested that their choice was informed by the fact that they were not very clear about career options in economics. As a result, they paired economics with other subjects like accounting or finance in order to increase their chances of getting employed in well-known careers like banking and other financial sector careers.

Other respondents did not study economics at all, but ended up working on economic issues or in economics organisations and therefore had to take the personal initiative to learn. Joining a professional association helped to support this learning journey and to keep a social network that offered other opportunities in the sector like internships, jobs, meeting opportunities, research and consultancy work.

4.3 Profiles of Women in Leadership in Economics in Kenya

The faces of women in economics in Kenya are diverse, reflecting the myriad ways they contribute to and influence the field.

PUBLIC SECTOR

Women in economics working in the public sector make significant contributions in national and county governments, ministries, and regulatory bodies. They have a significant impact on economic development and governance as they play pivotal roles in shaping Kenya's economic policies, in public finance, and in directing government agencies. For example, Dr Jane Kiringai worked in the Ministry of Finance determining the aggregate budget framework and ministerial and sectoral budget ceilings. She also conducted macroeconomic analysis and forecasting, public expenditure management and fiscal decentralisation, including determining the country's revenue allocation framework. In this regard, women in the public sector serve as key policymakers and economic advisors in ministries; they help design fiscal policies, budget allocations, and development plans; they work as economists, financial analysts, and policy researchers, playing important roles in setting monetary policies, regulating the financial sector, and managing inflation. At the county level, women economists are contributing to economic planning through the County Integrated Plans. Their work in research and analysis often directs local policy development but also alignment with national policies and frameworks. Other notable women holding key positions in critical institutions include but are not limited to the following: Nancy Gathungu, Auditor General; Margaret Nyakan'go, Controller of Budget; Dr Susan Koech, Deputy Governor, Central Bank of Kenya and her predecessor Sheila M'Mbijiwe; and Anne Waiguru, former Chair of the Council of Governors.

ACADEMIA

Women economists in academia are influential in creating and maintaining the economics pipeline through which individuals, particularly students and professionals, enter, advance, and remain in the field of economics. Some of the taught courses include macroeconomics, microeconomics, econometrics, and development economics as well as economics with other intersections like finance, agriculture, or gender. As lecturers

Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

and professors, they teach in economics departments, and conduct research and analysis that influences society and policy. They also have leadership and administrative responsibilities within universities and research institutions. There have been strides in terms of women professors and senior lecturers in departments of economics at key public universities. Professor. Tabitha Kiriti- Nganga, Professor at Nairobi University, Dr Perez Onono, Dean at Kenyatta University, and Winnie Mitula, Professor in the Department of Development Studies, University of Nairobi are a few examples. The Women's Economic Empowerment Hubs at leading universities across Kenya recognise women's important roles and contributions to the economy and the impact of policies on women.

As mentioned in the contextual analysis, the academic space has a notable leaky pipeline in the top economics departments. Although Africa is leading at all levels, the difference between entry level and senior economic positions is notable. Women constitute 75% of research fellows, 61% of entry level employees and only 41% of senior level management. This number significantly shrinks at much more senior levels of academic leadership.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Women economists in Kenya's private sector influence the strategic direction of businesses and the financial health of the country's economy. They play key roles in financial analysis, corporate strategy, investment and portfolio management in commercial banks, investment firms, and insurance companies. They also contribute to shaping corporate policies and advising on market trends, risk management, and investment strategies. Economic research and analysis is also used to manage successful businesses in sectors like manufacturing, agriculture, real estate and technology, and to offer consultancy services in economic analysis, financial forecasting, and strategic business planning. Examples in this sector are Jennifer Riria, CEO of Kenya Women Holding, Carole Kariuki, CEO of Kenya Private Sector Alliance, and women in banking like Nassim Devji, CEO of Diamond Trust Bank (DTB), among others.

THINK TANKS AND RESEARCH INSTITUTES

Women are also represented in the growing number of think tanks and research institutes, where there is a focus on policy analysis, development economics, and socio-economic research. Women such as Dr. Rose Ngugi, Executive Director of KIPPRA, and Dr Miriam Omolo, Executive Director of the African Policy Research Institute (APRI), have been instrumental in leading economic research that influences public policy in Kenya. Institutions for economics in Africa, such as African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), actively involve Kenyan women in capacity-building programs, research, and collaborative studies. Women economists are frequently engaged in policy-oriented research on issues like trade, macroeconomic stability, inequality, poverty reduction, gender equality, and economic empowerment, informing both national policies and international development strategies.

PROFESSIONAL BODIES

Professional associations provide a platform for women economists to network, collaborate, and advocate for gender equality in the economics profession in Kenya. These associations also facilitate mentorship and capacity building. Kenya Economics Students Association is notable for trying to start economics clubs in universities, organising learning symposia and university exchanges, conducting research, and networking with associations of older economists for purposes of mentorship. Other notable bodies include the Economics Society of Kenya, Association of Women Accountants of Kenya, Kenya Women in Business, Network of Impact Evaluation Researchers in Africa, Association for the Advancement of African Women in Economics (AAAWE), Women on Boards Network Kenya, and UNESCO Youth Forum.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOS)

Women economists working with NGOs are at the forefront of policy advocacy, especially in areas concerning gender equality, economic empowerment, and development. They also work with grassroots groups to make economic policies more accessible to ordinary people.

4.4 Legal Framework and Institutional Policies Facilitating Women in Leadership in Economics

Kenya's legal and institutional framework supporting women's leadership in economics includes a range of domestic laws, international agreements, workplace policies, and professional development programs that most organizations follow. These include, but are not limited to, the following provisions.

EQUALITY

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 promotes equality between men and women, boys and girls. Article 27 (1) states that "Every person is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law." This is reinforced in (3): "Women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres." Internationally, the UN Declaration of Human Rights promotes gender equality.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

A Political Party Fund exists in the Political Parties Act 2011. Among other things, its provision states that the "Fund shall be used for promotion of women's representation in Parliament". This means that whether inside or outside of economics, all women who have an interest in getting into politics, can, by law, access the fund.

ECONOMIC POLICY FORMULATION AND ASSESSMENT

There are opportunities for female economists to engage in public policy. An example is the County Budget and Economic Forum (CBEF) which provides an avenue for the public to participate in county budgeting and economic development. According to statute 137 of the Public Finance Management Act 2012, the CBEF shall by law consist of a number of representatives representing women.

HIGH LEVEL DECISION-MAKING

The Constitution states that for all key Commissions (these include Commission for Revenue Allocation, Kenya Commission on Human Rights, etc.) the Chairperson and the Vice Chairperson of these institutions shall not be of the same gender (article 250 (11)). This is an avenue for affirmative action for women to get into positions of leadership that have traditionally been held by men.

LEGISLATIVE/POLICY LEADERSHIP/ PARTICIPATION

The Constitution also provides for representation of women in Article 27, which states that "the State shall take legislative and other measures to implement the principle that not more than two-thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender." The PFM Act 2012 also states that regulations shall be developed to provide for inclusive, participatory governance (s207 (2)).

RECOGNITION OF CARE WORK

Kenya is in the process of developing a National Care policy. The goal of this policy is "to promote gender equality through establishment of a care system that supports the well-being and dignity of all Kenyans, recognises and rewards care work". The policy has four objectives, namely:

- Recognize and value unpaid care work.
- Redistribute and reduce care work to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.
- Promote reward and representation of paid care workers.
- Promote provision of public care systems.

It is envisaged that the policy will provide a comprehensive framework for mitigating issues of unpaid care and domestic work as well as other care matters.

NON-DISCRIMINATION

Section 5 of the Employment Act 2007 provides for non-discrimination on the basis of gender, marital status, religion etc. Specifically, section 5 (3) states that "No employer shall discriminate directly or indirectly, against an employee or prospective employee or harass an employee or prospective employee—(a) on grounds of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, nationality, ethnic or social origin, disability, pregnancy, marital status or HIV status; (b)in respect of recruitment, training, promotion, terms and conditions of employment, termination of employment or other matters arising out of the employment." This clause applies to recruitment, training, promotions and other matters arising out of employment like equal pay.

MATERNITY LEAVE

The law as stipulated in the Employment Act 2007 expressly protects women taking maternity leave and attempts to assist their continuation of work after the leave. S29 (1) "A female employee shall be entitled to three months maternity leave with full pay". (2) "On expiry of a female employee's maternity leave as provided in subsections (1) and (3), the female employee shall have the right to return to the job which she held immediately prior to her maternity leave or to a reasonably suitable job on terms and conditions not less favourable than those which would have applied had she not been on maternity leave.(s7)" It further stipulates that no female employee shall forfeit her annual leave entitlement under section 28 on account of having taken her maternity leave.

PRE-ADOPTIVE LEAVE

The Employment Act 2007 also provides for pre-adoptive leave. S29A states (1) "Where ... a child is to be placed in the continuous care and control of an applicant who is an employee under this Act, the employee shall be entitled to one month's pre-adoptive leave with full pay from the date of the placement of the child."

UNFAIR DISMISSAL

S46(a) of the Employment Act 2007 states that a female employee's pregnancy, or any reason connected with her pregnancy, does not constitute fair reasons for dismissal or for the imposition of a disciplinary penalty

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual Offences Act 2006 s23 (1) states that "Any person, being in a position of authority, or holding a public office, who persistently makes any sexual advances or requests which he or she knows, or has reasonable grounds to know, are unwelcome, is guilty of the offence of sexual harassment and shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than three years or to a fine of not less than one hundred thousand shillings or to both.

BREASTFEEDING

According to S71 of the Health Act 2022 "all employers shall in the workplace establish lactation stations which shall be adequately provided with necessary equipment and facilities including hand washing equipment, refrigerators or appropriate cooling facilities, electrical outlets for breast pumps, a small table and comfortable seats, the standard of which shall be defined by the Ministry responsible for matters relating to health (1)" and "The lactation station shall not be located in the rest rooms" (2) The same law also provides for break intervals for nursing employees. Section 72 (1) states: "an employer shall grant all nursing employees break intervals in addition to the regular times off for meals to breastfeed or express milk.

EQUAL ACCESS TO CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The Constitution of Kenya A232(1)(i) states that the values and principles of public service include "affording adequate and equal opportunities for appointment, training and advancement, at all levels of the public service, of men and women."

Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

4.5 Key Findings

4.5.1 Perceptions on Gender Equality in the Workplace

Participants were asked if men and women are equal in their workplaces. **63.6% of the respondents thought that men and women were equal in their workplace** (see figure 9). The reasons given included:

- equal opportunities and pay for all
- opportunities were merit based
- not experiencing discrimination as a woman
- hiring is based on experience and expertise, not gender
- opportunities to undertake training, promotions and other opportunities within or outside the organisation are equal for all
- the existing policies treat all equally

The basis of their responses is that opportunities, training, promotion and hiring are offered equally. That is to say, they are offered based on merit and experience, and not gender. The **36.4% who disagreed**, stated that:

- In terms of promotions and travel, men seemed to be favoured more than women.
- Management was not deliberate in including women in all work assignments. To ensure inclusivity and diversity, there must be intentionality to call out women towards taking up leadership roles and opportunities within the workplace.
- The fact that there are very few women in decision making means that decisions are made for them.

After asking whether there is equal treatment in the workplace, participants were then asked if men and women ought to be equal in the workplace. **82% said "yes" while 18% responded "no"** as shown in figure 10.

FIGURE 9: PERCEPTION AND BASIS OF EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

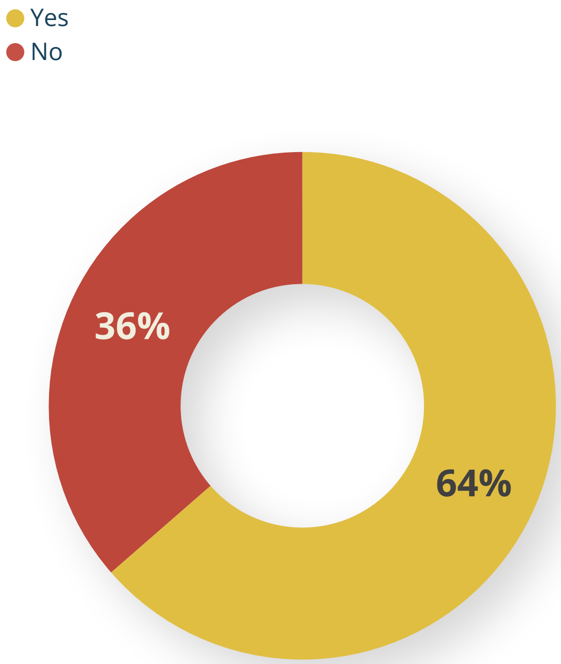
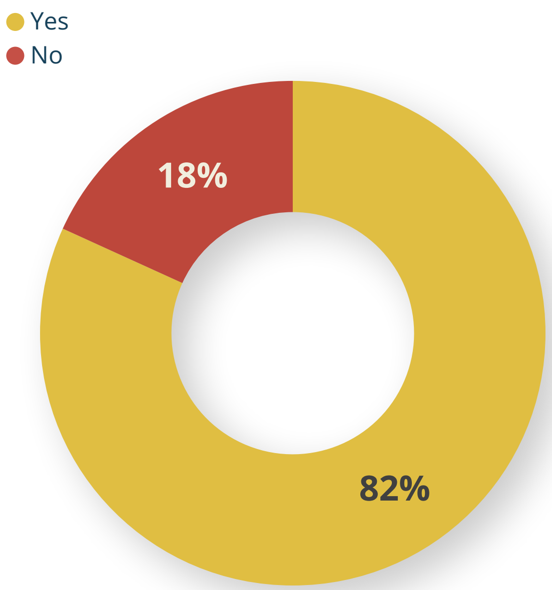


FIGURE 10: PERSONAL PERCEPTION AND BASIS OF EQUALITY



Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

The 18.2% who said **no** gave the following reasons.

- The expertise and deliverables should matter.
- They should be treated equitably not equally as they have different needs.
- We are all gifted differently and this is what makes the organisation thrive.
- Treatment should be commensurate with the responsibilities being done. based on experience and expertise.
- Merit should be the criteria.
- Women have unique needs that need to be factored in to level the playing field. For example, a few days leave in the month can be taken as menstrual leave days.

Those who said **men and women should be equal** gave the following reasons:

- Both men and women are able to serve equally if openly given the opportunity.
- The Constitution of Kenya envisages a situation of inclusiveness and no gender discrimination.
- Equal opportunities should be given to both men and women.

4.5.2 Level of Female-Friendly Policies and Practices in the workplaces

Respondents overwhelmingly highlighted six policies as indicators of the gender intentionality of workplaces. These are;

- equal pay
- maternity leave
- affirmative action
- hybrid/flexible working hours
- sexual harassment policy
- work/family balance policy

These policies were selected as basic indicators and are not conclusive of all gender intentional policies that can or should exist in a workplace. The two top policies that respondents' organizations complied with most were on equal pay and maternity leave. It seems that the existence of laws compels workplaces to adapt their policies to comply or generally align with the law.

4.5.3 Effectiveness of Policies in the Workplace

Respondents ranked implementation of various workplace policies on a scale of not effective to effective.

Among the workplaces with equal pay policies and maternity leave policies, about 70% of these policies are effective. Among the workplaces with affirmative action and work/family balance policies, 75% of these policies are effective. Among the workplaces with hybrid/flexible working hours policies and maternity leave policies, about 50% of these policies are effective. Among the workplaces with a sexual harassment policy, 78% of these policies are effective.

High effectiveness (75%-78%) reflects an area where firms recognise the need to go beyond legal requirements and voluntarily adopt such policies. However, this could also be driven by the significant risk and reputational damage of non-compliance—hence the willingness to address workplace inclusion and gender equity when the consequences are clear and immediate. Firms that achieve moderately high effectiveness rates (70%-74%) demonstrate that clear legal protections and sanctions encourage compliance.
Firms appear more likely to implement and enforce policies that are legally mandated, underscoring the importance of regulation in driving action. However, meeting legal requirements does not necessarily lead to a proactive commitment to broader workplace equity. Low effectiveness (below 70%), on the other hand, implies inconsistent application and enforcement. This means that in some cases organisations achieve strong outcomes, while in other cases, they fail to translate policies into meaningful practice. Implementation gaps may stem from inadequate resources, lack of leadership buy-in, insufficient capacity, or ineffective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

4.5.4 Workplace Facilities and Practices Indicative of Gender Intentionality

72% of the respondents reported having at least breastfeeding facilities and mentorship programs indicative of working in organizations that are committed to upholding gender inclusivity. Breastfeeding facilities are often seen as a baseline requirement for supporting working mothers, while mentoring programs are commonly associated with fostering professional development.

While these facilities and practices are present, their effectiveness in achieving the intended goals of improving gender equity or career advancement is not, however, guaranteed. The mere existence of breastfeeding facilities, for example, does not ensure that they are accessible, well-maintained, or meet the actual needs of working mothers. Such facilities could be inadequately equipped or located in inconvenient spaces, reducing their utility. Equally, the presence of mentoring does not inherently translate to impactful outcomes, as the quality, structure, and inclusivity of these programs can vary widely. Programs may lack clear goals, experienced mentors, or robust evaluation mechanisms. This means that without a focus on effectiveness, these facilities and practices risk becoming symbolic gestures rather than transformative measures. Organisations might check boxes to appear compliant with gender goals without addressing deeper systemic barriers. It is important to note that mentorship specific to economics scored very poorly and is indicative of a gap that needs to be filled.

4.5.5 Requirement to Mainstream Gender-Intentional Analysis in Technical Work

By and large, workplaces are not requiring their employees to carry out gender-intentional analysis in their work. 21 out of 23 organisations represented by the respondents did not require this of their employees.

None of the workplaces disaggregate data by gender. On further enquiry, women interviewed often stated that "I do not carry out any gender-intentional work at my workplace because it is not a requirement by my workplace." One respondent said that in her field (climate finance) it is difficult to develop a credible formula for gender-intentional work, stating that the end objective should be to develop products that work across the board. Another respondent stated that in her role and her department, they are tasked to look at how national resources can be allocated fairly to counties and not to women specifically. Others said they do not carry out gender-intentional work because they do not know how to do it.

The absence of an institutional policy on gender-intentional analysis in technical work means that while we may achieve gender equality at the structural level, the outcomes of the work we do may in fact exacerbate gender inequality.

4.6 Barriers Impeding Women's Attainment and Retention of Leadership in Economics

Various factors were cited by our respondents as hindering women's attainment and retention of leadership in economics. These are categorised into individual, institutional, societal, and policy or regulation barriers, and these barriers cut across all levels and stages of a woman's career journey.

INDIVIDUAL BARRIERS:

Respondents cited individual characteristics and personal limitations as having slowed down their progression into leadership, such as:

- being unaware of diverse options in economics pathways
- finding some subjects very challenging
- having to choose between career progression and the family
- experiencing impostor syndrome in taking up some opportunities
- lacking leadership skills

Others cited certain attributes such as age as barriers to job and leadership opportunities, citing lack of experience. These particular barriers occurred at all levels from entry level to leadership levels.

> "I have often been afraid of standing out."
>
> (Study respondent)

> **I did not apply for a job that I now know I was overqualified for because at that time I felt I would not get it, so I did not apply."**
>
> (respondent)

4.6.1 Organisational Barriers in Academic and Training Institutions

AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

Unequal Power Relations with Lecturers - Younger female students (aged 20-25) reported two main barriers: sexual harassment and bullying by male lecturers. Bullying included being denied re-sit opportunities when they failed a paper or were facing academic penalties unless they compromised morally. These challenges created tension and limited learning opportunities for female students, who expressed a strong preference for female lecturers due to fair treatment, yet there were very few female economics lecturers.

A female respondent, who is currently an economics student in a university told us:

"Because of how bad sexual harassment is at the university, as a female student, I cannot participate that much in class or consult a male lecturer for clarification because he is likely to hit on me. He might ask me to meet him later. How me and my friends navigate the situation is to ask questions through a male student's phone number because if the lecturer gets a female's phone number, they are likely to pursue them for sexual favours. To be safe, we avoid that".

Male-Female Student Power Dynamics - Female students faced unequal dynamics with male peers, who often delegated group work responsibilities to female group members while contributing minimally. This practice, observed across several universities, unfairly burdens female students with additional work. Female students said they could not decline the responsibility because their main goal was to pass the course.

Low Female Representation in Leadership - Female students rarely pursued leadership roles in academic clubs or associations. For instance, the Kenyan Economics Students Association (KESA) was predominantly male-founded, with only one female co-founder. Despite efforts to include more female leaders, male leadership has remained more prevalent in key committees.

AT MASTER'S DEGREE LEVEL

More reports of biases - At the Master's degree level, harassment was not reported, likely because most women that we interviewed studied abroad on scholarships. Unlike in Kenya where there seems to be no recourse for student harassment, penalties for this kind of harassment abroad are high. However, many women reported biases regarding their ability to complete the studies effectively. One woman faced doubts from an admissions officer about her capability to handle econometrics, reflecting ongoing gender biases in advanced studies even in societies considered to be more advanced in such matters.

Caregiving Responsibilities - Balancing academic and caregiving responsibilities was challenging for one participant, who brought her child with her while studying abroad. Her childcare responsibilities limited her ability to engage in post-class discussions and networking opportunities. This barrier was unique to her among the Master's degree level respondents.

AT PHD LEVEL

Balancing Family and Academic Progression - Approximately 55% of women felt torn between pursuing a PhD and starting or prioritising family life. One respondent sought advice on whether to delay her PhD for family reasons, reflecting the significant impact of caregiving responsibilities on academic progression. Many PhD holders subtly spoke about strained family relationships due to pursuing a PhD with one outrightly speaking about divorce.

Discouragement from Pursuing a PhD - Some women faced discouragement from peers, who warned about the challenges of a PhD, especially for those who were married or already in caregiving roles, emphasising the draining nature of doctoral studies.

Limited Support for Research Choices - One respondent's PhD supervisor discouraged her from pursuing a poverty analysis macroeconomic simulation model methodology, reflecting a lack of support that added to the challenges women face at the doctoral level.

Among female lecturers:
In the case of educators, for the past 40 years there have been more male than female lecturers teaching economics in universities in Kenya. Note that this captures six universities (Kenyatta University, University of Nairobi, Moi University, Multimedia University of Kenya - MMU, Embu University and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology - JKUAT). The only other university offering economics that was not captured in this study is Egerton University and therefore these findings can be taken as a possible snapshot of a trend existing in all Kenyan universities. The number of female lecturers diminishes as the degree level goes higher. In other words, the absolute and relative number of female lecturers reduces even further at the Doctoral level. This issue is largely brought about (according to the data that came out of this study), by very few women having PhDs in economics. It is a requisite that all lecturers in university must have a PhD and as one of the participants said, "Doing a PhD is draining, even more so when you are married." Other reasons given for few women participating in leadership include:

- Gender biases whether overt or unconscious in hiring, promotions, and recognition of academic contributions. Some hiring committees harbor biases against female candidates of reproductive age, assuming they are less reliable. Female candidates are sometimes hired to meet diversity quotas rather than being fully integrated into decision-making roles.
- Limited leadership roles: Women are underrepresented in senior academic positions. Institutional barriers, such as a lack of strict policies to enhance gender parity, play a role.
- Work-Life Balance where balancing family responsibilities and caregiving roles with academic work limits career progression. However, flexible working schedules for part –time lecturing are helpful in striking the balance.
- Limited funding and resources are a challenge generally in higher education. However, access for female lecturers is far more limited, because the resources are controlled by their male counterparts, and they fund different interests from those of female researchers. Time to do research is also constrained, especially when balancing care work with other formal responsibilities.

4.6.2 Barriers Faced in Transitioning/ Entering the Profession

CHALLENGES FINDING EMPLOYMENT IN ECONOMICS

Recent economics graduates, particularly those aged 24-25, struggled to secure roles in their field. Three young women shared their experiences of working in unrelated roles, such as administration or sales, which they ultimately left due to underutilisation of their economics skills. This differs significantly from the experiences of older economists (30s and above), who found entry-level positions more accessible, often through internships in quasi-government institutions like KIPPRA, or other sectors such as banks, that led to stable careers in economics-related fields.

JOB MARKET PERCEPTIONS OF ECONOMICS

Recent graduates also felt that the job market undervalues economics. Two young women reported that employers lacked understanding of how economics could contribute to their organisations, with one being advised to "leave her economics degree in the drawer." This is in contrast to older cohorts, who found greater recognition of economics qualifications, particularly through programs like KIPPRA's young professional track, as well as roles in finance, consulting, and development sectors.

SKILLS MISMATCH WITH JOB MARKET NEEDS

Recent graduates and students noted that their university education left them unprepared for practical job market demands, such as data analysis and financial software proficiency. In response, some are now enrolling in additional data analysis courses. Economists in their 30s and older did not report similar skill gaps upon entering the workforce, indicating that practical skill expectations may have changed over time.

4.6.3 Barriers to Thriving in the Workplace and Advancing to Leadership

At the organisational level, respondents cited a masculine corporate culture, and a cutthroat working environment that is more about profits or key performance indicators (KPIs) and less about people's well-being. This made organisations less flexible to some unique needs of women such as care duties.

Other organisational barriers cited were:

- lack of flexible work solutions in terms of systems and procedures
- lack of adequate re-entry opportunities especially when women take a break to attend to child bearing
- lack of company commitment to diversity at top levels of leadership despite corporate policy provisions
- lack of mentorship
- lack of an adequate economics network
- systemic sexual harassment by male colleagues mainly at higher and peer levels
- discriminative promotional practices
- lack of work-life balance
- lack of professional development opportunities

A respondent told us:

> **"Women and men are not equal in the workplace. There is a 'boys club' where conversations are held; there is a camaraderie that gives them an edge and helps decisions be made faster."**

4.6.4 Societal Barriers

Respondents cited societal barriers such as obstructive gender norms, stereotypes, and cultural practices, unpaid care work and the double shift of women, and biases based on sex, age (especially women of childbearing age), and ethnicity, often leading to discriminatory hiring and advancement policies and exclusion from professional development opportunities.

Respondents told us:

> **"There was a lot of doubt about whether as a female, I could handle the very quantitative aspects of economics. I was often discouraged to drop the subject especially because my brother had to defer because he found economics very challenging. There was a lot of pressure from my father."**

> "My brother wanted me to be a secretary while my spouse wanted me to be a housewife. They wanted me to pursue a career that fitted what they thought a woman should be. A secretary who has a male boss or a housewife to look after my spouse and children."
>
> "My father felt that it was unnecessary to educate females because upon marriage "all the money goes to the husband (anyway)."

SPOUSAL SUPPORT

Spousal or partner support was mentioned several times as a barrier and not once as an enabler to any of the women. Three respondents in their 30s stated that spousal support can make a big difference in whether a woman can pursue further education at Masters, and even more so at PhD level. One of the three respondents stated that up to date, she does not have adequate spousal support for her career.

A 50 year old woman told us:

> "My husband wanted me to do a secretarial course instead of pursuing an economics degree. He felt that economics would take me away from my caregiving responsibilities."

4.6.5 Government Barriers

Respondents indirectly cited the inadequacy of the regulations, laws and policies available. In these women's view, these regulations, laws and policies reinforced biases, producing inadequate work-life balance policies and inadequate parental leave and benefits. Specifically, the Employment Act grants three months (90 days) of maternity leave, which is shorter than the 14 weeks recommended by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards. There is also no provision for unpaid extended maternity leave for women who may need additional time for health or caregiving reasons. Fathers are entitled to only two weeks (14 days) of paternity leave, which is insufficient to support new mothers or bond with newborns. None of the respondents mentioned childcare facilities on campus, so lecturers with young children are left to make costly or unreliable private arrangements. Societal unwillingness to implement the available laws was also cited as a barrier.

4.6.6 Cross-Cutting Barriers

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Despite most organisations that we interviewed having policies and guidelines to prevent and address sexual harassment, it remains a big issue. The converse to that was the inherent belief that any woman's rising to a top leadership position was due to sexual favours.

CAREGIVING AS A BARRIER TO CAREER PROGRESSION

Several women aged 40-50 in the study reported challenges in balancing their careers with family responsibilities, particularly those with children between 4-16 years old. This struggle was absent among older women, suggesting the demands of caregiving impact mid-career professionals most acutely. One senior economist noted, "I have no time", highlighting the toll caregiving can take.

Changing family planning trends in Kenya reveal that more women are delaying motherhood to pursue education and establish their careers, with many starting families in their late 20s or early 30s compared to the early 20s in previous generations. This trend may contribute to mid-career pressures for women with young children. For some, caregiving responsibilities necessitated choices between career advancement and family, often restricting time for networking, post-work professional activities, and career strategising. Additionally, caregiving limited opportunities for work travel, reducing exposure and growth opportunities essential for career progression. All the women with young children mentioned having to make a choice at some point between career progression and caregiving to children.

4.7 Enablers and Gender-Intentional Interventions

When respondents were asked to name enablers in their journey to where they are at present, they gave a mixture of responses. Coincidentally almost all respondents gave the same responses regardless of age. Intentional interventions that helped accelerate and sustain women in economics and in leadership include:

4.7.1 Individual Enablers

Respondents often cited individual characteristics like grit, focus, determination, a personal decision to work hard and excel, as well as values. Self-awareness and keeping a positive attitude despite the challenges were often mentioned as skills used to navigate difficult circumstances.

Almost all participants reported:

> **“I was focused. I was determined. I had to be clear on what I wanted.”**

Others noted:

> **“You need to be genuinely confident or you will be bullied. We are raised to be compliant, and nice. But we must be confident.”**

Women interviewed had a common trait of being high achievers in whatever they set out to do. For instance, all women in their 30s and above were determined not just to get their degrees, but to graduate with high scores. Indeed most of the women in this age group were already top scorers in mathematics, or in their high schools or their counties. This trend in performance continued for some in their undergraduate and postgraduate careers, with a couple even being top scorers in their Masters degrees in economics.

Almost all participants reported:

> **“I was top of my class. I was a top scorer. I was good at mathematics.” ...**

With younger economists, scoring top grades was less seen as a goal. It was noticed that current students just want to get their degrees. This is not because they are unable to excel, but because they did not see the value of an economics degree in the job market. For this reason, their goal whilst in university was simply to secure a Bachelor's degree by exceeding the pass mark. Scoring top grades in subsidiary courses like CPAs (certification courses in accounting) was more important to them.

4.7.2 Organisational Enablers: (Corporate, NGOs, Academic Institutions)

At the organisational level, respondents cited positive work environments with supportive leaders, organisational policies and cultures, as well as organisational support in professional development and career advancement. In several interviews, opportunities to interact with seasoned industry players early in their careers inspired people to work towards similar goals of success. Opportunities such as continued education and the willingness to learn continuously implied that professional development played a huge role in career advancement. Respondents also highlighted the career benefits and privileges that came with studying abroad due to institutional support to get scholarships, citing improved skills, confidence, new experiences, and trust by employers to deliver results.

A respondent told us:

> "Getting a scholarship and doing my PhD really opened up a lot of career opportunities for me."

4.7.3 Societal Influencers and Enablers

Respondents noted social enablers like supportive friends and family, supportive peers, teachers and colleagues.

High School Teachers: Almost all women cited their high school teachers as having advised them to take economics in university. Due to confidence in, and respect for, their teachers, they heeded their advice and chose economics. Interestingly only one respondent cited having a family member (her father) as the one who advised her to consider two careers of which one was Banking. Career prospects based on observation and perceived success of close family members and friends also particularly influenced young economists to pursue economics.

Familial Support: Most women interviewed reported having "supportive parents" when enrolling for economics. Only a few women said that they were discouraged from pursuing economics or school generally.

Young economists said:

> "I looked up to my cousin."
>
> I looked up to my brother's friend" "who was a very wealthy economist working in a bank (evidenced by the cars they drove) and this inspired me to do economics. I wanted to become rich."
>
> I looked up to my mum, she was organised and smart."

4.7.4 Legal and Policy Enablers

The research noted that higher education policies that target equitable recruitment of female students in economics in universities have been implemented, as indicated by feedback from students that classes seemed to have 50/50 male and female representation. However, as school progressed, many more women dropped out of campus to get married or bear children and therefore by the time the students were coming to the end of their degree, the numbers were quite skewed to favour the men. There are also national and international policies at country and organisational levels aimed at increasing gender inclusion and reducing gender bias—as highlighted in earlier sections—which had mixed results in improving workplace opportunities for women.

4.7.5 Cross-Cutting Enablers

MENTORSHIP

Respondents commonly cited mentorship. All young economists (students as well as recent graduates) mentioned the need for individual mentorship, particularly by female teachers. The request for female mentors is driven by the fear of sexual harassment by male teachers. 80% of the economists in their thirties mentioned having had a mentor whilst in university at the Masters level. They state that these mentors (some male, some female) helped them move forward in their educational journeys and contributed to who they are today. More specifically,one woman stated that her male professor helped her by giving her research opportunities, and this gave her good exposure to the world of research. Another woman mentioned a female lecturer who encouraged her throughout her Masters by telling her that she could do it, and she therefore had no reason to doubt.

UNSTRUCTURED MENTORSHIP

Mentorship was also referenced as helpful in cases where organisational leaders (such as supervisors, managers, CEOs or directors) indirectly became mentors because of the way they carried themselves, their knowledge on technical issues and the way they handled situations. The women who brought this up cited the personal initiative to observe and absorb as much as they could from these individuals, but also to learn as much as possible through various interactions that presented themselves.

STRUCTURED MENTORSHIP,

Formal mentorship programs, such as the one run by KIPPRA (Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis) was also mentioned by over 80% of the women interviewed. It was hailed for providing a formal framework specific to economics and public policy, which helped young people, 50% of whom are women every year, to enhance technical skills and research capabilities. The program, which provides a formal mentorship structure that pairs young economists and policy researchers with experienced mentors, gives young economists practical experience in government. Participants engage in a structured curriculum that includes supervised research projects, training in data analysis, and policy formulation workshops. Mentors at KIPPRA guide participants through real-world policy challenges, offer insights into the public policy landscape, and support professional growth by fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This structured mentorship is instrumental in developing a pipeline of skilled public sector professionals ready to contribute to Kenya's socio-economic development and policy innovation. The program is also seen as an avenue where young people were referred to higher education opportunities abroad.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social networks were cited as enablers of access to professional development, job and business opportunities. They also enabled people to gain knowledge and technical skills, and to collaborate. Networks provide a platform for economists to connect with peers, mentors, and employers, which is especially important in a competitive job market. Networks help young economists to gain insights into job openings, internships, and mentorship opportunities that are not always publicly advertised. For our respondents, social networks also offered support in navigating career and family challenges, often compensating for limited formal mentorship and other socialising structures.

IDENTITIES

Various identities influenced access to enablers. For example, older women reported that their age, experience and organisational roles facilitated their access to closed high profile spaces, even if not economics-related. These spaces provided opportunities and access to travel and expanded learning through conferences. They were sometimes able to access professional development opportunities, either because their peers were in these spaces or because the roles they played in their organisations and qualifications gave them the visibility to access those opportunities. Further, age and gender influenced access to certain opportunities like access to scholarships, high profile youth mentorship and other professional advancement opportunities where these organisations were keen to attain gender balance.

5 Recommendations to Address Barriers Faced by Women in Economics in Kenya

1. DEVELOP CLEAR PATHWAYS INTO ECONOMICS FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Efforts should be made to create structured and well-communicated pathways into the field of economics for undergraduate students. Specific actions include:

- Developing outreach programs to expose high school students, especially young women, to economics as a viable and exciting career choice.
- Offering introductory workshops and seminars on career opportunities in economics, covering diverse fields like data science, policy analysis, market research, international development, and academia.
- Highlighting successful women economists as role models to inspire and guide young women in their career choices.

2. INCREASE THE VISIBILITY OF FEMALE ECONOMISTS

Visibility of female economists is crucial to inspire the next generation and challenge stereotypes. Actions include:

- Establishing mentorship programs where established female economists guide younger women.
- Promoting female economists in media, academic events, and on professional platforms.
- Celebrating achievements of women in economics through awards, profiles, and case studies.
- Creating a network or association of women in economics to foster collaboration, share experiences, and amplify their voices in decision-making forums.

3. ADDRESS GENDER DISPARITIES IN ECONOMICS EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP

Gender equity initiatives should target both student populations and leadership roles. Actions include:

- Encouraging female students to take up visible leadership roles in academic and professional spaces, such as conferences, clubs, and student fairs.
- Offering leadership training programs and support systems for women to prepare them for executive roles.
- Setting measurable targets for female representation in leadership roles such as Deans, Directors, and members of university management.
- Actively recruiting and retaining more female lecturers to balance gender representation in economics faculties.

4. TACKLE SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND FOSTER SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

To ensure women can pursue economics without fear, universities should:

- Establish clear policies and reporting mechanisms for addressing sexual harassment.
- Conduct regular gender sensitivity training for staff and students to cultivate a culture of respect.
- Create anonymous reporting systems and provide support services for victims of harassment.

5. ADDRESS THE LEAKY PIPELINE IN ECONOMICS EDUCATION AND CAREERS

Retention of women in economics at all stages of their academic and career journey requires systemic changes. Recommendations include:

- Providing scholarships, childcare support, and flexible learning options to accommodate women with caregiving responsibilities.
- Offering programs that re-engage women who dropped out due to family or societal pressures, enabling them to resume their studies or careers.
- Ensuring economics curricula incorporate gender-sensitive topics to attract and retain diverse students.
- Actively promoting career pathways beyond government jobs, showcasing opportunities in areas like financial analysis, taxation, environmental economics, and international trade.

6. ENHANCE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GENDER-INTENTIONAL POLICIES

Where laws are absent or insufficient, workplaces and institutions must adopt gender-intentional policies. Specific steps include:

- Aligning institutional policies with national gender laws and ensuring their implementation.
- Conducting gender audits to identify and address institutional gaps in gender equity.
- Promoting gender-sensitive organisational cultures by training staff and leadership on recognising and mitigating biases.

7. SUPPORT WOMEN IN BALANCING CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES WITH CAREER ADVANCEMENT

- Caregiving responsibilities often act as barriers for women's advancement. To address this, the following are recommended:
- Offering flexible work arrangements, including part-time options and remote working setups.
- Providing access to affordable and reliable childcare facilities, especially within universities.
- Creating support networks for women balancing caregiving and professional responsibilities to share experiences and best practices.

8. PROMOTE GENDER-SENSITIVE ORGANISATIONAL CULTURES

Creating an environment that recognises and addresses gender-specific challenges can drive better outcomes. Actions include:

- Building gender awareness among staff to foster inclusive practices.
- Ensuring decision-making processes are inclusive, considering gender perspectives in policies and strategies.
- Supporting initiatives that actively address unequal power dynamics within institutions.

9. EXPAND RESEARCH ON GENDER DYNAMICS IN ECONOMICS

Further studies are needed to uncover and address the systemic challenges faced by women in economics. These studies should:

- Examine the cultural and societal norms influencing women's career trajectories.
- Explore why younger economists are less interested in academia and address the gaps identified.
- Investigate the root causes of self-limiting behaviours and cultural orientations that discourage women from leadership roles.

By implementing these recommendations, Kenya can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in economics, ensuring they can thrive academically and professionally while contributing meaningfully to the discipline.

Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

6 Conclusion

This study used an age basis to compare data. This is to say that the study compared data from female students and recent graduates, with data of women in economics in their 30s and 40s and 50s plus. It is very telling that women over 50 in economics faced different barriers to becoming women in economics as compared to the women in their younger years.

Gender equality and women in leadership are not only social issues but also economic ones, with significant benefits to organisations and the broader economy. Research shows that gender equality of women in leadership leads to improved oversight, better performance during crises, higher returns on equity, fewer scandals, and stronger overall financial performance. Additionally, studies have highlighted a positive correlation between a company's success and the proportion of women in leadership roles, whether at the board level or in top management (Quayle, P., & Gao, X. (2019)). A positive relationship is also observed in several studies between a company's performance and the proportion of women in leadership positions (whether at the board level or in top management (Carter, Simkins, & Simpson, 2003). However, the observed positive relation for gender equality does not translate to equal representation of women in leadership positions generally, still less so in economics-related institutions.

The study reveals that, without intentional efforts to address the barriers women face in pursuing and advancing in economics, fewer women will be present in crucial areas like economic policy development, research, and analysis in the future. This is concerning because economics is a powerful tool for shaping society, addressing inequality, and

Co-Impact WIL Economics stakeholder roundtable, October 2024.

Co–Impact ®

driving systems change. The absence of women in these spaces limits the potential to create inclusive, equitable, and transformative economic policies.

Economics has a broad influence on all aspects of society—markets, healthcare, education, and social welfare—and its policies have the power either to reinforce or disrupt existing power structures. When women are excluded from the economic decision-making process, policies fail to address the full range of societal needs, especially those related to gender equality and the empowerment of marginalised groups. The exclusion of women from key economic discussions means missing out on their unique perspectives and their ability to shift power dynamics meaningfully.

Without female representation in economic research and policy development, critical issues such as unpaid care work, gender wage gaps, access to reproductive health, and women's economic empowerment often go unaddressed. This perpetuates a cycle of gender inequality where women's contributions to the economy are undervalued. Moreover, without women shaping policies, economic systems continue to benefit those in positions of power, predominantly men, thus deepening existing imbalances.

To break this cycle and ensure that economics becomes a tool for inclusive change, it is essential to 'fix the leaky pipe.' This involves creating policies and environments that actively support women's education, professional development, and leadership in economics. Targeted mentorship programs, gender-sensitive curricula, and institutional reforms that address gender biases at all levels of the profession are key to achieving this goal.

If these efforts are not made, the gap will continue to widen, leaving economic policy development disproportionately male. Given the transformative potential of economics, it is critical to involve women in shaping the future of our economies. Investing in women in economics is not just about fairness; it is about fostering more effective, equitable, and innovative solutions to global challenges. Through gender-inclusive economic policymaking, we can shift power dynamics, ensure more comprehensive policy development, and drive transformative change.

References

Africa, Education Sub Saharan. (2021). The state of women leading report: Unlocking the potential of female leadership in tertiary education. Education Sub Saharan Africa [ESSA].

Agwaya, R., & Mairura, S. (2019). Gender productivity gap in Kenyan informal enterprises. Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis [KIPPRA].

Biegon, J. (2016). Gender Equality and Political Processes in Kenya. Nairobi, Strathmore University Press.

Blūmane, A. & Timpars, T. (2021). Enablers and barriers for women's career progression into executive positions. Stockholm School of Economics.

Boris, E., & Parreñas, R. S. (2010). Intimate labors : Cultures, technologies, and the politics of care. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Social Sciences.

Buehler, D., Formella, C., García, Q., Kretschmer, S., Raith, J., Seidlitz, A., Singh, Y., Sondergeld, V., Takahashi, Y., Weilage I., and Zillur, K. (2023). The Women in Economics Index 2023. Berlin, The Women in Economics Initiative e.V.

Carter, D. A., Simkins, B. J., & Simpson, W. G. (2003). Corporate governance, board diversity, and firm value. Financial Review. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6288.00034

Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), (2013). Key gains and challenges: A gender audit of Kenya's 2013 election process. Kenya

Fraser, N. (2009) Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History, New Left Review, 56, 97–.

Geisler, G. G. (2004). Women and the remaking of politics in Southern Africa: Negotiating autonomy, incorporation and representation. Nordic Africa Institute.

Greenwood, R., & Hinings, C. R. (1996). Understanding Radical Organizational Change: Bringing Together the Old and the New Institutionalism. Academy of Management Review, 21(4), 1022–1054.

Glass, C., & Cook, A. (2016). Leading at the top: Understanding women's challenges above the glass ceiling. The Leadership Quarterly, 27(1), 51–63.

IBM Institute for Business Value, & Chief. (2023). Women in leadership: Why perception outpaces the pipeline—and what to do about it. IBM.

Kinyanjui, M. (2019). A lone ranger: My journey towards becoming a feminist geographer in Nairobi, Kenya. Gender, Place & Culture, 26(7–9), 1159–1169.

Lituchy, T. R., Galperin, B. L., & Punnett, B. J. (2016). LEAD: Leadership Effectiveness in Africa and the African Diaspora. Springer.

Mitullah, W. V., Forojalla, S., Basheka, B., Vieira do Nascimento, D., Jallow, S. S., Awol, E. A., & Feddal, S. (2023). Supporting women participation in higher education in Eastern Africa: building sustainable and equitable higher education systems in Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda. UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa, Nairobi.

Musyoka, P. M., Ochilo, W. N., Ntirampeba, L., Mutuku, B., Mugambi, I., Matata, J., Niyongere, C., Habindavyi, E., Ndayihanzamaso, P., Ndishimiyimana, E., Bundi, M., Vos, J., & Terefe, B. (2024). Can men unburden women from unpaid care work? Evidence from Burundi. agriRxiv (2024) 20240179432.

Nzomo M. (2003). Taking stock - women's performance in Kenya's parliamentary politics in the 2002 general elections in Nzomo M (ed), Women in politics: Challenges of democratisation in Kenya. Nairobi, Heinrich Böll Foundation.

Opoku, M. P., Anyango, B., & Alupo, B. A. (2018). Women in politics in Kenya: An analysis of participation and barriers. Multidisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies, 7(1), Article 1.

Orloff, A. S., & Shiff, T. (2016). Feminism/s in power: Rethinking gender equality after the second wave. In Perverse politics? Feminism, anti-imperialism, multiplicity (Vol. 30, pp. 109-134). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Oyugi W. (2003). Politics of Transition in Kenya, 1992-2003: democratic consolidation or deconsolidation?' in Oyugi W, Mbai C and Wanyande P (eds), The Politics of Transition in Kenya: From KANU to NARC, Heinrich Boll Foundation.

Oyugi, J. (2003). Redefining women's political participation through party politics: the context of Kenya's political transition. In Nzomo, M (Ed). Women in Politics: Challenges of Democratisation in Kenya. Heinrich Böll Foundation [HBF].

Padavic, I., and Reskin, B.F. (2002) Women and Men at Work. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Quayle, P., & Gao, X. (2019). Gender Diversity on Boards: A Cause for Multilateral Organisations. In Good Governance and Modern International Financial Institutions. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004408326_003

Republic of Kenya (RoK), 2016. Micro, Small and Medium Establishment (MSME) Survey: Basic Report. Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), Nairobi.

Rotich, K. (2021, August 2). Kenya trails regional peers in women top leadership positions. Business Daily. https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/data-hub/kenya-trails-peers-in-women-top-leadership-positions-3495782

Sivi, K. (2016). The path towards inclusive democracy in Kenya. In Biegon, J. (2016). Gender Equality and Political Processes in Kenya. Nairobi, Strathmore University Press.

Sivi, K. (2016). The path towards inclusive democracy in Kenya. In Biegon, J. (2016). Gender Equality and Political Processes in Kenya. Nairobi, Strathmore University Press.

Sivi, K. (2022). Targeting in targeted funds: How inclusion policies and programs can exclude intended beneficiaries. In Vorley, T. Smith, H.L. & Owalla, B. (2021). Gender Diversity and Innovation: Concepts, policies and practice. Edward Elgar Publishers.

Soares, S. E., & Sidun, N. M. (2021). Women leaders during a global crisis: Challenges, characteristics, and strengths. International Perspectives in Psychology: Research, Practice, Consultation, 10(3), 130–137.

Statista. (2022). Kenya—Labor Force, Female—2023 Data 2024 Forecast 1990-2022 Historical. https://tradingeconomics.com/kenya/labor-force-female-percent-of-total-labor-force-wb-data.html

The Women Shadow Parliament – Kenya (Undated). The Participation and Representation of Women in Management of Political Parties: An Unfinished Agenda in Kenya.

UN Women – Africa. (2023, March 3). Women's leadership slowed by patriarchal norms in Kenya elections. UN Women – Africa.

UNICEF. (2017). Glossary of Terms and Concepts. UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia

USAID (2020). Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Fact Sheet.

World Bank. (2024). Women, Business and the Law 2024. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Co
Impact