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Gender inequality facing women in leadership as the hindrance to achieving sustainable development in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the impact of the gender inequality gap in administration which serves as a interference to achieving sustainable social and economic development in Africa. The existence of gender differences has been overlooked in management and leadership research; hence it remains a reality that women are underrepresented in leading management positions in general on the ground, and particularly in leadership roles. The main question is if women's call to occupy leadership positions is a complete reality or if it is purely a pursuit for political acceptability. Gender gaps in the workforce over the last two decades remained largely unaffected, notwithstanding the increased number of women who have acquired education. Qualitatively, data was primarily collected through secondary content. The need to improve the education systems in low and middle-income countries is recommended, as all countries can reap the benefit of optimizing their deployment of female-skilled professionals and leverage their talent.

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Introduction

The challenges faced by women serve as a hindrance to gender proficiency in leadership, thereby making it almost impossible to achieve sustainable development in Africa. The study indicates that bringing social sustainability to the fore to achieving sustainable development, simply does not only mean reconciling both economic and environmental sustainability but also prioritizing social sustainability. Understanding the key role of women in society could help achieve sustainable development in the employment sector, including the social, political and economic spheres in developing countries, which has been conspicuous and is rapidly increasing (UNDP, 2011).

The study discovered several social barriers hindering gender proficiencies, which include the existence of social and cultural norms and gender-based differences in leadership, as confirmed by some researchers. The existence of these differences has been overlooked; hence it remains a reality that women are underrepresented in leading management positions in general on the ground, and particularly in leadership roles. The inequality gap in leadership in the African democratic system is explored in this study.

Emphasizing the central role of women in achieving sustainable economic development in the fourth industrial revolution, it is imperative to promote gender equality, as it indicates the rationale and the actions needed to achieve sustainable development. This paper finds it morally and ethically significant to connect gender parity with sustainable development. Sustainable development goals are achievable, but the global community seems to grapple with the problems of understanding the role of women in sustainable socio-economic development and the meaning of the term sustainable development goals.

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This study argues that the role of women in stimulating sustainable development cannot be overlooked in the fourth industrial revolution, by addressing the gender gap and women's inequality in employment. This is seen to be imperative for several reasons, citing the role of women in every sector of society and by implication, addressing the current gender inequality in employment and leadership gap can help achieve sustainable development. The challenges to gender proficiency in leadership affect the achievement of sustainable development in Africa. Gender equality as a goal is having gender neutrality while gender equities are practices and ways of thinking that help in achieving the goal (LeMoyné, 2011). Therefore, this paper aims at examining the impact of the gender inequality gap in administration which serves as a interference to achieving sustainable social and economic development in Africa.

Literature Review

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

Conceptualization of Gender Inequality

This section of the research primarily reviews the literature that focuses on gender inequality. The International Labour Organization (ILO) similarly defines gender equality as "the enjoyment of equal rights, opportunities and treatment by men and women and by boys and girls in all spheres of life" (ILO, 2013). Women and girls represent about half of the world's population and, this, therefore, implies that women and girls represent half of its potential. Gender equality, besides being a fundamental human right, is essential to achieve peaceful societies, with full human potential and sustainable development.

The realization of gender equality and sustainable development may potentially involve trade-offs that require to be openly discussed among different social groups (World Economic Forum, 2016), in a way that discussions in the social dimensions become sustainable which are too often neglected. The dimension must be copiously integrated with states and other meaningful key actors that should be held accountable for conveying sustainable development. In the last decade according to the World Economic Forum white paper (2017) the gender gaps in the workforce, particularly those in leadership positions, have remained largely unchanged and progress has stalled.

Despite the growth recorded in the various numbers of "women acquiring education, surpassing the rates for men in most countries" (WEF, 2017). In addition, the labour market is seen to be highly separated by gender inequality along sectoral lines, which thereby reduces the dynamism and benefits derived from diversity. The main issue is that scholars often fail to look at the lower share or percentage of women as a problem who are currently in the labour force. Women and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in promoting gender equality are necessary to achieve both social, political and economic development goals, as such goal 5 of the SDGs is to achieve gender equality and to empower all women and girls. According to the United Nations (2019), the term gender equality is "the state in which access to rights or opportunities is unaffected by gender". The term gender equality is also known as sexual equality or equality of the sexes.

The United Nations Population Fund states that gender equality is the state of equal ease of access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision-making; and the state of valuing different behaviours, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender (UNFPA, 2019). Gender equality is a fundamental right, accomplishing this right is not the right thing to do but it is a moral thing to do. With respect to the UN Women (2019), the best opportunity "we have in meeting some of the most pressing challenges of our time—from the economic crisis and lack of health care to climate change, violence against women and escalating conflicts". It is acknowledged that women are not only more exaggerated by these socio-economic problems but also possess notions and leadership to solve them.

Hence gender inclusivity to achieve gender equality is of great importance. Nevertheless, the discrimination in gender still holds too many women back from exercising their full potential, this holds the world back too. According to the UN (2019), achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were adopted by world leaders in 2015, embodies a clear roadmap for progress that is sustainable and leaves no one behind. Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is essential to each of the 17 goals. It is only by ensuring "the rights of women and girls across all the goals will we get to justice and inclusion, economies that work for all, and sustaining our shared environment now and for future generations" (UN Women, 2019: 1). To achieve sustainable development, it is imperative to start turning promises into sustainable action.

Gender equality is an issue that cut across all the Sustainable Development Goals and it affects the real lives of women and girls the world over. To achieve sustainable development goals by empowering women, the United Nations Women through an initiative established a global alliance to promote upscaling of rural technologies for women. The initiative has expanded on the Sharefair on Rural Women's Technologies, the aim is to build on the shared intent to upscale some of the great innovations to meet the robustly identified critical needs of rural women. This is in line with the sustainable development goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which presents a wider scope by deliberately and more incorporating economic and environmental sustainability. As well as several countries around the world aspire to have peaceful and inclusive societies (UN Women, 2019).

It must be noted that all over the world today, "gender inequality may keep women poor, it could deprive them of basic rights and opportunities for well-being" (Enaifoghe, 2020: 3). Enaifoghe & Khoalenyane (2018), articulated that women make noteworthy contributions every single day, from bringing an income to the household as an employed wage earner to creating jobs as an entrepreneur, taking care of her family and elders. Giving an instance from the UN Women (2019) analysis, a woman who is a farmer,

may not be able to make her crops thrive like a man as a result that she does not have the same access to seeds, credit, and technology and extension services. This implies that women are not likely to own their land to farm, as only about 20% of the landowners globally happen to be women (Enaifoghe, 2020).

Research shows that women are progressively moving out of the agricultural sector in developing countries, out of the industry in developed countries, and into service sectors (International Labour Organization, 2012), to contribute to the call to achieve a sustainable development agenda through gender dimension in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Research and Methodology

The study is a content data analysis. The researchers studied various literature that was collected through a desktop with written documents, which may be available either in the public or private domain. It simply put researchers determine the relevance of the documents that they consult based on their significance to the study. Sileyew, (2019), noted that there are several approaches used in research as method and design. The research approach supports the researcher on how to come across the research result findings. This method permits researchers to access various kinds of literature and determine the relevance of the documents that they consult based on their significance to the study (Enaifoghe, 2020: 114). This paper primarily collected its data through secondary sources and analysed them based on content.

Findings and Discussions

Understanding the Effect of Gender Inequality and Sustainable Development

The disruptive changes to business models and employment will have a reflective impact on the employment landscape in the coming years. Several of the major drivers of transformation that are currently affecting global industries are anticipated to have a substantial impact on jobs, reaching significant job creation to job displacement (World Economic Forum, 2016), and from discriminating labour efficiency to broadening skills gaps. In numerous industries and countries according to WEF (2016), the most in-demand occupations or specialties did not exist 10 or even five years ago, and the pace of change is set to go faster.

The absence of emphasis on gender equality in certain high-growth areas of the economy, and of course the potentially discriminated exposure to the new technological transformation is a limitation to gender proficiency. For men and women-dominated employment, the existing progress towards achieving gender disparity hangs in the balance. It is, therefore, imperative to first address the gender gap in employment and the consequent socio-cultural barriers and challenges that women are faced with, in promoting sustainable development goals in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This study believes that bridging the gap in women's inequality in the workforce will help to achieve sustainable development and now is the time to take action.

The quest to achieve sustainable economic development is more vigorous and maintainable when both women and men have equal opportunities to partake and contribute fully to the labour force. The International Finance Corporation (2013), argued that better jobs for women in employment that leads to higher wages and greater decision-making, also have a positive influence on the ways households spend money on children's nutrition, health, and education. Meanwhile, various corporations that invest in the employment of women are most likely to gain a significant competitive advantage (World Bank and IFC (2003). Despite the credible evidence which shows that gender equality has a transformative influence on productivity and development, women's complete economic and dynamic potential remains underutilized in many parts of the world (World Bank, 2007). As reported by the IFC (2013: iii), though women's education levels globally have increased and educated women now earn more than their uneducated peers, gender gaps in labour-market participation and wage levels persist.

The report of IFC (2013), argued that women continued to be played down in all formal and higher value-added occupations in the fourth industrial revolution. The private sector which is considered to account for almost nine out of 10 workers in many developing countries, has a serious role to play to ensure that women have better opportunities for employment through gender equality (IFC (2013). Talking about employment practices that develop efficiency and construct good working conditions that are appropriate to women's explicit circumstances are regularly disregarded. Quite a several companies are increasingly seeing the prospect, even in sectors that are considered to be non-traditional for women in the technologically advanced world – 4IR.

Today, the arrival of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) virtually certainly does not fail to provoke divergent extrapolations about the future. According to Cliff (2018: 1), critics see deepening inequality and unemployment in an era of unprecedented global wealth, as robots look poised to replace workers on the factory floor.

The promoters of gender equality, see the untold potential of human well-being in a "future where prosperity is decoupled from labour and drudgery", and are allowing common citizens to have adequate time to spend with their friends and families while in creative pursuits (Enaifoghe, 2020). The larger mainstream of working women in the world might likely fare even worse, limited to uncertain and informal employment. Globally, it is argued that only about half of the working-age of women are currently in the labour force, while those that work seems to earn a quarter less than their male counterparts in the same jobs (Cliff, 2018: 1). The presence of technology and globalization are drastically transforming the world of work as we know it.

The level at which jobs are being created, displaced and modified is incessantly growing, while skills gaps are becoming broader by the day, as the premium on invention, creativity and other exceptionally human traits is also growing. The World Economic Forum (2017: 4), states that “from the skills-demand perspective, the greater supply of educated female talent on the labour market is good news for talent-stretched high growth sectors. Dugarova (2018: 12), noted that these sectors will ultimately have the prospect of deploying these resources and, in doing so, they will reap the benefit of positive performance externalities of a progressively diversified workforce.

In the same way, many female-dominated sectors may also enjoy the benefit of having greater gender equality. However, scholars argued that both male and female-dominated high growth sectors may not at present be including gender diversity among their growth targets (McKinsey, 2012). According to Dugarova (2018: 14), gave an insight that; “women are also likely to be disproportionately impacted by disruptions in declining job families such as administrative and service roles—where women face five jobs lost for every job gained, versus three jobs lost to one gained for men overall.” It is no doubt that all countries could ultimately reap the benefit of optimizing their disposition of female talent in the industries because this is one angle to look at this great opportunity, which is to view it as a way to obtain the dividend of diversity. Through the application of innovation in high growth sectors, thereby preventing any additional broadening of gender gaps.

Many countries like China, the Nordics, the United States and Germany, with relatively high levels of exposure to labour market change due to their productive structures and level of technology adoption as well as high female labour force participation rates (World Economic Forum, 2019: 3).

These are said to be well-placed and they took advantage of the developing opportunities which then help to accelerate gender equality in the high-growth sectors. Several efforts have been put together to achieve a just and sustainable future. The United Nations (2014), highlighted that the rights, dignity and capabilities of half the world’s population cannot be ignored to achieve sustainable development for the future. It is perceived to be important to link gender equality with sustainable development. As the United Nations charts the underlying principle and the necessary action to achieve sustainable development, it states that to be effective, policy actions for sustainability must redress the disproportionate impact on women and girls of economic, social and environmental shocks and stresses (United Nations, 2014: 2).

Women’s Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality for Sustainable Development

Empowering women and bridging gender inequality for sustainable development is collective action in all spheres of life. Advancing women’s knowledge through agency and collective action has huge potential to improve resource productivity. According to the United Nations (2014: 2). enhancing ecosystem conservation, the sustainable use of natural resources, human capital create more sustainable development. The failure to take advantage of this would be regarded as a missed opportunity, as women are not to be regarded as victims, but as essential actors in moving towards sustainable development in the fourth industrial development (Truskinovsky, Rubin & Brown, 2012). This paper identifies a select array of issues that are seen to be fundamental to women’s lives which are also strategic in the achievement of gender equality and sustainability in the 4IR.

Addressing gender and equal access to opportunity is one of the foundations to achieving sustainable economic development and gender effectiveness. Women’s economic empowerment is defined as having the capacity to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth (OECD, 2011). The fundamental of sustainable development and empowerment ultimately lies in the ability of a woman to have control over her destiny (Kabeer, 2016a). For Enaifoghe (2018), this implies that to be capacitated or empowered as women, they must have equal competencies which include; education and health, and have equal access to resources and opportunities, which include; land, capital, and employment without discrimination.

Women should have the needed support to use those rights through an agency, as well as the capabilities, resources, and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions through independence in the household and community, leadership opportunities and participation in political institutions” (UN Millennium Project 2005). Until now, the UN Millennium Project have no concrete plan for achieving the Millennium Development Goals, Jeffrey Sachs states that the experts who contributed to this huge undertaking have shown without a doubt that the world can still meet the goals—if we start putting this plan into action right now (Jeffrey Sachs, *UN Millennium Project, 2005a*). For women to exercise their support, they must first have a form of security and then live in a world that is free of fear of coercion and violence (USAID, 2011). There is a robust contributory justification for advocating the greater inclusion of women in all levels of the economy and the service sector.

Kabeer (2013), states that a greater labour force and the participation of women can become a basis to reaping the competitive advantage for economic development, while it also contributes to a more inclusive growth, which includes the improvement of distributional dynamics and well-being within households. McKinsey (2013), argued that the countries that provide more reasonable and equitable access to economic opportunities for women are likely to become more competitive in the global economy. The research conducted by McKinsey (2013), reported that the advancement of “women’s equality” with regards to the labour force and women’s participation could add as much as US\$12 trillion, or 11 percent to global annual GDP by 2025 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2015: 3).

Women's access to employment and education opportunities greatly reduces the likelihood of household poverty, and women are known to reinvest up to 90 percent of income earned in their families and communities. Bridging gender inequality will help in creating positive outcomes for the education and health of future generations (IFC 2013). Dugarova (2018), found that there is a strong constructive link between women's full participation in the labour market and the socioeconomic growth of a state. Klasen & Lamanna (2009), argued that the present gender gaps in the world of employment ultimately explain the large extent of the differential in development between different regions over time, with the evidence recorded in the "Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia are practical examples of they are particularly lagging".

Dugarova (2018), articulated that unequal access to employment opportunities has resulted in the misrepresentations and distortions in the sharing and distribution of "talent to skilled and unskilled positions" through the frequency of "adverse selection". This action has slowed down economic growth, thereby lowering the level of competitiveness of the service sector. The elimination of gender-based exclusion for example in specific sectors and employments could be recorded to have increased output by 25% in some nations by "better allocation of women's skills and talent" (Cuberes & Teignier-Baqué, 2012). Similarly, the discriminatory laws and the lack of access to services and resources like "land, credit and technology, childcare and domestic responsibilities" have hindered female entrepreneurship which therefore contributes to their low productivity, further constraining the potential for sustainable development.

FAO (2011), suggested that if "women farmers had the same access as men to inputs such as land and fertilisers, agricultural output in developing countries could increase by as much as 4%". However, Kabeer (2016a), stated that there are quite a several factors that pose as barriers to women empowerment, such as "the entrenched gender norms and limited access to productive resources and training". These do not prevent women wage workers but as well as women entrepreneurs from entering expanding service sectors. There are some conduits between improving gender equality while achieving sustainable development goals in the fourth industrial revolution and eradication of poverty, through the gender dimension.

Research shows that increases in female earnings could help to address the current poverty rate and motivate short-term growth through higher consumption expenditure, as well as decreasing future poverty and motivating long-term development through higher savings (The Economist, 2018). Other findings show that globally, "women continue to experience gender wage gaps worldwide, there has been little change in the full-time employee gender pay gap since 2010 (OECD, 2018). The leading causes of the gender pay gap include gender segregation in jobs, differences in educational attainment, caregiving responsibilities that fall heavily to women, a lack of pay transparency, and discrimination and bias (OECD, 2018: 3). The gender wage gap increases as women age (OECD, 2018), while findings in the gender wage gap vary by country, "the average annual income for women globally is \$11,500, compared to \$21,500 for men" (Hutt, 2019).

Among OECD countries, the overall gender wage gap is 13.4%. (OECD, 2018), Korea has the widest gender wage gap at 34.1%, followed by Japan at 24.5% and Israel at 21.8% (OECD, 2018). Belgium has the lowest gap at 3.7%, with Greece at 4.5%, and Costa Rica at 4.7%. (OECD, 2018).

World Economic Forum (2017), articulated that the "consumption and savings channels" form a "multiplier effect" that resonates across the economy with regards to further "employment, investment", as well as economic growth. The growth in incomes and more local consumption can drive the growth rate in the service sector, which will thereby help to improve the competitiveness on the global stage. At the same time, The Economist (2018), argued that equal access to education and economic opportunities for women and girls will offer greater accretion of skills and proficiency for increased growth in the industrialized labour market. And consequently, advances the potential growth of the entire economy (Siegel, Kodama, & Halaburda, 2012). As educated women will become capable to undertake higher-value economic activities.

"Greater decision-making power for women over household resources and family size has the potential to enhance the human capital of the next generation, as children benefit as a result of more spending on food and education" (World Bank 2011: 2).

The drop in the rate of fertility linked with greater gender equality may also have deep impacts on the economy, by creating a "demographic dividend" that diminishes dependency but increases per capita outputs (Jennings, 2011), while contributing to sustainable economic development in the fourth industrial development. The evidence mentioned above builds a strong rationale to make sure of equitable participation of women in the global processes that are resulting in growth, this includes the opportunities fashioned out by trade-in service sectors. However, this paper identifies gender equality to be as much as the issues human rights, as a result, that over 50% of the population comprises women, who have the equal right to participate completely in both economic, social, and political life (McKinsey, 2012b).

Women also have the right to access employment with equal wages, access to quality education, advanced technology, knowledge, markets, finance, as well as complimentary policy and governing environment that enables women to access economic opportunities. Thereby promoting sustainable economic development and taking charge over their own lives, both "within and outside the domestic sphere" (Miller, 2013: 5). Nonetheless, this section has been able to demonstrate that greater gender equality creates economic sagacity, as results that it helps to enhance productivity, proficiency, and the affordability of the economy, in so doing, this will invariably lead to more inclusive development in the fourth industrial development.

Leadership Theory: Gender Equality in Sustainable Development

The leadership theory is a research area and a practical skill covering the capability of an individual or organization to "lead" or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organizations (Chin, 2015). The theories are mainly engrossed in the qualities that distinguish between leaders and followers. Women have demonstrated to have great leadership skills naturally. Fostering gender equality in leadership is one of the keys to achieving sustainable development. Women comprise an average of 55% of the total world population, yet they remain underrepresented, as they are faced with social, political and economic barriers. It is noted that women vote men into political leadership and shows their preference for male leadership.

The question for discussion is that does women's potential to occupy leadership positions is a complete reality. The existing development concerning gender parity is said to hang in the balance (WEF, 2017a). It is projected that every country will be able to reap the benefit of optimizing their deployment of female skilled professionals and leverage their talent, this is one perspective to look at this opportunity. That is to interpret it as a technique to secure the dividend of diversity through innovation in high-growth sectors—while averting any further broadening of gender gaps. Countries such as China, the Nordics, the United States and Germany— with relatively high levels of exposure to labour market change due to their productive structures and level of technology adoption as well as high female labour force participation rates—are well-placed to take advantage of the emerging opportunities to accelerate gender parity in high-growth sectors through targeted policies (WEF, 2019: 3).

The WEF (2017), indicated that countries like Italy, India, South Africa and Jordan, among others, will be faced with relatively substantial levels of coverage, but will require conscientious efforts to deliver the surplus of female talent to maintain competitiveness in energetic and high-growth industries. It is further indicated that countries are slightly less likely to be compressed to the same point and rapidly by labour force disruption, nonetheless could exert effort to prepare talent for the labour force changes and to profit from the future opportunities (WEF, 2017a). Therefore, to take advantage of this moment for humanizing corporate performance in "high-growth sectors" as well as to support development towards gender equality at all levels of occupation, it is analytically imperative to understand the explicit crescendos.

These crescendos or dynamics are the barriers that are hindering gender equality across all sectors. These dynamic barriers could vary by industry and geography, which frequently reflect different industry cultures in adding to the overarching economic and societal factors. The present moment consequently offers a calculated win-win opportunity for proactively improving gender equality as well as preventing the broadening in gender gaps and skills.

Socio-Cultural Barriers to Promoting Sustainable Development

Addressing socio-cultural barriers of women to achieve sustainable development in the fourth industrial development, it is imperative to improve the education systems in low and middle-income countries. Given the lower share of women who are already in the labour force, there is a deficiency in placing less emphasis on gender equality in several high-growth sectors and the possibly distinguished exposure to technological transformation for both men and women-dominated professions. Some difficulties are being experienced in accessing finance, and also in reconciling work and family life, given childcare and housework responsibilities (UNIDO, 2017; UN Women, 2015). Women also face the issue of negative perceptions about their capabilities or skills. Most female-owned businesses tend to be in services (44%), trade (23 percent), handicrafts (19 percent), and only a small proportion in manufacturing (11%) (UNIDO, 2017).

In this case, women who seek to establish and develop their own business may somehow find it difficult particularly as a result of the generalized de facto discrimination, even when formal laws do not treat women and men differently (Tyson, Klugman & Smith, 2016). Gender gaps in the workforce stayed largely unchanged and development has become hindered, mainly those in leadership positions in the last decade, this is despite the fact there seems to be a growth in the numbers of women attaining education, which surpassed the rates for men in most nations (Center for Strategic and International Studies -CSIC, 2019). The labour market remains highly segregated by gender along sectoral lines, which therefore reduced the dynamism and benefits that come from diversity (World Economic Forum, 2017).

Even though technology and globalization are transforming the world of work today, the speed at which employments are created, displaced and changed is incessantly increasing. Gender skills gaps are widening, and the payment on innovation, creativity and other uniquely human traits continue to flourish and advance. From the perspective of skills demand, there is a bigger supply of educated females who are talented in the labour market. World Economic Forum, (2017), this is seen to be good news for talent-stretched high growth sectors, as these sectors will have the opportunity to deploy these resources and, in doing so, benefit from the positive performance externalities of an increasingly diversified workforce. Comparably, many women-led sectors will likely profit from greater gender equality. Though, both men and women dominated high growth sectors may not at present be including gender diversity among their growth targets (Rutter, 2016).

It must be noted that women are likely to be disproportionately impacted by the disruptions in declining job families such as administrative and service roles. findings show that women face five jobs lost for every job gained, versus three jobs lost to one gained for men overall. Studies have tried to identify the gender challenges, but not much has been done on the socio-cultural barriers that are faced by women in promoting sustainable development goals in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, particularly in Africa. The report of Global Sustainable Development (2019) indicated that; "We must dramatically step up the pace of implementation as we

enter a decisive decade for people and the planet". We must find a way to "connect the dots across all that we do – as individuals, civic groups, corporations, municipalities and the Member States of the United Nations – and truly embrace the principles of inclusion and sustainability" (Independent Group of Scientists, Global Sustainable Development Report, 2019).

At the beginning of the 2020s, building a fairer and more inclusive economy is expected to be the goal of global, national and industry leaders. To get to that point, it is important to instil gender parity in education transversely, health, politics and across all forms of economic participation is critical. In the last 14 years according to Schwab (2020), the global gender gap index served as a compass to track progress on relative gaps between women and men in health, education, economy and politics.

Through this annual index, stakeholders that are within each country are therefore able to set priorities that are relevant in each specific economic, political and cultural context. Nonetheless, there seems to be growing recognition of the untapped capacity and talents of women and women's leadership in the contemporary world. Over the last two decades, as stated by Schwab (2020: 3), "the rate of women's representation in national parliaments globally which has incrementally increased from 11.8 percent in 1998 to 17.8 percent in 2008 to 23.5 percent in 2018". World Economic Forum (2020), noted that some regions across have witnessed intense increases;

"Sub-Saharan Africa, wherein the last 20 years the number of women in parliaments has risen from 11 to 23.6 percent, and the Arab States region, which has seen an increase from 3.1 to 17.5 percent".

The critical question is that political representation is on the rise, but is it enough to achieve gender equality and sustainable development? The truth is none of us may see gender parity in our lifetimes, and nor likely will many of our children. That's the sobering finding of the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, which reveals that gender parity will not be attained for 99.5 years (WEF, 2020). The total global representation is still below the 30 percent benchmark that is generally identified as the basic level of representation to achieve a "critical mass" – this is said to be a considerable minority of all legislators which has a major impact, rather than a token of few individuals – not to comment on the falling short of representation of women as half of the world's population (Lauzen, 2017).

One of the most generally alluded to as factors, include the irregular dual encumbrance of caregiving and breadwinning on the part of women, the cataleptic biases affecting women and men, and the structures of the workplace and practices built around traditional family structures. The inadequate care infrastructure, the lack of role models and the absence of confidence gap at times. To therefore pilot the uncertainties and fears of gender equality in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, with the new socio-economic and political context, all sectors need to proliferate the diversity which is within their talent pools.

As well as their leadership skill to benefit from a variety of perspectives, with creative thinking and the needed skills. This paper identified three principal areas where industrial development and technology could create gender-based distinguished distributional outcomes while addressing women's socio-economic barriers: the employment frequency alongside the consumption channel, and the public provision channel.

Conclusions

The existence of gender-based differences in leadership and the low participation of women in the employment sector as one of the barriers to achieving the SDGs. The overlooked existence of these differences hence remains a reality that women are underrepresented in leading management positions in general on the ground, particularly in leadership roles. Even though women comprise an average of 55% of the total world population, they remain underrepresented. It is noted that women vote men into political leadership which shows their preference for male leadership.

To achieve sustainable development, it is imperative to start turning promises into sustainable action. Gender equality is an issue that cut across all the Sustainable Development Goals and it affects the real lives of women and girls the world over. This paper finds it imperative to improve the education systems in low and middle-income countries. Given the lower share of women who are already in the labour force, there is a deficiency in placing less emphasis on gender equality in several high-growth sectors and the possibly distinguished exposure to technological transformation for both men and women-dominated professions.

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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