iscte

**INSTITUTO
UNIVERSITÁRIO
DE LISBOA**

Examining the Barriers and Gender Backlashes of Women's Pathway to Leadership in Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Kenya

Julia Flöttmann

Master of Science in International Management (M.Sc.)

Supervisor:
Shaozhuang Ma, Associate Professor, Department of Marketing, Operations and General Management, ISCTE Business School

June, 2021

BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Iscte Business School

Examining the Barriers and Gender Backlashes of Women's Pathway to Leadership in Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Kenya

Julia Flöttmann

Master of Science in International Management (M.Sc.)

Supervisor:
Shaozhuang Ma, Associate Professor, Department of Marketing, Operations and General Management, ISCTE Business School

June, 2021

Acknowledgement

I would like to give my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor. Professor Shoazhuang; you have given me the right directions and helpful criticism. Thank you very much for your collaboration.

I cannot thank enough Emily for giving me the guidance I needed. Your expertise and input were immense. I thank you for talking for hours with me about the inequalities in your country, and for sharing your insider knowledge with me. You were of such great help to me.

I would like to thank every single person that participated in the interviews that I conducted. Thank you for committing your time and effort and giving me your trust. I highly appreciate your support.

Thank you to my manager and my colleagues at work who have been incredibly understanding if I had to take days off to conduct interviews or to take a deep dive into the work of my thesis.

A special thank you to my parents for being by my side and supporting me along my way.

Resumo

As desigualdades de género e a sub-representação de mulheres em cargos de chefia nas empresas foram a motivação para esta tese. Os três objetivos da pesquisa visavam avaliar o *status quo* da paridade de género, examinar fatores institucionais e explorar as barreiras sócio-culturais que afetam o caminho das mulheres para a liderança em pequenas e médias empresas (PMEs) do Quénia.

Dez entrevistas semiestruturadas com fundadores e gerentes de PMEs quenianas foram empregadas via chamadas na aplicação Zoom. Os resultados mostram que as mulheres enfrentam um preconceito substancial em relação às suas habilidades e capacidade de liderança. A pesquisa também identificou factores institucionais que afetam a participação das mulheres no local de trabalho. Os participantes relataram que a fiscalização governamental para a execução de leis e políticas que buscam a igualdade de género e a antidiscriminação é muito baixa no Quénia. Além disso, do ponto de vista do local de trabalho, o estudo sugere que as poucas mulheres que estão no topo são excluídas da tomada de decisão, seja por causa de situações informais de tomada de decisão ou porque as mulheres são dispensadas em reuniões de alto escalão. Finalmente, a pesquisa destacou os fatores sócioculturais como uma grande barreira para a liderança feminina. A subordinação substancial das mulheres na sociedade leva à dominação masculina no local de trabalho. Os papéis tradicionais de género exigem que as mulheres assumam a responsabilidade exclusiva pela administração da casa, o que as impede de se concentrar em suas carreiras.

Este estudo também confirmou a existência de efeitos backlash de género. O assédio sexual foi frequentemente citado como uma ocorrência comum e as mulheres sentiram que esse risco aumentava se assumissem cargos de liderança, o que representa mais uma barreira para alcançar a igualdade nas PMEs quenianas.

Palavras-chave: Igualdade de gênero, Mulheres na liderança, PMEs quenianas, reação de gênero, Estereótipos, papéis de gênero, preconceito no local de trabalho

iv

Abstract

Gender inequalities and the underrepresentation of women in senior management positions in companies were the motivation for this thesis. The three research objectives aimed to assess the status quo of gender parity, examine institutional factors, and explore the sociocultural barriers that impact women's pathways to leadership in Kenyan small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Ten semi-structured interviews with founders and managers of Kenyan SMEs were undertaken via Zoom call. The findings show that women face substantial prejudice regarding their skills and leadership abilities. The research also identified institutional factors that impact on women's participation in the workplace. Participants reported that governmental enforcement to execute laws and policies around gender equality and discrimination are very weak. Additionally, the study found that the few women who are at the top are left out of decision making, either because of exclusion from situations where informal decision-making takes place or because women experience dismissal in senior-level meetings. Finally, the research highlighted sociocultural factors as being a large barrier for women attaining and remaining in leadership roles. The subordination of women in society leads to male domination in the workplace. Traditional gender roles require women to take sole responsibility of managing the household, which holds them back from focusing on their career.

This study also confirmed the existence of gender backlashes. Sexual harassment was frequently cited as being a common occurrence and women felt this risk increased if they took on leadership positions, which represents yet another barrier to achieving equality in Kenyan SMEs.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Women in Leadership, Kenyan SMEs, Gender Backlash, Stereotypes, Gender Roles, Workplace Bias

Table of Contents

x

Definition of Terms

Gender

The term "gender" is understood to refer to social and cultural ideas that are taught and learned about what behavioural characteristics are considered inherently female and male (Jhaveri, 2020). The UN defines these attributes as being "constructed and […] learned through socialization processes" (UN Women). It is crucial to recognise that gender is often used as an interchangeable term for female and male, whilst in actuality there are many different definitions of gender, which vary from culture to culture (Heidari et al., 2016).

Gender Equality

The term "gender equality" can be definted as the "same opportunity to equality" (Jhaveri, 2020). UN Women states the following: "Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female" (UN Women).

Gender Equity

The term "gender equity" refers to the fair treatment of men and women, including boys and girls, whereby the differences of women and men are recognised and "should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalance between the sexes" (World Health Organization). Equal outcomes are the focus whilst "[g]ender equity may involve the use of temporary special measures to compensate for historical or systemic bias or discrimination" (Nomoto, 2017).

Gender Parity

The term "gender parity" refers to relative equality defined by numbers and ratios of female-to-male or vice versa of a given indicator (European Institute for Gender Equality).

Sex

The term "sex" refers to the biological categories of female and male. (Nomoto, 2017).

List of Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
Dev.	Development
etc.	et cetera
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
F	Female
M	Male
MD	Managing Director
MSME	Micro-, Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprise
Op.	Operations
P	Participant
PSDS	Private Sector Development Strategy
SADC	South African Development Community
SME	Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprise
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization
WOCB	Women on Corporate Boards

XIV

List of Figures

List of Tables

XVIII

Chapter 1   Introduction

1. 1   Gender Inequalities

The chief member of the 2021 Tokyo Olympic Games organising committee had previously publicly accused women of being too talkative and annoying in meetings. This was followed by an open dispute and discussion around the subject of gender, which resulted in the stated aim of increasing the current 20 % presence of women on the board of directors of the organising committee to 42 % ('Tokyo 2020', BBC, 2021). This is just one of many examples that represents the marginalisation of women in organisations, business and society. The post-war period led to an increase of women in the workforce, whilst at the same time the men's participation decreased (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2016). However, more than 150 years later, gender parity has not been achieved yet which is e.g. represented by numbers in parliaments around the world where three-quarters of seats are held by men (International Women's Day, 2020). Gender inequalities and disparities are still not taken seriously enough and addressed with the importance that they deserve. Recent reports published that men seem to have the feeling that their countries are progressing fast in terms of gender equality (Poushter et al., 2019, p. 10) whilst in fact, "no country has achieved gender equality" (UN Women's Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, International Women's Day, 2020). Even within the European Union, the levels of gender equality differ hugely from country to country. The EU had a general Gender Equality Index score of 67.4 out of 100 in 2019, with the Nordic countries such as Sweden and Denmark at the top. In Asia Japan and Korea, the growth and power of women in the workplace has not progressed so much over the past years. Thailand is a leading country for equality in the Asia-Pacific region, as 32 % of women hold senior leadership positions in private sectors of mid-market companies, which is six percentage points ahead of the Asia-Pacific region as a whole (Women in Business 2020 Report, 2020). In Latin America, around 33% of senior leadership positions are held by women in senior leadership positions (Women in Business 2020 Report, 2020). A study that was conducted amongst Brazilian companies clearly showed that the representation of women decreased the higher up the chain the leadership positions were. The author concluded that many barriers hinder women from reaching the top (Pollmann, 2017), which leads to an overall underrepresentation of women in upper management and leadership positions (Hills, 2015). This is supported by the fact that

women earn 30 % of the MBA degrees awarded in universities in the United States of America, but when looking at the top management and CEO positions of Fortune 500 companies, only 5 % are female CEOs (Blount, 2017; Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014 in Murugami, 2018; Warner et al., 2018).

Even though inequality is acknowledged, slow progress to rectify this has been made over the years. The United Nations and the World Bank have the biggest influences and means when fighting for women's rights and their status in society. However, these big organisations face huge administrative workloads that slow down the effectiveness and progress in minority movements to achieve change (Nilsson, 2013).

To bring some much-needed attention to smaller companies and to investigate the status quo in this area, this thesis aims to look at small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya. Nguyen et al. (2020) and Mungai & Ogot (2012) point out the need for studies in developing countries, since the majority of studies regarding gender equality have been made in industrialised countries, whilst in most Sub-Saharan countries, the values and behaviours of society are influenced by their ethnic cultures. Mungai & Ogot (2012) are critical about the fact that not enough attention has been paid to the ethnic communities as gender roles there are strongly defined and expected to be executed accordingly. Kenya plays an economically important role in East Africa which is why "[this country] serve[s] as a suitable case study context, with potential broader applicability of findings." (Mwagiru, 2019). The outlook to achieve gender parity in Kenyan corporate boardrooms by 2030 is positive, as a lot of effort has already been made in the country (Mwagiru, 2019). Kenya had a significant "turning point" after the post-election crisis in 2007/2008. The country has since signed and ratified a number of conventions and enacted a myriad of laws and policies to address the unequal representation of men and women and to promote gender equality and equity. However, the placing of women into more inferior roles than men, the violation of women's rights and the continuing impact of men wielding more power, is slowing down progress regarding gender equality in the country (Okech, 2019). Women have been marginalised and underrepresented in the organs of decision-making and in governance structures in Kenya since independence. Kenya counts more women than men in the labour, force but significantly fewer women than men in leadership positions (Murugami, 2018). Some of the influencers that hold women back from acquiring leadership positions can be traced back to patriarchal mindsets which are a persistent

challenge to reaching gender equity (Mwagiru, 2019). Different authors have suggested that the role of a leader is mainly viewed as a masculine role (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, and Ristikari (2011) in Murugami, 2018, p. 53). Women are associated with being too communal and agreeable to be respected in roles as leaders. Theories in literature suggest that female leaders that act in a more assertive way, might gain more credibility in their leading positions, but at the same time lose likability as society does not link a woman to being too confident and secure in their behavioural attributes. This theory is called the backlash effect and "poses a significant barrier to gender equality in the workplace." (Phelan & Rudman, 2010). Gender inequalities need to be addressed and more efforts have to be made to eliminate the discrepancies. Diversity in the workplace leads to more independence and empowerment for women, but also to a likely increase in profitability for companies (Pollmann, 2017). Therefore, companies should not see gender diversity as a recommendation, but rather as an obligation.

1. 2 Problem Statement, Research Objectives and Research Questions

Mungai & Ogot (2012, p. 176) say: "Most cultures, particularly in Africa, are of masculine nature, with masculine notions, stereotypes, values, beliefs and assumptions." This argument leads to the idea that women must be less represented in boardrooms in Africa than in continents with a less masculine nature. Looking at numbers only however, Africa as a region counts "more women in executive committees, CEO, and board roles in companies than the average worldwide" (Lohini Moodley et al., 2016, p. 3). The Southern and Eastern countries of Africa perform best in including women in management and board positions with an average of 17.1%, compared to the north with 7.3% (Fraser-Moleketi et al., 2015). Nevertheless, it is important to look at the different industries, the fact that women struggle to reach the top, and even if they do so, own less power than men do. Women face difficulties in being appointed to higher positions and that is affected by a multiple of variables (Fraser-Moleketi et al., 2015). Researchers and scholars have been conducting various studies in order to analyse the reasons for men to be more powerful and own more seats in parliaments, board, senior, and leadership positions. The most common and repeated reasons for gender inequalities at the workplace according to scholars can be categorised as shown in the following:

- **Institutional factors such as organisations/workplaces** (Petrongolo & Ronchi, 2020; Murugami, 2018; Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2016; Steyn & Parsaloi, 2014; Nilsson, 2013) **and laws and policies set by governments** (Nguyen et al., 2020; Fraser-Moletki et al.,

> Puzyreva et al., 2018; Kameri-Mbote, 2006; Pala, 1983; Reguera-Alvarado et al., 2017; Hills, 2015; Kioko et al. 2020)

- **Sociocultural factors** (Chang & England, 2011; Mwagiru, 2019; Murugami, 2018; Fraser-Moleketi et al., 2015; Chabaya et al., 2009; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Bush & Gao, 2017; Phelan & Rudman, 2010)

- **Other reasons such as tax reasons** (Olivetti & Petrongolo, 2016); **Smaller board**s and therefore a smaller number of women (Fraser-Moleketi et al., 2015); **Age** and **Experience** (Chang & England, 2011)

Institutional	Socio-Cultural Factors	Others
•Less access to career and education possibilites for women •Combining of family responsibilities and work •Lack of mentors •Access to land •Government regulations	•Stereotypes •Ideology •Gender Roles •Backlash •"Queen Bee"	•Tax reasons •Smaller board seats → smaller number of women •Age •Experience

Figure 1-1: Factors contributing to Gender Inequalities

Source: Own illustration

Ibarra et al. (2013, p. 1) mention a "mismatch between how women are seen and the qualities and experiences people tend to associate with leaders." Researchers point out that women are neglected in their role as leaders not necessarily due to "strategic" reasons, but rather due to "ideological" factors, which is something seen especially in patriarchal cultures (Bush & Gao, 2017). The traditional culture of Kenya - like many other African countries - is very much embedded in the mindsets of its people, which is partially also the reason for the country's progression of developments (Bwisa & Ndolo, 2011). Even though constitutions and legislations are being established, and the government and various organisations are fighting

gender inequality, parity is far from being achieved. Patriarchy and sexism are the main reason for the fact that the role of women in many societal contexts is seen as inferior to the role of men (Wangila, 2015).

Focusing on legal components and how these walk in lockstep with sociocultural factors might give useful insights in how to overcome the obstacles to achieving equality between the sexes, since women not only face difficulties in being appointed to board seats and management positions, but also in receiving loans and other financial support to fund businesses. Men are often seen as being more capable and competent of starting a business than women due to sociocultural factors which creates a big barrier to for women to achieve financial independence (Bolin, 2018).
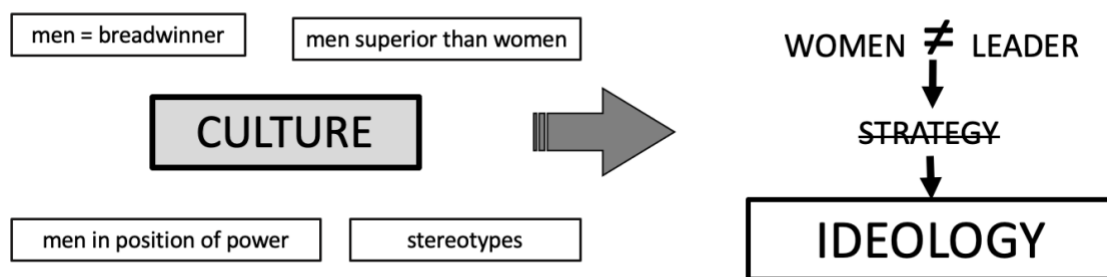
Figure 1-2: Culture and the Perception of Women

Source: Own illustration

This study will look at institutional factors such as the legal framework with regards to gender equality in Kenya and how this is impacted by barriers, which include societal attitudes and behaviours and the resulting backlash effects that hinder women from reaching the top. To address this topic the following research objectives were set:

1. Examine the gender parity status quo in leadership of Kenyan SMEs.
2. Examine women's pathway to leadership in Kenya by looking at the institutional factors that influence and impact gender equality.
3. Understand the (sociocultural) barriers and gender backlash and how they impact on women leadership in small- and medium-sized organisations in Kenya.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Based on the above objectives, the following research questions will support the dissertation by its findings. The research questions evolved and were based on a positivist, as well as a critical researcher guiding paradigm (Lapan et al., 2011). Based on the literature review and theories, a conceptual framework will be presented at the end of Chapter 2.

Research Questions:

1. What is the gender composition in leadership of the organisations under review and how does this composition influence gender equality in the SMEs?
2. What are the institutional factors that promote or hinder women rising to leadership and decision-making positions in Kenya? What legal instruments are in place to promote or hinder attaining gender equality?
3. What role do culture and beliefs play for women at work in Kenya? What are the theories of backlash that affect or influence gender equality debates and women's leadership in Kenya?

The study targeted leaders of small- and medium-sized companies. In this study context, a leader is regarded as someone who manages, trains, supports and helps to develop employees with various skills and abilities to work collectively towards an organisation's bigger goal (Winston & Patterson, 2006).

A qualitative method approach was employed whereby snowballing and purposive sampling methods were used to recruit study key informants. This involved identifying first few accessible women in leadership for recruitment to the study cohort, whereby the cohort members were then requested to recommend other potential respondents who, in turn, suggested others. Through this method the researcher easily accessed the study participants and obtained a reasonably representative sample of workers based at small- and medium-sized organisations in Kenya. In addition, the snowball sampling does not require the construction of a sampling frame (Sedgewick, 2016).

Chapter 2
Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2. 1   The Need for Gender Diversity

2. 1. 1 Global Call for Gender Equality

Globally, countries are fighting for equal opportunities for women and men as gender equality leads to economic growth, better health conditions, and social rewards (Shannon et al., 2019). Research suggests that in a full-potential scenario in labour markets where women have equal importance and relevance as men do "[…] as much as \$28 trillion, or 26 percent, could be added to global annual GDP in 2025." (Woetzel, 2015). A greater inclusion of women in companies could especially be for a benefit for countries with aging populations according to Woetzel (2015). The author finds in his study, where 15 gender equality indicators as measurement were used, that 40 out of 95 countries "have extremely high or high levels of inequality on half or more of the 15 indicators" (Woetzel, 2015, p. 1).

In order to eliminate the inequalities and remove entry barriers for women in the workforce, anti-discrimination laws can help to create equal opportunities, especially in "male dominated, high-income occupations" (Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017). Government interventions supporting the improvement of female-friendly company policies and opportunities to combine careers and family responsibilities can attract highly qualified women and open up more possibilities to choose from a wider pool of talent (Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017; Shannon et al., 2019). Companies will benefit from the inclusion of women on boards as it reflects the impression of a "women-friendly" firm (Bell, 2005). In 2007 Spain passed mandatory legislation to promote women on boards - only the second country world to do so - as "[..] compulsory regulations are a powerful mechanism that is in the hands of governments in order to achieve effective gender diversity in boards" (Reguera-Alvarado et al., 2017, p. 347). Bell (2005) suggests that women in executive jobs are paid better if their board members, managers and companies' CEOs are female.

In 2017 the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) for the first time had a 50:50 representation of men and women at its mid-term conference. The ETUC has the mission to promote gender diversity in its member unions and thus it introduced an annual equality survey to monitor and evaluate the progress of women's participation in the unions. Even though the general participation of women has risen, the survey results show that women in decision making roles and key leadership positions are still not equally represented (The Contribution of Social Dialogue to Gender Equality, 2021). The International Labour Conference established the Violence and Harassment Convention 2019 (No. 190), which was followed by a Recommendation (No. 206) as a result of severe and increased acts of violence in work environments (The Contribution of Social Dialogue to Gender Equality, 2021). The convention called for an elimination of violence and harassment against women and "it also recognizes that violence and harassment may involve third parties (e.g. clients, customers, service providers and patients) who, depending on the circumstances, may be victims or perpetrators of it." (The Contribution of Social Dialogue to Gender Equality, 2021, p. 9).

2. 1. 2 Performance Impacts and Breakthroughs for Companies

Literature suggests that when looking at performance outcomes - both financial and non-financial - companies with a high share of women tend to perform better than their competitors with smaller shares of women. Fèlix and David (2019) investigated the impact of gender diversity at the management level of 199 Portuguese family-owned companies from 2006 to 2014. The authors confirmed positive firm performance compared to their competitors that did not include women in their management positions. Having a gender diverse board adds value to firms as "it brings to the board new ideas and different skills and views." (Reguera-Alvarado et al., 2017, p. 347). Additionally, women have greater international experience, according to a study in the UK (Nguyen et al., 2020). The same study found that female directors were better qualified than men in that they hold degrees such as an MBAs etc. (Singh, Terjesen, & Vinnicombe, 2008 in Nguyen et al., 2020). One of the biggest benefits are social and ethical breakthroughs that allow companies to perform better than their competitors who do not include gender diversity in their business practices (Nguyen et al., 2020). Reguera-Alvarado et al. (2017) looked at 125 non-financial companies listed on the Madrid Stock Exchange and concluded a "positive relationship between board gender diversity and positive economic results" and that "having more women in governance positions increase[s] the business

performance" (p. 347). Ionascu et al. (2018) concluded in their study - where they looked at companies listed in the Romanian stock market - that companies can benefit from a gender diverse board, as well as compensating for the deficient governance practices in emerging (EU)-markets. Gender equality policies can benefit the financial performance of a firm and contribute to sustainable development practices (Ionascu et al., 2018).

When looking at company size, researchers suggest that "large cap companies typically fare better than mid-cap or small-cap companies in placing women on boards […]" (Fraser-Moleketi et al., 2015, p. 21), which might be due to the fact that big companies are more concerned with having broader diversity in their boards as the media draws more attention to them (Fraser-Moleketi et al., 2015). The Australian Stock Exchange (ASX) was the first stock exchange that required gender diversity for companies to be listed, which led to an increase in women on board seats. Norway instituted a quota law that requires a minimum presence of women on corporate board rooms of 40%. The quota was first introduced in 2003 and fully implemented by 2008. Large corporations had raised initial concerns around not finding enough qualified women; however ,the seats were replaced instead of increased and filled with female members who happened to be more qualified and ended up carrying out their role to a higher standard than their previous male counterparts (Hughes et al., 2017). East African Breweries in Kenya had the highest percentage of women on boards in Africa in 2013 with 45.5%, nearly reaching parity between the sexes (Fraser-Moleketi et al., 2015, p. 14). Before a look is taken at gender diversity in SMEs, the next chapter will give a definition and explanation of the SME sector in general and specifically in Kenya.

2. 1. 3 SMEs in Kenya

When categorising an organisation as a micro-, small- and/or medium-sized enterprise, it is important to consider the number of employees, revenue and numbers on the balance and income sheet (Poole, 2018). The European Commission categorises SMEs as the following:

1. The category of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is made up of enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons and which have an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million.

2. Within the SME category, a small enterprise is defined as an enterprise which employs fewer than 50 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 10 million.

3. Within the SME category, a microenterprise is defined as an enterprise which employs fewer than 10 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 2 million. (Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 Concerning the Definition of Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, 2003).

Table 2-1: SME Categorisation

Company Category	Staff headcount	Turnover	or Balance sheet total
Medium-sized	< 250	≤ € 50 m	≤ € 43 m
Small	< 50	≤ € 10 m	≤ € 10 m
Micro	< 10	≤ € 2 m	≤ € 2 m

Source: European Commission based on Article 2

The European Commission notes that on top of that the importance of considering factors that at first sight may not seem too obvious but which might have an important impact on the performance of a company, such as subsidies, or ownerships taken by larger or more established companies.

Medium-sized companies in Kenya differ from the classification of the European Commission: "The sizes of MSMEs are categorized into micro (1-9 employees), small (10-49 employees) and medium (50-99 employees) sized establishment." (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2017, p. 16).

A large amount proportion of Kenyan SMEs operate in the service sector "with most operating in wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles followed by accommodation and food service activities and other service activities." (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2017, p. 47). Accommodation and food services (restaurants, kiosks, hotels, bars), electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; information and

communication; financial and insurance activities; and administrative and support service activities (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2017), as well as manufacturing, wholesale and retail, and agriculture are widely represented in the SME sector (Ong'olo & Awino, 2013).

Looking at the gender composition of business owners, the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2017) reports "that 47.9 per cent of the licensed establishments were owned by males and 31.4 per cent were owned by females. Further, 60.7 per cent of unlicensed establishments were solely owned by females." (p. 17). Nordentoft (2020, p. 2) highlights that "a majority of the workforce operates in the informal economy (83%), which is shaded by non-compliance of labour regulations (including wages).". In illegal settings, the media - as well as the government -has less power to draw attention to unfair conditions which can be very harmful, especially for minorities (Nordentoft, 2020).

SMEs are especially confronted with 'market failures' and 'structural barriers' as they often suffer from a lack of management and strategic knowledge competencies (European Commission, 2020). Muriithi (2017) emphasises the importance of SMEs in developing economies because of their accessibility both from a demand as well as a supply side. "In the Sub-Saharan Africa region, SMEs account for more than 95 percent of all firms." (Hatega, 2007; Kauffmann, 2005 in Muriithi, 2017, p. 1). Kenya experienced exceptionally good economic performance in 2009 and 2010 after the previous post-election crisis had thrown the country into violence and ethnic conflict, which exacerbated financial struggles, all on top of a global financial crisis (Kimenyi et al., 2016). SMEs are always an engine for the economy; however, the author Kumar (2017) draws attention to the struggle that SMEs face when it comes to stable electricity grids, reliable infrastructures, and costs such as licenses, other fees that arise, and taxes. As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kenyan government introduced the Finance Bill 2020 on 5 May 2020, which aimed to reduce corporate income tax which might help SMEs to be more stable (East Africa Tax Alerts | Deloitte East Africa, 2021). Kung'u states that the main problem for SMEs to more independence is the denied access to 'public equity markets' (Kung'u, 2011, p. 2). Kenyan SMEs collect their equity through national and local banks in most cases, or through informal lending from personal networks e.g. family members and friends (Kung'u, 2011).

The Kenyan government aims to support SMEs in their growth and development, which is why it set up the Private Sector Development Strategy (PSDS) (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Programmes such as the Micro Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) Competitiveness Project aim to create jobs and decrease poverty in Kenya. The government, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the World Bank "initiated the project to support the development of the private sector, generate wealth and alleviate poverty in Kenya." (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2017, p. 29). The programme does not only include enterprises from the formal economy but also from the informal economy, which is crucial to equality aims, as the majority of Kenyan women operate in this sector (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

2. 1. 4 Gender Inequalities in SMEs

In the case of medium-sized enterprises, authors argue that a closer relationship to the management level allows more flexible and women-friendly conditions (Woodhams & Lupton, 2006). The authors point out that even without formal policies and legislations, medium-sized enterprises perform well in practising gender diversity, as it is more likely that employees know each other personally and in private contexts, which allows them greater understanding to be more flexible to respond to ad-hoc requests such as flexible working times when a child is ill (Woodhams & Lupton, 2006). Woodhams and Lupton (2006) compared small- with medium-sized enterprises and concluded that medium-sized enterprises are more likely to include equality policies and practices. Small firms do mostly not have formal equality procedures but the authors are noting that just because a company has these practices and policies embedded in their culture and policies, it does not mean that it "necessarily indicate[s] either the presence or absence of actual equality of opportunity." (Woodhams & Lupton, 2006, p. 164). Woodhams & Lupton (2006) argue that SMEs might lack HR managers with expertise regarding the successful implementation of equality issues in comparison with large enterprises, but they rather work on gender equality topics without formal quotas. On the other hand SMEs often prefer the investment in other HR directions than gender equality as it might seem more lucrative and competitive for managers at first sight (Woodhams & Lupton, 2006). The authors argue that especially in small enterprises there is often little motivation to engage with gender equality issues, which might be due to a lack of management and governance trainings. SMEs have often reported a skill shortage which makes them chose talents in terms of knowledge, experience and skills, rather than considering the gender balance as a primary factor

(Woodhams & Lupton, 2006). That a higher share of women on board seats in SMEs can have positive effects on a firm's performance was also confirmed by Martín-Ugedo and Minguez-Vera (2014), as they conducted a study in which they looked at SMEs in Spain.

A gap exists in the literature as it seems difficult to find reliable data on how SMEs in Kenya perform when including women on their boards and in management positions. A number of papers look at women in entrepreneurship and the informal sector, but do not explore existing factors and barriers for women acquiring leadership positions specifically in SMEs.

2. 2 Factors and Barriers impacting Gender Equality

2. 2. 1 Role of the Government

Laws, Policies and Regulations in Africa

Authors find that a larger representation of women in parliament and government results in a wider share of Women on Corporate Boards (WOCBs) (Chizema et al., 2015 in Nguyen et al., 2020, p. 25). To counter inequalites and to set up laws that provide equal inclusion, efforts have been made globally to strive for equality of outcomes for women. Legislation and conventions have been set up by the government and, partially, on a private level. Janine Hills (2015) and Kioko et al. (2020) mention the following conventions that promote gender equality in Africa: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); Political Rights of Women (1952); Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); Civic and Political Rights (1966); The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979); The Beijing Platform for Action (1995); The UN Millennium Development Goals (2000); Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000); The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) and the SADC (South African Development Community) Gender and Development Protocol (2003).

Laws, policies, and regulations enacted by national governments can affect the way men and women are perceived by society which is why it is important to have laws in place that do not exclude one gender. In 1983 Pala argued that the individuation of land rights might lead to women being in a disadvantaged position in terms of owning rights (Pala, 1983). Kameri-Mbote (2006) calls for a need to replace state and individual ownership of natural resources

with "a regime that gives access predicated on the relationship that an entity has with the resource" (Kameri-Mbote, 2006). The results of placing women in a more inferior role than men means that up until today women suffer from unequal rights in terms of accessing lands and resources in Kenya. If women were given autonomy over resources and land, it could mean movement from a "reproductive role" to a "productive role" (Mies, 2003 in Kameri-Mbote, 2006). This autonomy can be given by creating laws and regulations. Kameri-Mbote (2006), however, warns that the creation of regulations does not necessarily result in more women owning land, as women are less likely to be given financial credits and the general perception of a women not being able to manage resources persists (Kameri-Mbote, 2006). What is important to note here is that women in Kenya can have access to land, e.g. by inheriting it, but do not own it legally yet, as it is regulated by governed statutory, customary and religious laws (Kameri-Mbote, 2006). Ensuring equal access to land and resources however, is for women, especially in the Global South, a step closer due to economic and social development, which is - amongst other reasons - why the Millennium Development Goals, that were later on extended to the SDGs, were established (Kameri-Mbote, 2006). At this point "[f]eminist critiques of development have identified the marginalization of women from the means of production as a critical factor in the subordination of women." (Boserup, 1970 in Kameri-Mbote, 2006, p. 43).

Legal Framework Kenya

Besides the above described inequalities in owning land rights, the Kenyan government has made some efforts regarding gender equality, like the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategy (Wangila, 2015) in 1985, which aimed to strengthen the position of women in Kenyan society via a constitution signed in 2010 that states that "not more than two thirds of the members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender" (*The Constitution of Kenya*, 2010, pp. 24). The latter resulted in an increase of women on boards in state-owned companies from 15% to 20% in just two years (2010-2012) (Fraser-Moleketi et al., 2015). The constitution of Kenya includes clauses to tackle gender issues, as mentioned in Article 59(1) of the Kenya National Human Rights and Equality Commission and in 59 (2)(b): "*to promote gender equality and equity generally and to coordinate and facilitate gender mainstreaming in national development.*" (The Constitution of Kenya, 2010, p. 40). In the eighth periodic report of the Republic of Kenya, the implications of the 2010 Constitution, which was based on the CEDAW (Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), were evaluated by different bodies such as research and academic institutions, as well as

international organisations. As a result, the 2010 Kenyan constitution was evaluated as "one of the most progressive in the world for its inclusive and comprehensive bill of rights […]" (Access to Government Procurement Opportunities, 2017). The authors state that "the new Constitution provides significant principles and mechanisms for preventing the recurrence of human rights violations and economic crimes." (Akech, 2010, p. 20).

Akech notes the following aims stated in the 2010 constitution:
1. Diffusion of tensions between ethnicities
2. Transformation of the electoral system with the aim to include people from all 'segments' in the government and ensure equal representation
3. Re-organising and rethinking structures and laws in access to (national) resources
4. Elimination of unfair conditions in accessing land which enforces inequalities and marginalises different ethnic societies
5. "Realization of equality and inclusive citizenship." (Akech, 2010, p. 20).

The main values and principles in the 2010 constitution are of a "devolution of power, participation of the people, equity, social justice, inclusiveness, nondiscrimination, and protecting 'the marginalised'." (Akech, 2010, p. 20). Akech (2010) argued that the principles laid out in the 2010 constitution had the means to bring justice to women if legislative quotas were carried out and executed accordingly. As this thesis addresses gender inequalities in SMEs, the 2010 Constitution's aim of eliminating inequalities holds great meaning. For the elimination of gender inequalities, laws such as the Employment Act are crucial. Under article 5 "Discrimination in employment", it is written under point 2 that: "An employer shall promote equal opportunity in employment and strive to eliminate discrimination in any employment policy or practice ". Point 3 requires 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 [...] sex […]" (*Employment Act*, 2012). These articles are important to consider when looking at the gender inequalities in Kenyan SMEs and the rise of women to reach leadership positions. Important to note is that constitutions and laws provide the framework and governmental guidelines. However, the execution depends much on how the suggested "rules, values, and principles are realized day to day" (Akech, 2010, p. 36). Okech (2019) criticises the slow and weak enforcement of the laws and policies in Kenya, which can be blamed on the construction of gender roles, sexism and stereotypes. Kenya has

passed nation-wide legislation to tackle sex inequality, but years after the 2010 constitution was introduced, women still remain underrepresented, especially in leadership positions. To evaluate the effectiveness of the policies and legislations by the Kenyan government, Puzyreva et al. (2018) examined different approaches where six out of 19 policies scored "high" and five scored "low" in useful gender engagement, whilst the rest were in the middle.

Additionally, authors stress that through rules such as the two-third gender rule, it has become common to co-opt women into (political) leadership positions. This phenomenon was also mentioned by Bush and Gao (2017), where women in parts of the Muslim world are appointed into political positions to gain representation, which was seen during the elections in Yemen and in Jordan in 1990. Women were appointed into very conservative parties which led to the perception that these parties had modernised their thought patterns and believed that women could be successful leaders. However, they only did so in order to fill seats and to attract even more voters. A similar case could be seen in Morocco in 2000, where women were listed in parliament seats only in order to pass gender quotas (Bush and Gao, 2017). Co-opting women into positions due to gender quotas does not help in promoting women because people believe in their ability and skills. By just co-opting women into positions, women will still not be given the power to promote other women into management positions or to have an impact in organisations or parliaments (Kioko et al., Chapter: The Two-Thirds Gender Rule and the Question of Women Empowerment in Kenya; Abendroth et al., 2017).

Researchers have analysed a "critical mass" that requires more than 50% of women in the workforce or governmental bodies in order for them to promote other women to receive promotions (Agrawal, 2014 in Bolin, 2018). The Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) - which Kenya is a partner country of - is monitoring the progress and improvements that are being made in sociocultural norms, with the main objective of achieving a 50% participation of women in business activities in the sector (Bolin, 2018). At this point, women often face backlashes as some authors disagree with the 50% critical mass threshold and criticise the approach that numbers can be equalised with impact. Krook (2015), for example, argues that "not all women in politics prioritize the fight for women's rights, at the same time that some men in politics do." Steyn and Pasoloi (2014) state that just setting up policies and rules does not necessarily result in gender equity. "It is in particular the organisational barriers, socio-cultural attitudes

and the stereotyping of women's roles in society that have acted as hindrances towards women seeking leadership positions." (Steyn & Parsaloi, 2014, pp. 5989).

2. 2. 2 Sociocultural Factors

Stereotypes, Gender Roles and Responsibilities

Ancient civilisations influenced imbalances of rights between men and women, including the exploitation of women's labour, childbearing, and sexuality (Lorber, 2005). The feminist and writer, Marilyn French, however, holds an opposing view and sees women as holding a powerful role exactly because they, uniquely, hold the position of the childbearer, feeding the children and caring for them, and with that maintaining their reproduction. According to this belief, men had to create power in order to build an identity that gave them a meaning as well (Radtke et al., 1994). Marilyn French and other feminists argue that men are not more powerful by nature, but are merely "self-proclaimed" (Radtke et al., 1994, p. 47).

Other authors argue that the inferior role of women in society probably stemmed from the physical and biological differences of men and women that were remodelled into social discrepancies and coupled with a tendency to project women as "weak" (Nilsson, 2013). Kameri-Mbote (2006) highlights the dangerous conceptualisation of a social construction of gender in that the means, tasks and roles of men and women differ from each other and are predetermined, especially in patriarchal societies in African countries. Patriarchal cultures especially followed traditional gender role allocations, where men served as "breadwinners" and women took care of the household and children and these gender roles are "viewed to have been designed to keep women in a subordinate place." (Begum, Ja, Khan, 2013 in Murugami, 2018, p. 53).

Even though these theories differ hugely from another in their standpoints, they eventually lead to an overlapping position and agree that the people who have been given powerful roles, traditionally as well as historically, are men rather than women. This disproportionate weight of power and influence thus evolved to beliefs and concepts that are embedded socially as well as culturally in mindsets, and are often seen as how gender structures are supposed to be, which have then evolved into gender stereotypes (Hoyt & Burnette, 2013). The present-day world strengthened the property of men, and the gendering and pointing out differences between men

and women has led to a continuous widening of the gender gap (Lorber, 2005). "Stereotypes have been defined as "cognitive structures that contain the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about some human group." (Hamilton & Trolier, 1986, p. 133, italics added in Rudman & Phelan, 2008, p. 62). Authors argue that such placing of men and women into different categories, and then additionally determining which interests and behaviours are appropriate for their respective gender role, highlights the discrepancies of men and women in different social settings such as the workplace (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014).

In a study that was conducted to investigate gender perceptions amongst transgender people, researchers looked into how people categorise other people as "men" or "women" and found that far more importance is placed on "identity-based ideologies" rather than "biological factors" by individuals (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). These "identity-based ideologies" turned into a complex arrangement of sex and gender categorisation (Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). The categorisations of "men" and "women" are connected to mindsets and beliefs and shape 'expectancies' about the sexes. In the literature the components of this concept are termed descriptive and prescriptive components (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). The first defines how people are being perceived by others whilst the latter defines "should and should nots" of behaviours judged by other people (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Fiske & Stevens, 1993; Gill, 2004; Prentice & Carranza,2002 in Rudman & Phelan, 2008, p. 63). Women are more likely to be described with personality attributes such as being "people-oriented, warm and kind" (Basow, 1986; Williams & Best, 1990 in Phelan & Rudman, 2010), whilst men are associated with agentic attributes and self-directed attributes such as being stronger, clearer, competent and achievement oriented, which are attributes that are likely to be connected with successful leadership (Phelan & Rudman, 2010).

Okech (2019) finds a correlation between the exclusion of women from military services in Kenya that places women in the role of the "defended" whilst men are being put in the role of the "defenders". Such structures result in strengthening society's perceptions of feminine and masculine roles which is "crucial to […] sexism." (Okech, 2019). To relief such societal beliefs and perceptions and in order to speed up results and change people's way of thinking the need for education on issues around gender equality at grassroots levels was emphasised by Nilsson (2013). The author, however, warns of a possible solidification of strengthening beliefs around gender roles and women's status in society. "Values, tradition, and therefore, culture are not

and cannot be sacred. The malice of refusing women the right to be independent individuals cannot be protected behind the veil of values called culture." (Nilsson, 2013, p. 132). This is likely to happen in schools that are already in a "gender discriminating society" (Nilsson, 2013, p.129) as they will not have issues around women's equality and the equitable treatment of boys and girls on their teaching agenda. The risk that evolves is that students will not critically question gender roles but instead embed them even more into their mindsets and carry them inside them throughout their lives. (Nilsson, 2013).

Cultural Norms, Backlashes and Role of Congruity impacting Leadership

The role of congruity by Eagly (2002 in Rudman & Phelan, 2008; Hoyt & Burnette, 2013) argues that men's expected roles in social contexts are congruent with the ones expected in work contexts, which does not apply for women. From a cultural perspective, leadership is generally seen as rather something masculine (Ely et al., 2011). This argument is confirmed in a Kenyan study where employers ranked their male employees as more resistant to stress, more persistent and more capable of leading a team, in contrast to female employees who lost in almost every category against men (Sanchez Puerta et al., 2018). Evidence exists that the prescriptive gender role that is foisted on women does not correlate with one that is associated with leadership and leads to disapproval and penalties.

Nevertheless, women do act in agentic ways but then find themselves particularly disliked by male observers (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This theory was confirmed by Bauer and Carpinella, who analysed the political campaigns of female politicians and found that the more their campaigns deviated from gender stereotypes, the more they experienced more negative feedback and fewer votes (Bauer & Carpinella, 2018). Thus, it can be argued that globally "[…] women are prohibited from demonstrating the self-assertion, dominance and achievement orientation so celebrated in men." (Heilman, 2012). Researchers investigated the perception and ensuing treatment of women by their colleagues when acting in ways that are not "norms" for their gender roles according to stereotypes and expectations by society. Because of the described prescriptive and proscriptive stereotypes women were, as expected, negatively perceived, as they were not showing enough "feminine attributes" anymore (Dodge, Gilroy, & Fenzel, 1995; Glick, Zion, & Nelson, 1988; Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995 in Phelan & Rudman, 2010).

The violation of the prescriptions for gender roles and resulting dislike, social disapproval, and disfavour by single people, colleagues and society itself is named "gender backlash" (Rudmann & Phelan, 2008) in the literature (Heilman, 2012). Ibarra et al. (2013) state that these backlash effects often influence the evaluation of performance feedback, where successful female managers tend to have large falls in their likeability, whilst men do not experience that. Authors express that the role of a leader being associated with masculine attributes or being seen as a masculine role due to stereotypes (Murugami, 2018), as well as "gender norms and women's positioning within cultural communities is a significant denominator of opportunities and limitations faced in leadership." (Mwagiru, 2019).

Women showing strong competencies as leaders were described as acting "too dominant" and agentic, which would hurt the picture or prescribed role of a woman and would fit better to men. If women, however, showed more of their communication skills, cooperation and willingness to make compromises, they faced the risk of not being taken seriously in their role as leaders, and had to deal with prejudices such as not being emotionally capable and without control over themselves (Steyn & Parsaloi, 2014). Several researchers and authors suggest that women who are in competition with men for leadership roles have to show even stronger leadership skills, such as being resilient, but by doing so they lose, again, more of the aspects that they are stereotyped for, such as being communal and willing to compromise.
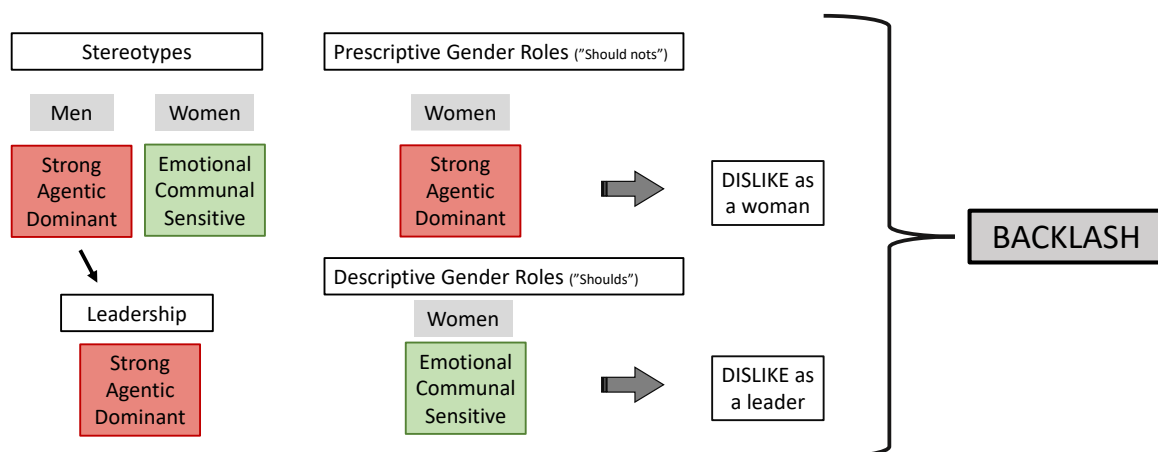

Figure 2-1: Gender Backlash

Source: Own illustration

Backlashes can result in the idea that Grossman et al. (2015) mentioned, where women might not even want to take on leadership positions, even if they could, due to the fear of not being respected in their role. The authors conducted a study where that they looked at gender differences in leadership and verified that women feared not being liked and seen as eligible leaders by men which followed gender role stereotypes. The authors confirmed the "Stereotype Threat" (Steel 1997), a phenomenon discussed in psychology. Zimbabwe has invested decades of efforts to work against gender inequalities, however the country is still facing underrepresentation of women in leading positions. Chabaya et al. (2009) looked in their study at schoolteachers in Zimbabwe and concluded that most of the women involved in the study had the qualifications to be promoted to a position, in principle, but did not actively apply for it. Fraser-Moleketi et al. (2015) argue against the defence often given by companies, who blame a lack of supply of qualified women when trying to justify the small number of women in leadership positions. The authors state that in most of the cases it is clearly a "demand issue" (Fraser-Moleketi et al., 2015, p. 42) as enough qualified women would be available but are not taken into consideration or reached out to by hiring managers in companies and organisations.

The power executed by men evolves here by following social norms, where consequences may be feelings of discomfort and uneasiness from the side of the women (Grossman et al., 2015). Dissatisfaction in the workplace and with the performing role are the most common reasons for women leaving their management position, according to Rudmann & Phelan (2008). Further studies imply that women's work and performances find rare acknowledgment and satisfaction by men (Giuliano et al. 2006; Correll et al. 2007 in Abendroth et al., 2017) and that society has higher expectations from women leaders than from male leaders (Murugami, 2018). The author Heilman concluded his paper about workplace bias by stating "[t]he claim […] has been that gender stereotypes are the basis of biased evaluative judgments and discriminatory treatment of women in work settings." (Heilman, 2012). These "biased judgements" form invisible barriers that hinder women when they try to achieve meaningful, more senior positions.

2. 2. 3 Organisational Factors

Fraser-Moleketi et al. (2015) explain that it is very hard for women in many African countries to enter corporate companies at all, but even when they do so, they tend to be excluded from positions where they can make impactful decisions, as men hold more power than women do. Authors note that merely having a larger amount of women in leadership roles cannot be equalised "with meaningful inclusivity and participation in decision-making processes" (Mwagiru, 2019), which is why it is important to analyse the positions that women are being appointed to and how much their voice matters in those positions (Kulich & Ryan, 2017). A country that faces a backlash where "quantity does not mean quality" (Kulich & Ryan, 2017, p. 2) is Rwanda, as the country had - with 63,3% - the highest representation of women in parliament worldwide, but nevertheless women there still face difficulties to feel accepted, acknowledged and be able to participate in negotiations and impactful decision making (Mukabera, 2019; Murugami, 2018). Okech (2019) mentions in his analysis the gender dilemma that Rwanda is facing: The country is known for having more women in parliament than men, "[h]owever, the progressive laws and policies that provide equal access to land and the robust provision of marriage equality is informed by the impact of the genocide on the Rwandan population that led to a higher population of women." (Okech, 2019). Patriarchal influences and the supremacy of men shape societal contexts and dynamics in Africa (Løvgren, 2015). This often leads to acts of violence against women and domination over them by men (Løvgren, 2015). When coping with violent conflicts and extreme poverty as a result of masculinity, women are impacted in their productive roles (Løvgren, 2015), which call for a greater need to explain and justify why women should occupy decision-making positions and establish transformative policies. At this point, from a workplace perspective, opinions and study results differ when evaluating if female leaders support other female employees or not. Abendroth et al. (2017) state that women face earning penalties when having a same sex supervisor which men do not experience. Abendroth explains the following: "Women in supervisory positions [may] seem, in general, not to be powerful enough to promote female workers […]" (Abendroth et al., 2017).

Additionally, there is the "Queen bee" phenomena that is described when women tend to try to act more like dominant male-leaders, exhibiting stereotypically male behaviours and executing their power (Staines et al., 1974 in Nguyen et al., 2020). This may lead to a situation where other women find it harder to be promoted and where women in top management positions

could even decrease the chances for other women to be appointed to similar positions (Nguyen et al., 2020). Other researchers, however, claim the opposite and argue against this argument. Bell (2005) refers to the positive relation between having more women on boards with the average compensation and number of senior women in the company. She concludes that women with female supervisors have better career outcomes than if they had a man as a supervisor (Bell, 2005). Ibarra et al. (2013) also argue against Nguyen et al. and as with Bell, they think that women in the workplace open up ways for other women to move forward and upwards, as they recognise their strengths and believe in their abilities more than men would do. However, the authors admit that it is rare to have female leaders that are persistent enough to assert oneself to make it easier for other women to mobilise.

Other theories suggest that men receiving promotions and acquiring leadership positions often did so due to being part of communities and social clubs from where they make connections to have better chances later on. This is in the literature referred to "the old boys' network" from which women are mostly excluded due to cultural attitudes and stereotypes (Vinnicombe et al., 2008; Mwagiru, 2019; Fraser-Moleketi et al., 2015). Rachel et al. argue that these male-only networks are created in order for men to gain power over women. "It is essential to exclude girls from initiatory institutions: their presence would subvert the entire purpose to divide the sexes and inculcate boys with the idea that domination is not just essential to manhood but divinely ordained." (Radtke et al., 1994, p. 59). Steyn & Parsoloi refer to the authors Kelly (2008); Kiamba (2008) and Osumbah (2011) who talked about women being "[…] historically encouraged to develop personality traits and behaviours that prevented them from participating in leadership." (2014, p. 5984). These views of different authors find consensus in that it is the stereotyping of women that stems from cultural attitudes and gender inequalities in societal structures. These gender inequalities eventually lead to gender inequality in the workplace (Woetzel, 2015; Steyn & Parsaloi, 2014). "Gendered stereotypes coupled with moral imperatives often justify the discrimination and abuse of women, particularly those who do not visibly conform to prevailing gender norms and expressions." (Thirikwa, 2018).

2. 3   Conceptual Framework

Figure 2-2 below shows the conceptual framework with the barriers and factors that impact women rising to leadership positions in SMEs in Kenya. This thesis aims to understand such factors. According to the previously evaluated literature in Chapter 2 institutional as well as sociocultural factors can impact women leadership in the workplace.

The literature review presented several legal components such as policies, laws and conventions that are established by the government and have an impact on women acquiring leadership positions. The workplace itself has barriers that hinder women from rising up to leadership positions.

The sociocultural factors are mainly impacted by gender roles and stereotypes that are imbedded in beliefs and mindsets which have an influence on female leadership. Factors on the right side behind the straight line of Figure 2-2, such as age of an employee; the years of experience of an employee; and the company size can, in fact, have an impact on women in leadership positions, but are not looked at in this study.
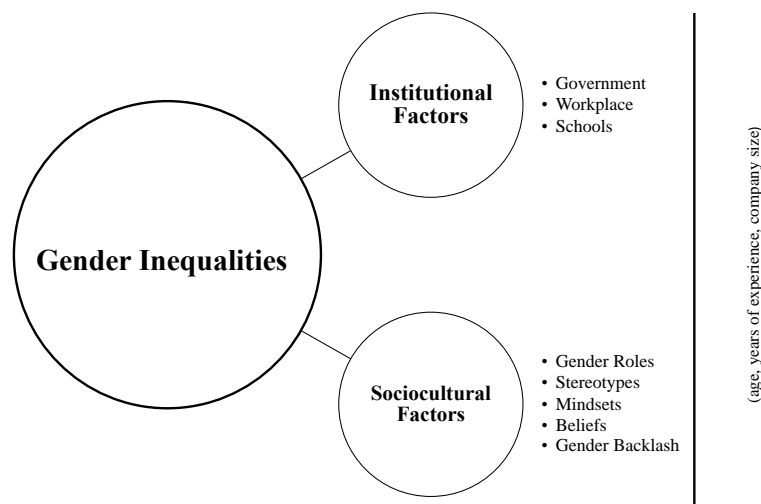
Figure 2-2: Conceptual Framework

Source: Own illustration

Chapter 3   Methodology

3. 1   Research Design

The research methodology incorporates strategies and planning so that the "work can be critiqued, repeated, and adapted" (Lapan et al., 2011, p. 71). In this study a phenomenological research design was adopted in order to help achieving its objectives. Based on Christensen's, Johnson's and Turner's (2014) description, a phenomenological approach is an inductive, descriptive research approach that is developed from phenomenological philosophy and aims to describing experience as it is actually lived by the respondent. The phenomenon can be experienced directly or indirectly by the respondent (Adu, 2019). The researcher found this approach suitable in uncovering meaning from participant stories and discovering themes through participant response commonalities. The approach allowed the respondents to describe the meaning of individual experiences which was clustered into codes and themes later on.

3. 2   Sample Description

The respondents were constituted of a homogenous group with knowledge and experience in the study subject. When deciding if a subject was qualified to participate in the interview, the researcher considered if they were employed in a micro-, small- or medium-sized enterprise in Kenya and if they were holding a management, leadership or founder position. All of them were sampled from private and non-government institutions. The study employed a qualitative method approach, whereby snowballing and purposive sampling methods were used to recruit key interviewees. This approach involved first identifying accessible women in leadership for recruitment to the study cohort. The cohort members were then requested to recommend other potential respondents, who in turn suggested others. This sampling method is considered suitable since the desired target population was hard to reach based on their social-political status, work commitments, and the geographical distance between researcher and interview candidates. In addition, the snowball sampling does not require the construction of a sampling frame (Sedgewick, 2016).

3. 3   Data Collection

Data collection happened at an individual level, as the aim was to explore the beliefs and norms of individual persons. The study was conducted in form of in-depth interviews with a sample of ten people as "differences and similarities" (Lapan et al., 2011, p. 90) of the participants were to be discovered. There exist several forms of in-depth interviews, but due to the study frame the one-time in-depth interviews that may take between one to two hours and include 12 to 15 main questions (Lapan et al., 2011) seemed to be most suitable. As in-depth interviews fall into the category of generated data, it allowed the interviewee to explain and transmit their experiences, feelings and interpretations (Ritchie et al., 2013). The researcher's aim was to have access to true experiences and opinions, feelings and viewpoints unfiltered from the participants. "Very complex systems, processes or experiences are generally best addressed in in-depth interviews because of the depth of focus and the opportunity for clarification and detailed understanding" (Ritchie et al., 2013, p. 58). This research method appeared to be best in the respective study context in order to understand motivations, coherences and resulting impacts and outcomes (Ritchie et al., 2013).

The participants were contacted through a referral of personal contacts, or by searching for people working in Kenyan SMEs via the search function on Linkedin. The prospects were then sent a connection request, and afterwards sent a private message where the aim of the study was briefly explained. The researcher had originally planned to conduct the interviews in person in Kenya. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were all conducted online "*synchronously* (in real time)" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) via Zoom. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewees. The researcher is aware of limitations that come with semi-structured interviews as questions were set prior the interview. However, the questions were asked in a naturally occurring way. The order of the questions varied with each participant, and not all questions were asked to everyone, whilst some questions were added during the interview. This happened in a genuine way, as the researcher understood better what to focus on and how to get the most individual insights of participants, without bias, after conducting the first couple of interviews.

3. 4   Ethical Consideration

When conducting research, it is important to examine ethical and moral aspects. It is to consider that every interview is partially affected by the human that is conducting them. Interviewees may react to the interviewer which could affect the produced outcome. The purpose of conducting interviews is to produce knowledge. From the produced knowledge conclusions can be drawn about e.g. a social phenomenon, human groups, human behavior etc. (Kvale, 2008). At this point it is important to look at the ethical and moral issues that may arise (Kvale, 2008). Kvale suggests ethical questions that can help to frame and evaluate the ethical and moral implications when conducting qualitative research. Table 3-1 presents seven ethical questions that were taken from the book "Doing Interviews" by Kvale (2008). The author of the thesis answered each question according to the purpose and aim of this study. It is important to note that the questions had been answered before the interviews were conducted.

Table 3-1: Ethical Questions

Ethical Questions	*Responses by the author*
1. What are the beneficial consequences of the study?	The researcher hopes to identify the barriers that women face in the workplace and in acquiring leadership positions in Kenya. Identifying the barriers can build a base for future research.
2. How can the study contribute to enhancing the situation of the participating subject?	Talking to affected and experienced people can help discover new areas that research has not found yet. Companies, HR departments, managers, leaders and single employees can be made aware of where the barriers are and how severe they might be. This might lead to a decrease of the extent of the situation if action is taken on e.g. better chances for women in the workplace which can eventually result in greater gender equality.
3. How can the confidentiality of the interview subjects be protected?	The researcher will not publish names of companies, names of interviewees nor connect names with companies. Full confidentiality will be promised and provided.
4. How important is it that the subjects remain anonymous?	The subjects will be asked to talk about their personal experiences and opinions about gender equality issues in Kenya. The subjects will also be asked to provide information about the situation at their workplace. For the subjects not to be feared that any provided information might have consequences on their careers: The

	researcher's priority is the anonymity of the respondents.
5. Who will have access to the interviews?	The master's thesis will include direct quotes of the participants in the findings chapter. The thesis will be handed out to the University of the author (ISCTE Business School Lisbon, Portugal).
6. What are the consequences of the study for the participating subjects?	There will not be further consequences for the participants as full confidentiality and protection of the personal information and data will be provided.
7. How will the researcher's role affect the study?	The researcher will leave room for the respondents to express their feelings, emotions and opinions. The researcher will not interfere and will not have an influence on the saying and opinions of each interviewee. The interviews will be conducted online, which creates a bigger distance between interviewer and interviewee.

Source: Own Illustration. Questions 1:1 taken from "Doing Interviews" (Kvale, 2008)

To provide transparency and comfort to the participants a form of consent was handed out (see Appendix A).

3. 5   Interview Structure

The sample consisted of ten people. The demographics such as gender, age, nationality, sector, company size and position of the interviewees can be taken from Table 3-2. The conduction of the interviewees took place between 6 April 2021 and 13 May 2021 via Zoom. All participants were of Kenyan nationality. The interviews were conducted in English language. The share of speech was roughly between 20% of the interviewer, and 80% of the interviewee. The shortest interview lasted around 32 minutes, whilst the longest interview lasted about 65 minutes. The length of the interview was dependent on how fast the person that was interviewed spoke, their experience, their general ambitions about the topic, and their competence of expressing their opinion.

Table 3-2: Sample Characteristics

P	Gender	Age	Nationality	Sector	Size	Position	Int. Lenght	Date
1	F	25	Kenya	Educational (Kids/Teens)	10	Founder	47.38 min	06.04.2021
2	F	29	Kenya	Pharmaceutical	30	Manager	50.21 min	07.04.2021
3	F	40	Kenya	Food	6	Founder	33.01 min	08.04.2021
4	F	37	Kenya	Engineering	30	Administrator/HR	47.20 min	09.04.2021
5	F	40	Kenya	Research	5	Founder & Exec. Director	49.14 min	12.04.2021
6	M	35	Kenya	Magazine Publishers	12	Director of Business Dev.	44.04 min	20.04.2021
7	M	41	Kenya	Micro credit company	38	Manager	65.30 min	25.04.2021
8	F	37	Kenya	Tec Solutions for Supply Chain	20	Co-Founder, Op.Director	31.42 min	30.04.2021
9	M	53	Kenya	Energy Sector (Oil and Gas industry)	20	Co-Founder	46.26 min	30.04.2021
10	F	38	Kenya	Agriculture	90	HR Director & Board Member	35.51 min	13.05.2021

Source: Own illustration

Chapter 3 Methodology

The interview guideline was developed after existing literature had been analysed. A discussion of the literature was presented in Chapter 2. Based on identified theories by other scholars, the interview questions have been developed with regard to the research objectives. The research questions in Chapter 1.2 gave a guidance throughout the interview. The interview guide can be taken from Appendix B.

All of the ten interviews started with an introduction by the interviewer who was the researcher herself. The interviewer reminded the interviewee of the possibility to withdraw any given answer at any given point, to always ask questions if something is not clear, and about the anonymity of the interview. The interviewees gave their consent for the interviews to be recorded. The purpose of the research was briefly explained, though a briefing had been handed out in written form to all respondents prior to the interview. The interviewee was then asked to give a small introduction with some general facts and information about themselves, their organisation, and their current role within their company. During this part of the process, the interviewees started to feel comfortable talking and most of them would give enough information without the need of the interviewer to further ask for more detail.

The second part of the research addressed research objective one and looked closer at the gender composition of the overall company, the leadership team and whether there were policies in place to promote gender equality.

The third part of the interview addressed the legal framework in Kenya and if the participants were aware of any existing laws and policies. The interviewees were asked to list and name the policies that find practise in their organisations.

The fourth part discussed barriers to equality and stereotypes, and, in most interviews, this section took the largest amount of time. The focus was placed on culture, norms and beliefs around gender roles that exist in Kenya. The decision-making power between men and women was, if not in part two, discussed at this point. The fourth part offered a lot of room for explaining the differences between how men and women are treated in the Kenyan culture. The participants expressed their opinion directly on asked questions or gave examples in the form of their own experiences in their current or former companies, reported examples from close friends or family members, and gave insights into the dynamics in their own families.
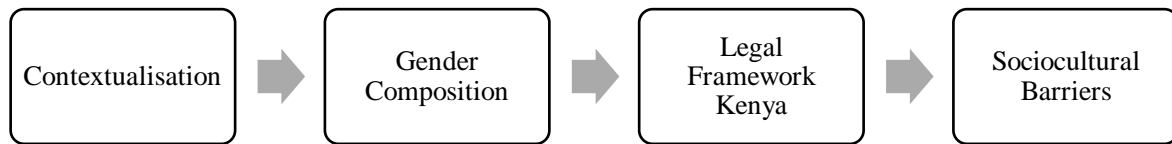
Figure 3-1: Steps in Conducting the Interviews

Source: Own illustration

3. 6   Content Analysis

The interviews were all transcribed verbatim. The researcher used the software otter.ai for easier transcription. The detection of the words, however, was not correct at all times, which required the interviewer to proof-transcribe every single interview one more time. This process took about two to four hours per interview, depending on the length of the interview, fluency of speaking, and clarity of pronunciation. Some sections of the interviews were not easy to understand and required the researcher to re-play the part several times. The transcribing of the raw data allowed the researcher to get comfortable with the content and to highlight sections that would require exact analysis, as the interviewees revealed relevant insights. To analyse the raw data, the method of coding was used. Lapan et al. define coding as the following: "Analysis of qualitative data progresses through classification of ideas, themes, topics, activities, types of people, and other categories relevant to the study." (Lapan et al., 2011, p. 98). The coding process was supported by using the software Atlas.ti.

For the first transcript of Participant 1 (in the following all participants are referred to P1, P2, P3 etc.) the researcher followed an open, inductive coding approach as suggested by Scheu (2018). Adu (2019) suggests breaking down the qualitative data reduction process into the following steps: "Raw data, relevant data, codes, categories, themes." (Adu, 2019, p. 24). The transcript of P1 was coded by first highlighting paragraphs. From there buzzwords and bullet points were pointed out which then resulted in a total of 53 codes. These codes were classified into main and sub-categories. So was e.g. the code "Outcome focused" categorised as related to the code "Qualifications over Gender Balance" which was then merged under the group

"Status Quo", which was later classified as a main theme "Status Quo and Gender Parity Issues in the SMEs assessed" in Chapter 4.2. Appendix C shows a network created with Atlas.ti of some of the quotations that had been applied with the code "Qualifications over Gender Balance" which was then put in the group "1 Status Quo" (see Appendix C for Quotations Qualifications over Gender Balance). The analysis systematically demonstrated the process of thinning the raw data into the emerging themes.

After the coding of the first interview was finished, the second interview was conducted, recorded and transcribed. The transcript of the interview of P2 was analysed by taking into consideration the 53 codes of P1, if they seemed applicable, which is referred to as axial coding (Scheu, 2018). If new codes or themes emerged, they were added to the coding table. This technique was used with all other interviews. However, the number of new codes added to the coding table decreased after the analysis of the interview of P6. This can be explained as patterns started to be repeated and already existing codes could be applied on new transcripts. The process of analysing the data cannot be classified as linear but rather as dynamic, as the analysing of the data happened simultaneously to the conducting of the interviews. The more data was generated, the easier it was to cluster the content into already existing codes and themes from previously analysed interviews. As the researcher developed expectations and certain ideas during the process of the first interviews (Scheu, 2018), the need to minimise the risk that a one-sided view of the content emerged, which required the researcher to step back and analyse the raw data without thinking too much inside the box, and to not feel comfortable too quickly within the research field (Scheu, 2018).

A total of 90 codes emerged at the end of the analysis of the ten interviews that were classified into groups for the analysis. Some codes were moved into more than one group, whilst other codes can only be found in one group. Not all of the listed groups were classified as main themes in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Table 3-3: Table of Codes

Name	Groundedness	Groups
Action needed	0	
Age	13	
Backlash	7	3 Sociocultural
Belief in the Kenyan Government's ability to achieve gender equality	4	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, LEGAL
Bottom up	1	
Co-opting	1	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, INSTITUTIONAL
Cultural	0	
Culture	26	CULTURAL, Root Causes, Hinderences
Culture/Tribe	2	Culture
Decision-making power	13	CULTURAL
Deny of opportunity by gender	4	CULTURAL
Education	10	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, INSTITUTIONAL
Equality vs. Equity	2	
Exclusion	4	3 Socio-Cultural, CULTURAL
Experience	1	1cSTATUS QUO
Extra mile because being a women	1	3 Socio-Cultural
Family Responsibility	1	Gender Roles
Founding own org.	5	
Gender Based Arguments	1	
Gender Composition	5	
Gender Composition Management	8	
Gender Roles	0	3 Socio-Cultural, CULTURAL, Culture
Gender Roles_Men	17	3 Socio-Cultural, Gender Roles
Gender Roles_Women	30	3 Socio-Cultural, Gender Roles
Harder for SMEs	8	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, INSTITUTIONAL
Harder for Women	6	3 Socio-Cultural
Imposter Syndrome	0	3 Socio-Cultural
In Favor of Gender Equality	10	
Incentives Men	1	1 STATUS QUO
Indirect Gender Discrimination	3	1 STATUS QUO, 3 Socio-Cultural
Influence of Gender	5	1 STATUS QUO
Inheritage	3	
Institutional	0	
Law	0	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, LEGAL

Law without effect	9	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, LEGAL
Leadership style	27	
LEGAL	0	
Locker room banter	4	3 Socio-Cultural
Lowering grades for girls	2	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, INSTITUTIONAL
Male dominated sector	5	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, 3 Socio-Cultural, INSTITUTIONAL
Men preferred	8	1 STATUS QUO
Mindset	6	3 Socio-Cultural, CULTURAL
More listen to a man	1	3 Socio-Cultural
No Impact Diverse Management	3	1 STATUS QUO
No policy	8	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, LEGAL
Open door policy	1	
Opinion on exception for girls	6	
Opportunity	8	
Opposite effect of Gender Equality	1	
Outcome focused	3	1 STATUS QUO
Patriarchy	2	3 Socio-Cultural, CULTURAL
Perception	12	3 Socio-Cultural, CULTURAL
Policies needed	5	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, LEGAL
Policy	5	
Political	1	
Power	7	1 STATUS QUO, 3 Socio-Cultural, CULTURAL
Prefer man or woman	1	
Prejuduces_Women	13	CULTURAL, Stereotypes
Privilege	1	
Progress Urban Areas	2	
Qualification but no job/opportunity	4	Root Causes, Hinderences
Qualifications over Gender Balance	9	1 STATUS QUO, 2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, INSTITUTIONAL
Recruiting externally	2	
Religion	2	
Rising from Junior to Senior	1	3 Sociocultural
Sexual Harrasment	14	3 Sociocultural
Start from the top	4	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, INSTITUTIONAL
Start with the family	1	
Stereotypes	0	3 Sociocultural, CULTURAL, Culture
Stereotypes_Men	13	3 Sociocultural, Stereotypes
Stereotypes_Men_OwnOpinion	2	3 Sociocultural
Stereotypes_Women	16	3 Sociocultural, Stereotypes

Stereotypes_Women_OwnOpinion	10	3 Sociocultural
Strong personality	1	3 Sociocultural
Structural	5	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, Culture, INSTITUTIONAL
Teaming Up by Gender	1	
Treated Differently men and women	1	3 Sociocultural
Try to have women	3	
Two third gender rule	9	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, LEGAL
Violence	5	CULTURAL
Voice being heard	1	
Widening the gap	1	
Women feeling	15	3 Sociocultural
Women helping women	6	
Women not helping women	1	
Women not willing to volunteer	1	
Women preferred	5	
Workplace	6	2 INSTITUTIONAL | LEGAL, INSTITUTIONAL
Workplace_Mentors	4	
Workshops	1	

Source: Own illustration

Selective coding (Scheu, 2018) was used to identify correlations and contradictions of participants' answers. The software Atlas.ti allowed the creation of networks that show the connection of each emerged theme with the associated codes.

The first theme that emerged was "Status Quo and Gender Parity Issues in the SMEs assessed". The theme emerged from the codes that can be taken from Figure 3-1.
Figure 3-2 shows the codes that were later classified as institutional factors which then was classified as the second main theme.

Figure 3-3 shows the sociocultural factors. The codes around it emerged during the conduction of the interview and were later grouped into "Sociocultural Factors" which resulted in the third main theme.
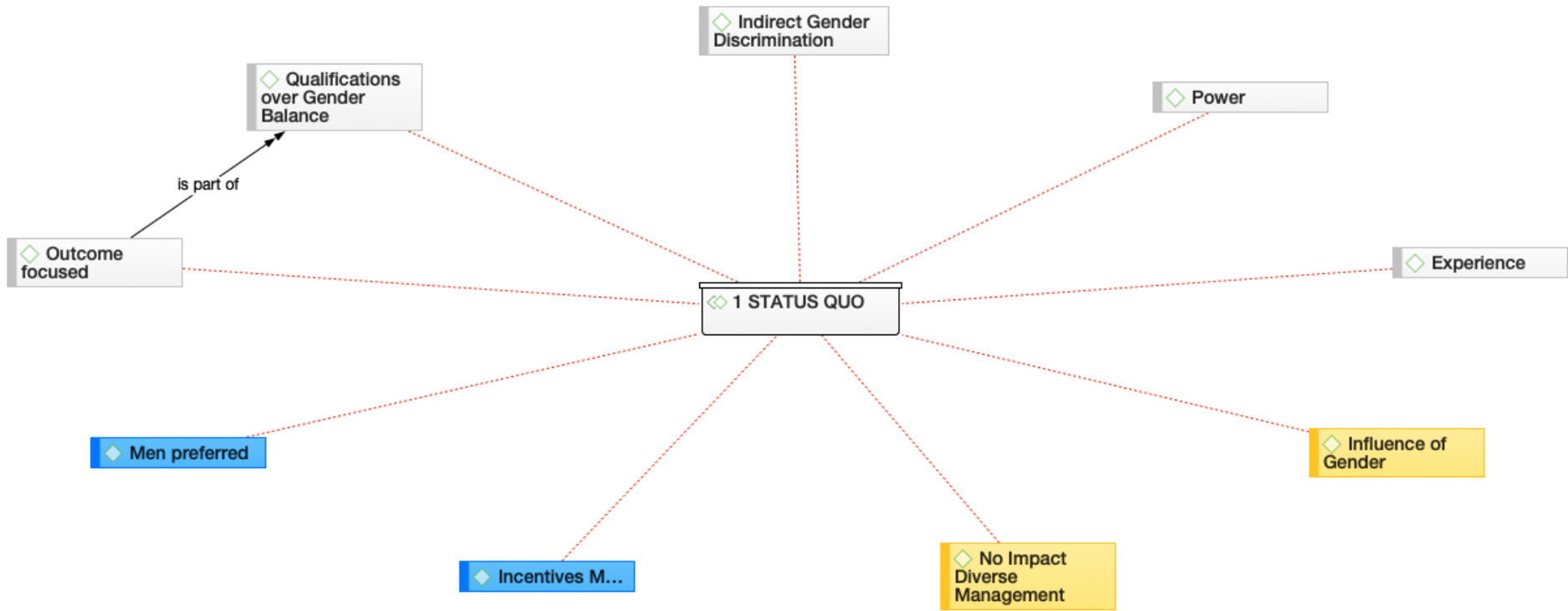
Figure 3-2: Codes Status Quo

Source: Own illustration
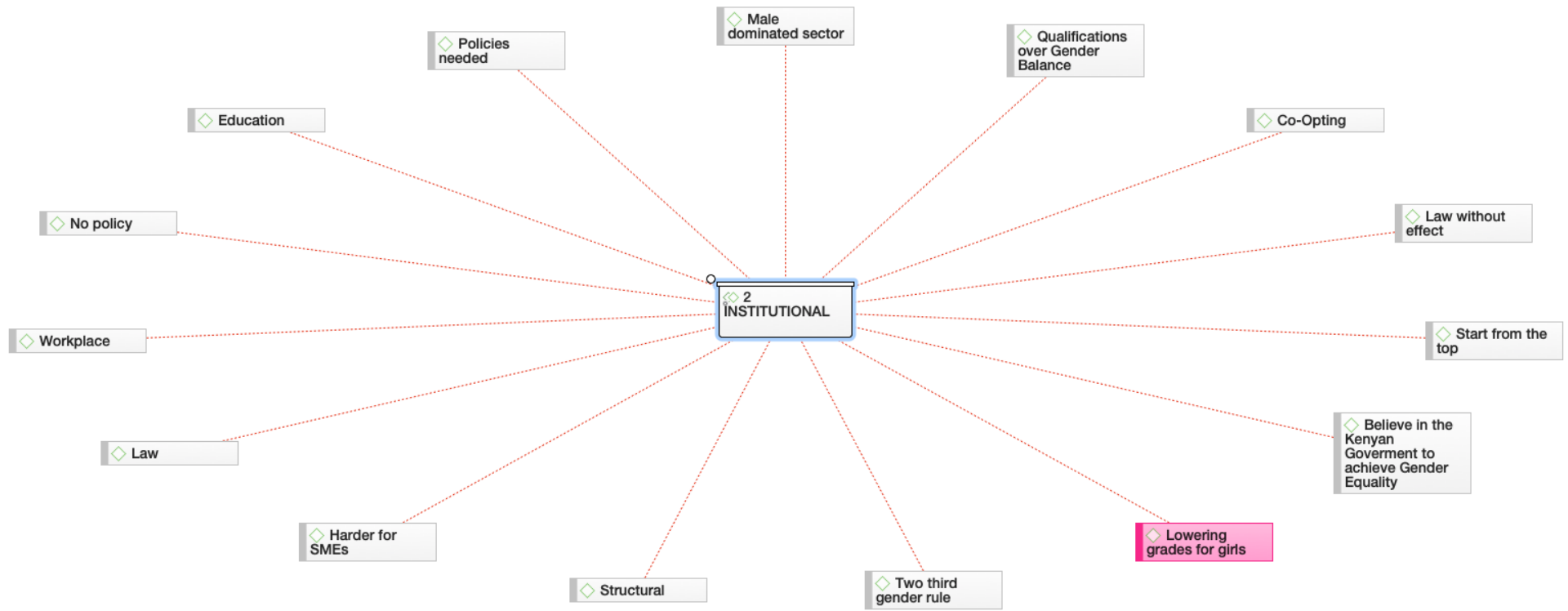
Figure 3-3: Codes Institutional Factors

Source: Own illustration
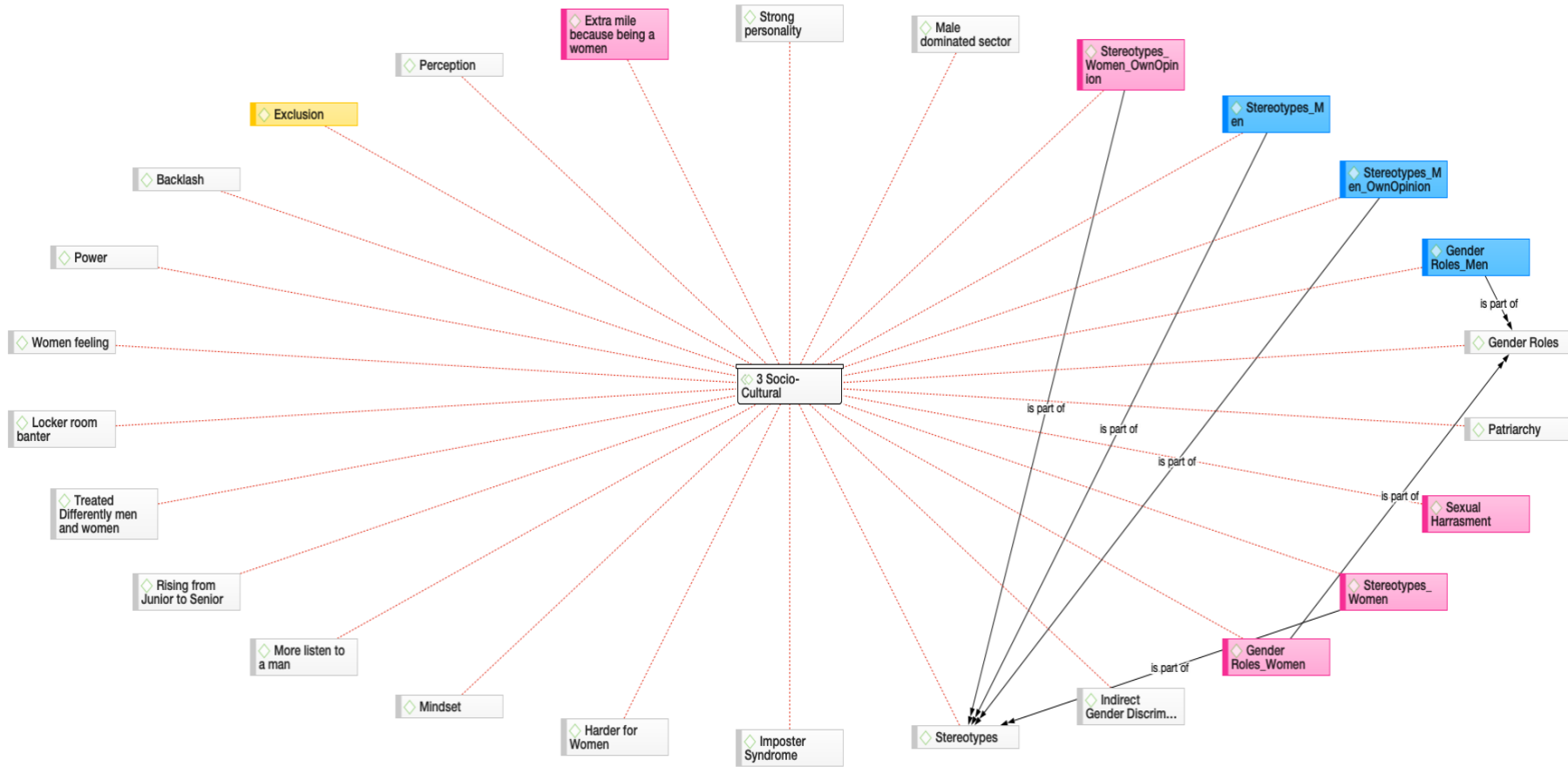
Figure 3-4: Codes Sociocultural Factors

Source: Own illustration

Chapter 3 Methodology

The result of the interview analysis and the coding process was the identification of themes and sub-themes that will be presented in detail as findings in Chapter 4. Some of the themes have three levels, whilst others have two.

After the development of the main themes, the researcher repeatedly studied the single codes from the table of codes over and over to categorise them and place them into appropriate groups, from which emerged sub-themes. During the write up of the findings chapter, some sub-themes were merged together, depending on the content. Some quotations have been applied with several codes. The researcher became very familiar and confident with applying the codes as the intense analysis took place. The transcripts and coded transcripts were read several times so that the researcher had an exact overview of which quote was said by which participant at what point during the interview. The following chapter will present the findings in detail that emerged during the analysis process.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Chapter 4   Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify the barriers and backlashes that hinder women from rising to leadership positions in SMEs in Kenya. The conduction of the semi-structured interviews detected three main themes that are in line with the research objectives established in Chapter 1.2. Table 4-1 presents the three main themes with its subthemes. Theme 2 has additionally to the sub-themes, sub-subthemes.

Table 4-1: Themes and Subthemes

	Themes	Subthemes + Sub-subthemes
1	Status quo and gender parity issues in the SMEs assessed	Gender composition
		Qualifications over gender balance
		Impact diverse management
		Decision-making power
		Prejudices and biases
		Opportunities
2	Institutional factors influencing women's pathways to Leadership	Government
		Educational institutions
		Organisations/Workplace
		Religious beliefs
3	Sociocultural barriers impacting gender equality	Subordination of women (mindsets and beliefs)
		Stereotypes
		Gender roles and identities
		Men dominating women
		Backlashes and perceptions of women
		Sexual harassment

Source: Own illustration

4. 1   Theme 1: Status Quo and Gender Parity Issues in the SMEs assessed

The first theme emerged based on research objective (1) which aimed to examine the gender parity status quo in leadership of Kenyan SMEs. The first theme "Status Quo and Gender Parity Issues in the SMEs assessed" was divided into six sub-themes that describe the status quo and the gender parity issues in the assessed SMEs in Kenya.

Chapter 4 Findings

4. 1. 1 Gender Composition

The gender composition, in numbers, of the organisations that were under review can be taken from Table 4-2. The first column shows the participant, the second column the gender, the third column the size of the company by employee number, the fourth column the number of women in the company, the fifth column the ratio in percent, the sixth column the gender of the director supervisor, and the seventh column the sector that the organization operates in. P1, P3, P5 and P9 founded their own organisations which explains the hyphen in the column. P5 employs five full time employees shown in the table, however there are another 12 people volunteering from whom 11 are female and four are male.

Table 4-2: Gender Composition

P	Gender	Size	F	Ratio F vs. M	Direct supervisor	Sector
1	F	10	1	10%	-	Educational (Kids/Teens)
2	F	30	12	40%	Woman	Pharmaceutical
3	F	6	3	50%	-	Food
4	F	30	1	3%	Man	Engineering
5	F	5	3	60%	-	Research
6	M	12	4	33%	Man	Magazine Publishers
7	M	38	26	68%	Man	Micro credit company
8	F	20	5	25%	Man	Tech Solutions for Supply Chain
9	M	20	5	27%	-	Energy Sector (Oil and Gas industry)
10	F	90	41	45%	Man	Agriculture

Source: Own illustration

The management composition that P4 reported that the board consists of three people only, three men, as the company was quite small. She said that bigger companies have wider "*varieties of people*" (P4) and are more likely to have a female board member. P10 sits as the only female on the board of a company employing 90 employees. The company has a 45/50 ratio of women to men. P10 commented regarding their gender composition: "*At the second level management, we have about 12 senior managers, we have one woman. But as you go lower, like, for example, the supervisory grade, you almost have a 50/50.*" (P10). P7 reported that in his company the low- and mid-level positions are mostly occupied by women. He added: "*Out of the six managers, four are men […] The top secretary and the chairman are men. […] Men are fewer there, but they have the claim of the organisation.*" (P7). P7 also
42

mentioned that the IT department has predominantly male staff, whilst the marketing team has more women. P8 is the only women next to four other male senior managers. She mentioned that the company is proud to have one woman in the technical department. P9 reported that the company employs five women that occupy the following roles; finance manager; accountant; administrator; environmentalist; and office manager. The leadership team exists of himself and one other male co-founder.

4. 1. 2 Qualifications over Gender Balance

When the participants were asked which tools were used to promote gender equality in their organisations, there was a strong tendency to underline the fact that the most important factors which are looked at when hiring and promoting employees are qualifications and skills, rather than considering the gender of an individual and the gender composition of the organisation as a whole. The following quotes given by P7, P3, P6, P1, P4 and P2 presented in Table 4-3 demonstrate that no criteria are used to promote gender equality. The first column shows the participant, whilst the second column gives the direct quote.

Table 4-3: Qualifications over Gender Balance

P	Quote
7	"I would say that the most important thing that they will look into is ability. The ability of that person to meet those requirements."
3	"If someone has good qualifications and experience, definitely you promote him or her."
6	"And when opportunities arise, we give them to everybody who is qualified for them."
1	"I actually do not even choose who will be in and who won't be in. Provided you have an interest, and you can serve the children and also serve according to the values that we have hold as an organisation… you are free to come in."
4	"I don't think it was about like gender parity or anything as much"
2	"I'm not sure the criteria they use currently. But I'm sure they just give it to a qualified individual."

Source: Own illustration

P2, who runs her own business alongside being employed, stated additionally: "*I choose depending on the skill.*" (P2) P4 who works as the only woman in an engineering company in an administrative role, stated that the company really wanted to have a woman for this particular role but does not have any criteria in place to formally promote gender equality.

4. 1. 3 Impact Diverse Management

When the participants were asked if a balanced composition of men and women was beneficial for the management team and the organisation as a whole, opinions differed. Some respondents saw no benefits in a mixed composition, whilst others saw an added value if both men and women are represented in the team. P7 stated: "*There is this kind of teamwork. What drives you will be now the job.*" (P7). He works in a department with more women than men and noticed "*some kind of teaming up by gender. […] There are those gender conflicts that arise.*" (P7). He reported cases where co-workers would support their colleagues purely because of the same gender, by saying "*we have done this as a group*" (P7), instead of looking at the numbers and results of the task itself. P8 reported often being the only women in the management team and mentioned that by having a more gender-diverse management team, the work could be achieved but with a higher quality: "*I think it would add a lot more value, changes the perspective, the outlook, in terms of what's priority.*" (P8).

P1, P2 and P6 do not see a positive aspect in itself when having a mixed composition of men and women in the leadership team or overall workforce, but rather believe in the capabilities of an individual. P2 stated: "*I think it is more personal on how somebody manages their people. I know the benefits will be different. I don't think it really matters if male or female. Because all these depend on a specific person's value.*" (P2). Contradicting this statement, the same participant stated at an earlier point that having a mixed composition of the leadership team can be beneficial, as a common ground with the women in the workforce could be created:

> Like it's good, the management section, if there are more women, they would understand issues affecting women. You can say I need a day off today because I was cramping. And somebody would actually understand more than the men. They [the men] would tell you are cramping and act like this a normal thing, you know, but I think if there was a lady in HR so that you can easily communicate and tell them (P2).

P1 and P6 expressed earlier an importance on qualifications over gender balance. Both participants do not see any advantages in a mixed board or workforce composition, but rather focus on the broader goal and outcomes of the organisation:

> I feel it doesn't really matter who is in the organisation. Provided you can drive to the mission and to the vision that the organisation has provided. You can make an impact and change. It doesn't matter which gender you are. So, I really do not support this notion that there should be one... when the woman is the president, the issue to be deputised by a man or vice versa (P1).

P6 emphasised that skills are not dependent on a specific gender, but rather on the characteristics of one person:

> It doesn't matter, male or female, what matters is output, are you able to deliver on time? Do you have quality? Do you have good listening skills? Do you have good interpersonal relation skills? Because that is what matters (P6).

P6 expressed several times throughout the interview that the outcome and output of a team is not dependent on the gender composition of the management team.

4. 1. 4 Decision-Making Power

When the gender parity of an organisation is being evaluated, it is crucial to not only look at the ratio of the sexes, but to also consider the weight of decision-making power between men and women. The participants expressed different examples that all found consent in that women are not given the same power as men in decision-making situations. P5 mentioned that women would rather be given implementing roles instead of strategic roles with more importance:

> I think generally, in our culture here, I would say largely women will still be given roles that don't demand a lot of decision-making power. They're more implementing kind of roles, but they're not strategic kind of roles (P5).

At this point P5 mentions the importance of differentiating between the size of a company and its attempts to ensure gender parity and equal decision-making power within the organisation. Larger corporations would have different motivations to implement gender equality policies:

> […] bigger companies are very sensitive to that, because it seems they are tied to how they're viewed, you know, you have to look like you're compliant. But I'm talking of Kenya being a country where you have a lot of small and medium enterprise kind of arrangement. And I think many people don't even know the leadership dynamics of such smaller level of organization where you're one or two [people] (P5).

P5 described how women will most likely not be involved in higher decision-making situations unless they have founded their own organisation. She added that "I *can decide, but I'm wondering if this was someone else organisation, a start-up which was started by a man. If I'm not a partner, I think I would be pushed to implement more.*" (P5). According to P5's argument, larger companies distribute the decision-making power more or less equally because they are under greater surveillance due to their size and reach.

P8 expressed how women have to push harder than men to get their ideas and suggestions implemented and to be heard, stating that "*unfortunately, most times, it's easy to just go quiet. And […] not share the ideas*." (P8). The participants revealed that women would be excluded from situations where decisions are being made, something which will be further explored in Chapter 4.3.3.

4. 1. 5 Prejudices and Biases

The struggle of attaining gender equality in SMEs in Kenya is heavily impacted by prejudices against women, as participants' responses revealed. P1 clearly expressed difficulties in working with women, saying "*This is why I cannot work with women. You cannot come and just want to go to the bathroom four times to fix your make up.*" (P1). The prejudices, however, range from judgemental attitudes to making assumptions on why a woman acquired a certain position. P2 points out that women's abilities to earn a leadership position are not admired but rather questioned, saying "*They definitely look at options of who you slept with to get to the*

top. They won't even look at your education." (P2). Participant 4 and 7 outlined biases against women that would impact gender equality:

> I think the bias is intrinsic, it's psychological. It's a psychological bias. Because I think women come for interviews. And they want to work here, but unfortunately, only men get picked. I don't know. […] So, the person interviewing, will, will already have a bias against women, you'll already be a step behind your male counterpart, even if you are more, if you are more skilled or qualified. So, that makes it you know, harder for more women to be in this space (P4).

The above quote from P4 indicates that women are a step behind even if they are more qualified and contradicts with point 4.2.2 Qualifications over Gender Balance. P7 explained, "*What I perceived from the management is… what they have is that they are kind of biased towards women.*" (P7). He said that when a man was picked over a woman, it would always be justified by saying that the male candidate is better "*economically*" (P7) or has better "*capacities*" (P7). A weakness on the part of the woman's qualification would be constructed, in order to have a reason to not chose her, without making it so obvious that it was due to her sex.

4. 1. 6 Opportunities

P10 mentioned the struggle of attaining gender equality in leadership when companies promote internally for leadership positions when their senior levels are male dominated. She mentioned that if the majority of managers and their supervisors are men, you will keep promoting male employees. This is why P10's company, that has 45% women working in the company, decided to recruit mostly externally. She said:

> I think this is one of the places we've broken ground. You know, we don't just allow for hierarchical promotions. So that it doesn't matter whether you're female or male, you have an equal opportunity to becoming whatever you want to become (P10).

P6 expressed several times throughout the interview that opportunities would be given to men and women equally. This was underlined by the following quote where P6 said, "*One of my favourite statements I usually use is that there is no opportunity that is dressed male or female. Opportunities are opportunities. They arise equally.*" (P6). At this point, P8 mentioned a

limitation in terms of opportunities for women, especially in the case of SMEs and start-ups, where hiring managers will often "*want to go for younger men who are more available, who can work longer hours*" (P8), even if women and men would both have applied for the same position.

4. 2 Theme 2: Institutional Factors influencing Women's Pathway to Leadership

The second theme emerged based on research objective (2). The aim was to look at the institutional factors that influence and impact women's pathways to leadership in Kenya. Based on the main theme, the four sub-themes – government, educational institutions, organisations/companies, religious beliefs - emerged. The first sub-theme (Government) covers three sub-subthemes that explore several factors that impact on the representation of women in leadership.

4. 2. 1 Government

National Laws (Macro)

One of the objectives of this thesis is to look at the institutional factors that influence and impact gender equality in Kenya. Chapter 2.2.1 presented the legal framework regarding gender equality policies in Kenya. Laws and policies ensure rights and build a safe ground on a macro but also micro perspective such as in institutions. The two-thirds gender rule that came into force with the 2010 constitution was mentioned by every participant when asked about laws and policies that promote gender equality in Kenya. It is noticeable, however, that the two-thirds gender rule does not seem to be understood by every participant as it is meant to be interpreted. P1 mentioned, for example, "*We're having the third gender rule. That there must be a third, a third of women in the parliament with men.*" (P1). The idea "*at least 30% [have] to be women*" was expressed by P2, when in fact the rule aims to not have more than two-thirds of *either* men or women. P2 also understands from the two-thirds rule that every company needs to have this rule implemented. However, it is currently only mandated in the Kenyan parliament and in state-owned companies.

Despite different understandings of the two-thirds rule, it is commonly understood correctly that the rule aims to provide better outcomes for women. At this point P7, P3, P8, P9 and P5 all criticise the fact that the two-thirds rule has not produced positive effects and often fails to be implemented. P7 refers to the fact that the country has rules, policies and laws that exist in written form, but "*when it comes to action, it is not so… the action is not there as deflecting the paper*." (P7). The law only existing of paper, rather than in real life was also heavily criticised by P9 who said:

> You can put everything on paper, and it looks very nice on paper. But unless anything gets implemented, it's not - it's not going to be effective. Right, we can talk as much as we want to, at the end of the day, we must go ahead and implement things (P9).

The participants do not seem to be seeing a strong enforcement of the two-thirds rule. P7 added that "*women are meant to meet that two thirds gender rule. But they haven't met it.*" (P7). P3 insisted that "*the law is in the parliament. But it has not been amended.*" (P3). P7 criticises the approach of the government of wanting to have equal rights for women and announcing these goals to the public, but failing to address and eliminate the barriers that are actually in place:

> When it comes down to the contest of practice, there are certain beliefs of taking now the law. There is no nothing which is done to kind of eliminate the barriers, like, you know, give women an advantage of campaigning like men (P7).

P7 believes that women do not have the same prospects and chances to do their electoral campaigns as men do which lowers their chances to be elected.

Company Policies (Micro)

If we turn now from a macro perspective to a micro perspective and compare policies and instruments that aim to achieve gender equality within the organisations under review, the majority of the participants confirmed that there were no formal policies in place. P4 reported, "*Not that I am seeing. I mean, the company was founded by the two guys at the top, our two directors. And so they run it, they just run it, I guess.*" (P4). A similar answer was given by P1 when she was asked if there were any policies in her company, "*No, I don't have any policy.*" (P1). When P6 was asked about any gender equality policies, he denied it and said it was not needed in the company in that he works in, as colleagues treat each other like a family. He commented:

First as an institution, we don't believe in one gender being biased. We have one policy, an open-door policy, that is what we have always used. And that means anybody who requires assistance, is free to walk to my office, especially to my MD [Managing Director], who also comes up as a chairman, they can walk in, we have been a free, we have been a small family. You may be my sister. […] I think we have given it equally the benefit to all those who are interested. […] But basically, yes, we do not have a standard policy, but the policy that we have is that we have an open-door policy (P6).

P6 was asked how incidents of harassment would be handled and added:

In instances whereby somebody feels offended by anything, our policy is simple, it's an open-door policy, just walk in and just report your matter. And then it will be handled. […] It's an open policy, there is no particular order of how people should communicate or how they should take their grievances forward (P6).

Whilst P6 repeated that an open-door policy where incidents can just be reported by talking to the manager, P5 expressed the importance of having policies in written form in place:

In Kenya, gender-based violence is quite high. I think it's the awareness as brought out, so the workplace is not quite a very safe space for women. So, I think also these affects how women perform, and how they position themselves even going for leadership, because sometimes you want to go for a leadership position. And you have so many hurdles, one of which is the demand for sexual exploitation (P5).

P5 stresses the need for establishing policies that give women a point to hold on and feel safe at the workplace, especially when it comes to matters of harassment. P5 is a researcher and founded a company that offers research training and mentoring programs. The relationship between mentor and mentee was labelled by her as a "*power-relation*" (P5).

I think we had underestimated... we - we always thought it's the mentor who can be exploitative to the mentee. But this one became, it's the mentee. So, for the mentees, we have a handbook with code of conduct. […] we didn't expect a mentee could be so disrespectful to a mentor and hit on them and, you know, and really destabilise them. […] We are very careful with that so

that we don't have issues of exploitation either from the mentee or from the mentor (P5).

P5 mentioned a particular incident where a male mentee made sexual/romantic advances towards an older female mentor which made the people in the organization *"realize the harassment can go the other way."* (P5). She now incorporates the UN anti-harassment policy in her company's HR policies. The clause has to be signed by mentors as well as mentees. It is interesting to add that when P5 was asked if she herself has had any experiences with sexual harassment at her workplace, she first denied that she had. However, when she thought about it, smiled a little imitated and said, *"No…. Maybe just… usual…objectifying. Okay. Okay, maybe that's still sexual harassment, but it was not to the extent that it hindered anything."* (P5).

In addition to having anti-discrimination and anti-sexual harassment policies, companies may protect their employees by setting up clear policies for maternity and paternity leave. P6, who had earlier stated that there was no need for gender or sex equality policies in his company, expressed admiration for companies that established policies for mothers allowing them to breastfeed during working hours and also to have a place close to the office where nannies can take care of children. P6 sees this as an option for his company to be implemented, once the company has grown more, *"That for me is something very impressive. It's something that when we grow to a particular level, it is something our team can embrace."* (P6) The size of a company and the formal policies within it, were also mentioned by P5:

> If one got pregnant, I may not be able to retain them right now. On any way. So, you see, for us, who are running enterprises that are growing startups, and are... even if there's an employment policy, I'm not able to provide that, you know, such organizations, we are likely to see more women struggling P5).

She further expressed:

> Like, for me, I was a big proponent of maternity care and all that. And I'm very sad that I cannot provide that here. And I'm not supported to do that. So, it means it means […] I may not be able to promote gender equality to the point I want (P5).

P8 reported that she had been let go by her previous company right before she was about the give birth. The company had policies in place, however, could not maintain her. She said, "*You are only as valuable as you bring in the money.*" (P8). P5 criticised the lack of support and funding provided by the Kenyan government towards the SME sector. She claims that this sector is hidden from the public and not well protected in law. A high percentage of people are employed in the SME sector. However, due to the smaller company sizes, the businesses are not always able to provide policies and employment rights to ensure gender equality as the interviews revealed.

> I really worry, what kind of rights we will violate, might that take us back in the gender issues. Because these small start-ups are not able to live up to some of these expectations. You know, sometimes you want to have gender balancing employment, but you have to start with your relative because they are willing to work for free […]. And sometimes they could be either all women or all just men (P5).

According to P5 it is hard to provide an equal number of men and women, and to provide paid maternity leave if companies are still in the beginning phase, and if companies are not in the position to choose their employees from a pool of talents, but to rather employ who is available. Nevertheless, the argument of not being able to provide maternity leave because of the size of a company or due to financial aspects was heavily judged and criticised by P9 who argued the following:

> If somebody tells you, even as a director of a company, that, hey, you know what, I have to look at the financial aspects, and I have to look at this, to me, that's an excuse. Because the minimum standards that governors are the legislation in the country, the legislation in the country clearly states that when you have a lady who is pregnant and needs to go on maternity leave, she must be given three months maternity leave, period. […] That is a legal requirement. […] To me, that would be a ridiculous sort of argument by anybody in their right minds to be able to put together (P9.)

P9 argued that it is the company's responsibility to consider whether a woman might get pregnant when they employ her:

> When I make a decision that I'm going to employ somebody, I expect this person to be with me for a long time. And therefore, I need to plan for this individual. I need to

recognise that they're going to have these kinds of issues because they're human related (P9).

P9 reported that in his company also men were allowed to go on paternity leave. In his company, employees are handed out an employee handbook that covers anti-sexual harassment policies, maternity regulations and non-discrimination policies. His priority is to comply with legal requirements set by the government and the ILO convention.

Low Governmental Enforcement

P6, P7, P8 and P9 stated that it is difficult for a country to achieve gender equality if most of the top positions in parliament are occupied by men. The government should set an example to demonstrate to people and companies of the benefits that diverse gender compositions of leadership teams can bring. P6 stated:

> I've seen bad in the political circles, whereby I found that probably our composition, especially in this country, we have more male MPs [minister presidents], those are members of parliament, or elective posts than the female (P6).

(P7) added: "*The top leadership of our country… mostly men dominate. And when you look at the top decision-making institutions such as the parliament, the presidency… there is so much controlled by men.*" (P7). P7 mentioned that if the top parliament positions are occupied largely by men, the private sector will most likely not consider appointing women to leadership positions. P6, P8, P7 and P9 put an emphasis on the government's role. P6 said: "*If you want to grow a successful institution... Look at successful countries…look at the top. Who is their leader? If we start from the leaders, then we shall have a quicker kind of change of mind.*" (P6) P9 said:

> So, if we want to break through these barriers and we want to internalize
> having, you know, gender equality, then the top must demonstrate […] that we
> as citizens, whether it's in the public sector or the private sector, follow you,
> because you are leaders, right. And you, you've created a business case for us
> to be able to have more women in positions of society, you know […] (P9).

P8 and P10 referred to the perspective of women by saying that if the women in the country do not see other women at the top as role models, it will be hard for them to "*believe a woman*

should be in that place [of a leadership position]" (P8). P10 said: "*I feel that when women and girls see a woman leader, they feel like they can become anything, or they're like: 'Oh, we can be like her.*" (P10). She said that female leaders as role models will enhance the belief that women can be excellent leaders too.

4. 2. 2 Educational Institutions

Whereas some participants see a top-down approach as appropriate to achieve greater gender equality in SMEs in Kenya, others see a bottom-up approach and the role of educational institutions such schools and universities as more or at least equally important (P1, P2, P3, P4, P8, P10). For example, one interviewee said: "*I think it should be done in schools, institutions. People should be educated about the benefits of equality.*" (P3). P8, who put an emphasis on a top-down as well as bottom-up approach stated:

> Now, again, there's a bottom-up kind of approach. Then it starts on how we're bringing up our children, what we're teaching them. Are we teaching them to respect? If it's the boys respect the women, and how we are handling that. And in the schools, what are we teaching our children? So again, if we also start teaching them from that young age, then we're sure there's a generation that's going to come with change. It might not be ours, but this will start teaching the next generation (P8).

P2 and P3 continued and stressed that especially in Africa it is the role of educational institutions to teach children that girls are not less worth than boys. P2 commented: "*[...] So that the girls don't grow up thinking all they need to do in their life is to take care of a home. They should also grow up to be stronger people who can lead.*" (P2). P4, who works in the engineering field, remembered that back in the days "women were not given an incentive to go to school, because even like just going to school was a problem for women. So, then these careers […] became men careers, because at that time, it's only men who were going to school." (P4)

A somewhat counterproductive attempt to create equal opportunities for men and women in being accepted into university was highlighted by P1. She explained that in some cases the grades of women are being lowered in order for them to have a better chance of being accepted into university programmes, which was an initiative which was initially aimed at increasing

54

the numbers of women in programmes such as engineering, and tech-related studies. P1 however criticised this approach: "*I think it's really, it's really not fair for us to be... it looks like we are just being given stuff on a silver plate. Not like we earn to be where we are.*" (P1). She expressed that respect would not be given to women by other people, or society in general, if the perception is that girls are given an easier time than boys. She states, "*Why would girls then be lowered for grades, and just given stuff on a silver plate just because of the fact that you're a woman.*" (P1). P1 felt that this initiative is counterproductive and creates bridges between men and women which will widen instead of closing the gender gap. Also, P10 did not see the need to lower entry grades for girls and women as "*they're able to compete fairly, there is no need for you to reduce a grade or something.*" (P10). P10 additionally mentioned that this approach might even take away the confidence of girls to believe in themselves, as they may grow up thinking they are less smart, which is why their grades are being lowered.

4. 2. 3 Organisations/ Companies

When looking at the factors that influence women's pathways to leadership in SMEs in Kenya, obviously the workplaces themselves and the structures that organisations provide must be examined. P4 and P5 mentioned male domination in certain sectors and in more senior positions. P4 reported, "*I am literally the only woman in the company I work for. It's an engineering firm. And so, it's very male dominated. So, everybody works on site, and I work as an admin at the office.*" (P4). P3 mentioned that in the companies that she had worked in before, from leadership positions up to the CEOs, it was mostly men occupying the top management positions. "*[…] there is that discrimination of ladies. I don't know why.*" (P3). To counteract these issues, the participants suggested that clearer management structures and transparency must be in place to provide equal opportunities for women.

P4 - as well as P8, observed the exclusion of women from participating in meaningful decision-making. Both participants reported that the men in the company would meet for after-work drinks, where they networked, bonded, and would eventually take work-related decisions in informal settings that might lead to promotions. When P4 was asked about the practices that deny women from reaching leadership positions, she stated that, "*I think one of them is, this is not I guess a formal practice. But let's talk about what they call 'locker room banter'. When men get together and make decisions over a drink, you know, the woman is not there.*" (P4).

Whilst P4 reported that it was very unlikely for a woman to find herself in these situations as it would cast her in "*weird light*", P8 reasoned that it was more to do with the fact that she needed to go home to take care of the household and the family, which was certainly the situation for her as she stated, *"[...] I have got my family, my children. I'll have to leave at certain times. And that is how you end up being excluded in those settings."* (P8). P8 felt that the way roles at work are given to men happens in a more casual way, whereas she felt she needed to push harder to get through the structures at work and "t*o break through the ceiling, to be able to get into those positions.*" (P8).

Another example that illustrates the exclusion of women at work was given by P3. She told the story of a friend who is the only female engineer in the company that she works in. Even though her friend occupies a role which is a management position, she is often ignored and excluded when it comes to taking crucial decisions. In order to get her ideas implemented, P3 reported the following about her friend:

> What she did was, she employed a man as her secretary. And she attended all meetings with this man and told him everything that he needed to say. And like he was always in the meetings and finally, like, more of her ideas that had been taken up. So, she doesn't get to get the credit, but she finally can get the work done. I thought that was quite crazy. But then she said, that's literally yeah, that's literally how it works. So, she's, she's just trying to work there, so she can keep doing what she does (P3).

To counteract these exclusions, P1 and P5 mentioned the importance of establishing mentorships amongst women: "*These women that have already fought this, that means we need to look up to them. And they need to be like mentors to us*." (P1). P5 said that it was crucial for her to have had female mentors along the way, who helped her to get to where she is today, and not only in work settings but also in university. She reported still having good relationships with her mentors after many years. One of the mentors encouraged her to start mentoring as well, which she found purpose and meaning through being a role model to young women.

4. 2. 4 Religious Beliefs

P4 brought up the fact that religion "*creates a bias against human.*" (P4). She thought that religion "*has a lot of authority but then they do not uphold values that foster gender equality, they actually uphold values that keep gender inequality going*" (P4). The inequalities between men and women were made clear in an indirect sentence expressed by P6. He mentioned that at his workplace women and men would have the same decision-making power. When he was asked about the decision-making power in his family and if his wife could decide over things as much as he does, he said: "*Everybody makes a decision. She, we are equal partners.*" (P6). This argument was followed by this comment: "*Of course, as a Christian, as a Christian family, I am the head of the family. She is my, my helper.*" (P6). P6 argued that his wife can take decisions as well, but he would at all times have the final word, as he is the man of the family.

4. 3   Theme 3: Sociocultural Barriers impacting Gender Equality

On the basis of research objective (3) which aimed to understand the sociocultural barriers and factors that impacted on female leadership, the third theme emerged. Backlashes were discovered and their impacts on gender equality and women leadership in SMEs in Kenya were identified. Theme three incorporates six sub-themes that will be looked at in this chapter.

4. 3. 1 Subordination of Women (Mindsets and Beliefs)

When the participating interviewees were asked about the root causes of gender inequalities in their country, every single participant responded saying "culture". Beliefs are difficult to be questioned as they have been passed on as the one and only right way to do business, from generation to generation, and are firmly established in society's mindsets. This was clearly expressed by P1, who said, "*because this is what we know and did not want to experiment other ways.*" (P1). P6 added that "*culture, the things that we found our great grandfathers were doing. We didn't question the culture. We embrace the culture as it was, without a clear understanding of why it was like that.*" (P6). P6 and P7 mentioned the unequal inheritance distribution between men and women in the family and the resulting perception of the sexes. P6 spoke about the issue in his community:

>One of the biggest cultural beliefs that we have heard, especially from my communities, is about inheritance. […] and the woman has always been left out. […] It has been a tradition that women don't inherit from their fathers in terms of inheritance (P6).

He added that there are now some changes occurring, and women are given more rights to inherit from their fathers. At this point, P7 commented:

>During my father's time, it's only them [the men], who will inherit my grandfather's wealth. But in my family now we have that kind of right for women. But not in the same ratio, like I get 75% and she [my sister] gets 25% (P7).

P7 stressed that the distribution of what women inherit compared to men creates the perception that women have less worth in the family and this belief is carried into workplace. Most of the participants expressed how men would take control, which was not necessarily how they would like things to be. However, this is a belief that they have been raised with and something that still persists in their culture, especially in tribes where cultural beliefs hold up traditional practices. P3 illustrated this by stating that, "*in my culture for example, I'm from a tribe Meru. In my culture, sometimes I see men are treated in a superior way. Like, when we were born, I used to see men given more priorities.*" She continued, saying that "*culture messes up with the equality of people*" (P3), and gave the example of how in some tribes, women have to bow in front of men when they serve them. P2 mentioned the difficulties of labeling such behaviors that demonstrate the subordination of women either "*as respect or care*" (P2) towards men. She added: "*Our culture just doesn't give us the space to be free as women around men.*" (P2). P4 reported that when women ask for contraceptives or sterilisation at the doctor, they are often asked if their husband gave the permission:

>At that point, they're not acting as a doctor, as a professional, they are acting out of these cultural norms that they have deeply believed about women and how women belong to men. […] And so, you don't get to be independent. [...] The idea is very embedded in our head […] because women have belonged to men historically. Like, as a girl I would belong to be my dad, then I'd be transferred to my husband when we get married (P4).

P9 reasoned the still persisting views and beliefs:

> I think root causes are perhaps associated with the general development within society […]. We still have barriers where women have to break the ceiling, to be able to move, you know, into higher positions. I think those are associated with the various local cultures that exist within society (P9).

The placing of men into a superior position supports a picture that P2 described:

> We grew up knowing all that, that men are stronger […]. We grew up knowing that actually all that in our mind is that men should be working, and women should be at home, taking care of kids. So, it's in our mind (P2).

Several participants stated that these mindsets are often carried into the workplace up to boardroom level and could shape the opinions of an entire leadership team. P7 referred to a situation where a female manager had to resign from her board position in 2016 because "*the whole mindset of the board was that this manager was not good because she was a woman. She was not able to handle men.*" (P7). He explained that the woman had difficulties in dealing with the fixed mindsets of her male colleagues in the boardroom. P7 mentioned patriarchy and reported that in his experience the leadership teams often conveyed the following message, "*at the top there it is the man who will be able to control the institution.*" (P7).

Patriarchal practices were also mentioned by P4, who argued that patriarchy would "*create a bias against women.*" (P4). P10 added that the biggest obstacle in attaining gender equality is to change "*the thinking of society*" (P10), which could not easily done by increasing the representation of women by numbers alone.

The aforementioned mindsets, which derive from cultural norms and beliefs and create power relations where the man is always in a superior role to the woman, can lead to women experiencing self-doubt and feelings of uncertainty over their own abilities, which was described by P5 who said, "*I think my biggest struggle was self-doubt. And technically, I know research, technically I'm good.*" (P5). She described that these struggles held her back from applying for leadership positions and she wished she had believed more in herself at an earlier stage in her career.

4. 3. 2 Stereotypes

Women's career pathways are heavily impacted by stereotypes that exist within the Kenyan culture, as reported by the interviewees. Throughout the interview sessions, every participant described several examples of stereotypes of men and women. Some of the stereotypes were given when the participants were directly asked about common stereotypes of men and women in their culture, other stereotypes were given in an indirect way, and expressed in a subordinate clause. Since a large number of stereotypes were given by interviewees, which all presented or eventually suggested the inferior role that women hold in comparison to men, the following tables present some of the quotations as they were given directly from the participants. Table 4-4 presents common stereotypes of women, whilst Table 4-5 presents common stereotypes of men. The first column shows the participant, whilst the second column gives the direct quote.

Table 4-4: Stereotypes Women

P	Quotes identified as stereotypes for women
1	"They [the women] are looking for money to buy make up, they're looking for money to go to these posh hotels."
2	"Yeah, our parents of course, they think that girls are fragile. And there's something that you cannot do. So, growing up with, actually from my family, we are two boys and I'm the only girl. So, they will treat me as a bit fragile, not like the boys."
2	"They [the women] are supposed to be humble and submissive."
3	"Ladies tend to be soft."
4	"They're more expected to be, I don't know, more nurturing."
5	"Like women pull each other down, women bosses are not good, they're very emotional"
5	"Women are shy. They tend to be shy of things."
6	"Women may be regarded as weak"
10	"Even when women speak, they should not speak too much or too loudly."

Source: Own illustration

Table 4-5: Stereotypes Men

P	Quotes identified as stereotypes for men
1	"They really do not care what's going on around them"
2	"And we grew up knowing all that, that men are stronger, men are, I don't know, seem to be working more harder."
3	"A man, you know most things men can do better, sure."
3	"Sometimes men are violent. And they tend to be more energetic than ladies"
4	"Men are more assertive […] and they go for what they want. […] Men are more able to negotiate for themselves, both in and out of office."
5	"They got it together, like got their thing together, like they've got it figured out."
6	"Men sometimes are viewed as strong."
8	"So, the man has to fend for his family, and has to bring the money."
5	"I have found men are more easy to make decisions and move on quickly."

Source: Own illustration

The respondents reported that they grew up with the aforementioned stereotypes and that they felt that society would expect them to act accordingly, as P4 succinctly expressed, "*Because people feel like you should play a particular role were you should be the agreeable, supportive, quiet, gentle, whatever kind of person.*" (P4). Rigid gender roles that were expected to be played by men or women were often directly and indirectly mentioned. . The next sub-theme presents gender roles expressed and experienced by the interviewees.

4. 3. 3 Gender Roles and Identities

It became very clear throughout the interviews that the stereotypes described above are closely connected with gender roles. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and P8, all of whom are women, reported that the biggest hindrance they faced in advancing in their careers was that they needed to take care of their children, cook at home and do all the household work after a long day at work, which exhausted. P5 said:

> That plays out very differently because it also means that as much as I'm
> working, my role at home does not consider that I'm a working woman. So,
> it means when I get home, it's all the other things need to still function, and
> you do get tired- burnouts. But everything basically still has to function.

>And your work has to function as well. But then I think the demands on the
>guys is a big difference, because they get home and put their feet up (P5).

P5 reported that it is very "*hard to convince men to do housework. And it's because they've tied housework with their male identity. So, to them when they do housework, they're not man enough.*" (P5). P1 mentioned that this unequal distribution penalises women:

>When these men that are our leaders, they come back home, and then there is nothing
>they do. All they do is just sit and watch television and watch news. And just talk about
>politics. So, you see there's no leveled ground (P1).

The female participants expressed the view that some support in the household could give them more time and energy to focus on their careers. When P6, one of the male participants, was asked about his opinion of equal distributions of household work, he stated:

>Am I able to support as a man? Does it inspire me? Does it make them [the
>women] have a deficiency of something? And does it benefit the other party
>that they have something that they are proud of? And does that also mean
>that the man goes out there and washes? (P6).

P6 argued that he would not see a benefit in doing household work and that it would shed a bad light on his wife, as people might think she has a "*deficiency in some area.*" (P6). P5 and P3 explained that these unequal gender dynamics and roles in the house are carried into the workplace as well, which is a big hurdle for them to overcome. P3 mentioned that there have been several situations where her male colleagues expected her to do things that have nothing to do with her job itself, "*Like I should do it because I'm the woman at the office.*" (P3). She expressed anger about "*that bloody line where there are no boundaries between what is expected for you to do as part of your job description.*" (P3). Her supervisor would sometimes ask her to make her a cup of tea, or she recently had to make the company hire a cleaning lady as this work was expected from her, since she was the only woman working in this company. Table 4-6 demonstrates direct quotes by the respondents that were identified as gender roles. The first column shows the participant, whilst the second column gives the direct quote.

Table 4-6: Gender Roles

P	Quotes identified as Gender Roles
2	"And if you look at the house choice, I would do the dishes. And the boys would do harder things."
2	"In our mind that men should be working, and women should be at home, taking care of kids."
3	"Let's say like 90% of many farms in Kenya are controlled by men."
5	"And for men, maybe when they do care work. They're told: You're now becoming a woman."
5	"I think we have to raise children differently. We have to give them a different messaging, don't tie your identity to a role."
7	"When it comes to the kitchen roles. Food comes maybe to the table and the man believes I don't need to stand up and serve others. It's a woman's work […] maybe cleaning a place maybe... a man will feel like cleaning is the work for a woman."
7	"When it comes to issues of politics, you'll find that men are perceived to be good in politics, and women, even fellow women, will not believe that a woman articulates well their issues."
8	"It's very hard that you will find your husband at home, also cooking and taking care of all other roles. So, the women have changed, but I think everything else hasn't changed."
6	"Sometimes you see women you see that their work is household."
7	"So, when we are doing listings… those positions such as a receptionist and those kinds of duties, office cleaners, they will not consider men."
8	"Like the same thing will transcend down to even the role I mean, the receptionist will always be the girl. The cleaner, the tea lady all that. That still remains."
8	"The woman doesn't get to sit in the boardroom. They need to be more at home."
10	"Women's place is in the kitchen or at home."

Source: Own illustration

4. 3. 4 Men dominating Women

The aforementioned stereotypes (Chapter 4.4.2) and gender roles (Chapter 4.4.3) heavily limit women's possibilities to advance to leadership positions, as expressed by the interviewees. P1 reported: "*Our culture is really men stimulated. Men is given so much power.*" (P1). The participants found consensus in the point that women have it harder when attempting to acquire leadership positions. P9, who works in the energy sector, personally witnessed how women have to prove themselves more than men, due to existing stereotypes and gender roles. He said: "*You know, she's got to have a better knowledge or understanding of the job to be able to prove herself. I think these are the sort of barriers that one needs to overcome.*" (P9). This was confirmed by P10, who is the only women in the board of directors at her company and said that she needed to prove herself so her colleagues would not think she is "*just good in*

talking." (P10). She said: "*Generally, you you're having to do more, I must say, you're having to do more than if you were just a gentleman.*" (P10). At this point P5 said that a lot of women stay in lower positions, even if they are qualified to rise to higher positions. At the top there are a lot of men, and "*that's where we want to see more women*" (P5), but this fact is exactly what hinders women from going for those kinds of positions; she stated that "*the environment sometimes is not conducive for you to move, to mobilise up.*" (P5). The participants mentioned that women feel "*misplaced*" (P9), "*isolated*" (P9), just not "*confident to speak [...] or to share ideas*" (P8) or would "*suffer from imposter syndrome*" (P10), which would hold them back them applying to and thus acquiring leadership positions. This lack of confidence may well have resulted from repeated past experiences of being dismissed because of their sex and expected gender roles, which was something that P8 mentioned.

4. 3. 5 Backlashes and Perceptions of Women

All female participants reported that the perception and acceptance of female leaders is way different than that from male leaders. P10 who studied law and works as an HR director said:

> You almost have to be a superwoman, you have to be very, very, very, very
> good. Otherwise, then they will find a loophole. So, if you're a woman
> leader, you have to be as straight as an arrow. You know, you cannot do any
> evil. Because if you do, then they will exploit that to take advantage of you
> [...] I think they punish us very, very well (P10).

P5, who is the founder of a research and mentorship organisation, reported that she often experiences people being surprised, or even shocked, when they learn that she founded the organisation. She described her own leadership style as "*underground*" (P5) and reported that she often felt dismissed when she went to research conferences. To gain more respect and authenticity in her leadership and senior researcher role, she said:

> I started training programs on facilitating online learning, research, mentoring. I have
> been in bigger organisations, as a mentor, to create my own legitimacy. So that when
> I speak, I can show you, I have a track record (P5).

With these qualifications in hand, she knew she would be more respected as a leader, but she struggled with an uncomfortable feeling of "*showing off*" (P5) whenever she mentioned her

achievements and certificates. She reported that she did not want to be seen as too aggressive. Whilst P5 described feelings of discomfort on her pathway to leadership, P7 observed men, especially in junior positions, being way more "*aggressive*" (P7) and wanting to quickly rise from junior to higher positions. He commented:

> They [the men] are kind of aggressive and they want to be noticed by the management. So that coupled with the mindset now will propel a man to be promoted easily. Then again, when you look at women… even when it comes to kind of opportunities of advancement… that kind of aggressiveness is not that much there (P7).

Several female participants revealed that they have faced situations that required them to act more assertively and counter-stereotypically to either gain authority or respect. However, the reactions by their colleagues were often negative. P7 noticed in his work environment that assertive women were labelled as "*bossy*" (P7), and colleagues would say "*it is too much*" (P7). He noticed such comments coming especially from fellow women. Also, P5 described how people reacted after she gained more confidence in her leadership position:

> There is a lot of labelling. Like me, people have constantly described me as very intimidating, because when I have an idea, I'll go with it, I'll push it. So that label is a label to either discourage you or make you feel you're too much. So, you want to minimise your too-muchness. And I think that also played into my being invisible, trying to be invisible and let my work speak for itself for you see this work, but you don't know who was doing it (P5).

P4 said that men could be saying the same thing as a woman in a meeting, and trying to push through their ideas, but the perception by the colleagues would be different: "*They [the men] would be considered assertive and I'd be considered aggressive*" (P4). P8 stated the same and said that she is careful "*not to seem to be aggressive*" (P8) when acting in her position or advocating for an idea. P4 said these feelings manifested not only in disklike but also outright dismissal:

> she is not even looked at. That is what they see, you know, this one, this one is troubled. You don't want to have this on your team because they're seen as less agreeable (P4).

The interviewees shared that it is difficult for women to find a balance as pushing through their ideas risked them being disliked by their colleagues, which would also hold them back from either getting an idea implemented or going for a more senior position, as they would rather stay in a place that is "*safe*" (P5). P10 reported that assertive women would often be told to slow down and that they would experience punishments which could happen directly or indirectly. There could even be comments on subjects which are not work related, such as body shaming or picking on other sexuality-related issues, which will be looked at in the next sub-theme.

4. 3. 6 Sexual Harassment

The female participants in this study repeatedly mentioned that one of the main barriers holding women back from acquiring leadership positions is sexual harassment. P5 said that acts of sexual harassment at the workplace either make "*women not go for particular positions and enhance that disbalance*" (P5), or go for the position but then be exposed to situations where acts of sexual harassment would happen, or "*where your boss will need you to do some things to be able to grow.*" (P5). Interestingly, this was the point when P5 was asked if she herself had ever had any experiences with sexual harassment along her career path. At first, she denied she had, but then quickly realised that actually she had been exposed to it, without realising it in the moment, as such conduct had become so normalised for her (P5). Also, P4 reported to being repeatedly touched at work or "*catcalled*" (P4). She mentioned a situation where a male colleague tried to make advances towards her on several occasions until it became extremely imitating and uncomfortable for her. When she told him off, he got "*really offended*" (P4). She said:

> Then he made my life hard for a bit of time before I had to escalate it and be like, this particular person is making my work hard. And you know, I think something should be done about it. Nothing was done about it (P4).

P4 and P5 explained that the main problem with acts of sexual harassment lies in the fact that "*people don't see a problem*" (P4), which was confirmed by P7 who has heard male colleagues talk about women in a discriminating way: "*They don't seem to notice that they are harassing. They are causing some harassment.*" (P7). P5 also spoke about sexual harassment (see Chapter

4.3.1 Company Policies) and later on, she mentioned her worries about normalising sexual harassment and sex discrimination:

> I think we have systems that are not very… they don't frown upon injustices of women enough, you know, normalising violence, normalising harassment. So, when a woman speaks up, you minimise her, you're like, it's not too bad (P5).

Even reporting sexual assault can be futile, as P4 said the police would not take the issue seriously, which is why a lot of assaults are not reported. P2 mentioned a general atmosphere of sexualisation of women at work and referred to prejudices that lead to women being hesitant about being too assertive when aiming for leadership positions as "*they [men] definitely look at options of who you slept with to get to the top. They won't even look at your education. There are so many stupid stereotypes around the women.*" (P2). The stereotypes that place women into categories build strong barriers for women to break through.

Chapter 4 Findings

Chapter 5   Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the barriers and gender backlashes in women's pathway to leadership in SMEs in Kenya. To support the aim of the study, three research objectives were set in Chapter 1.2. The research objectives are in line with the three main themes that emerged and were presented in Chapter 4. The study revealed a wide range of topics and barriers that impact gender equality in SMEs in Kenya. This chapter brings the theories and main findings of different authors of previous literature (as discussed in Chapter 2) in relation with the findings of this thesis. To give the reader a better overview and present the analysis in correlation to the findings, this chapter has four sections, three of which focus on the main themes that were unearthed from the research, whilst the fourth section examines the limitations of the study. It is important to bear in mind the fact that the themes discussed overlap to some extent and some findings can be found in another theme, if a closer relationship was perceived.

5. 1   Theme 1: Status Quo and Gender Parity Issues in the assessed SMEs

The assessment of the gender compositions of the companies under review revealed female/male ratios from 3% (P4) up to 68% (P7). At this point generalisations cannot be made as the sample consisted of only ten companies and the employee numbers ranged from five to 90 employees. However, what was interesting to note was that the more senior the positions were, the fewer female managers were found. Participants whose companies had a large proportion - or even a majority - of female staff in the overall workforce, reported to have not more than one female manager in the second level management or board of directors. Participants also stated that despite the high proportion of women in their companies, they were still led by men. These findings are in line with previous literature (Pollmann, 2017; Hills, 2015; Murugami, 2018; Warner et al., 2018), which suggest that the fewer the number of female employees, the higher the positions they hold are, especially in Chief and board-level positions.

To evaluate gender parity, the study looked at the criteria that companies use to promote gender equality within the organisation. The results provided evidence that a clear focus is put on

purely choosing by the qualifications that an employee brings, rather than considering the proportion of men and women in the organisation. Some of the participants did not see the benefits of having a mixed composition of men and women in the management team, as they said the company performance is dependent on the characters of the leaders regardless of gender composition. The following studies (Nguyen et al., 2020; Reguera-Alvarado et al., 2017; Ionascu et al., 2018; Martín-Ugedo & Minguez-Vera, 2014) prove that a mixed composition of men and women in the workforce and leadership team leads to a positive firm performance and better overall company results. If management does not share the belief that a mixed board of directors or a mixed management team is beneficial for the company, they are likely not to implement criteria that strive for gender-balanced teams in the workforce.

It is notable that the participants reported in direct quotes that the criteria to pick employees would be purely based on qualifications and not on gender. However, the study revealed that women face preconceptions about their abilities and doubts about their qualifications which limit their chances of being chosen. The dominance of men in the leadership positions of the organisations under review indicated an overall internal gender disparity.

Further indicator of gender inequality was the fact that the decision-making power in these organisations is not given equally to men and women. Two main points were uncovered at this point: Firstly, participants reported that women are more likely to be given implementing roles rather than strategic roles. Secondly, if women do hold strategic roles, they tend suffer from not being heard, not getting their ideas implemented and, more generally, being dismissed, unless they have founded the organisation themselves. Several reports by other scholars (Kulich & Ryan, 2017; Fraser-Moleketi et al., 2015) have shown that even if women hold leadership or boardroom positions, they are not given the same power as men to make impactful decisions. Participants highlighted the need for companies to shift their focus to inclusive gender diversity that gives women voices and not only seats. These results are in line with Mwagiru (2019) who mentioned that numbers of women in management alone are not enough to indicate the inclusivity of women in decision-making processes. It was suggested in this study that bigger companies would be more concerned to have women in decision-making roles if there is more public scrutiny. This finding is in line with Fraser-Moleketi et al. (2015) who reasoned that there is a reasonable amount of media interest in large corporations, which is simply not the case with SMEs. Giving women decision-making power only because of greater public scrutiny does not demonstrate that the importance of gender diversity has been

understood and viewed as a meaningful issue by the management team and without this understanding it is hard to pass this to SMEs that are - due to the hidden sector - less confronted with large media interests.

5. 2 Theme 2: Institutional Factors

Further analysis revealed that only a few policies existed internally in the companies that monitor practices impacting gender equality. In one case, an "open-door" policy, where everyone could address their matter at any time, was seen as appropriate rather than having formal policies. Equality was mentioned to be given to anybody who is interested. This observation showcases equality as a choice that is given, rather than a right or standard. The approach of an open-door policy has to be viewed critically, since laws and policies are meant to be in place which support and create a safe framework for employees. Additionally, policies are needed to communicate strictly forbidden areas and clear lines where harassment and discrimination start. The research found that incidents of harassment had to happen first before the issue was tackled. These issues could have possibly been avoided if clear policies had been in place beforehand.

The fact that the SME sector is hidden from the public with less media attention and reinforcement of policies by authorities, leaves room for loopholes where women face acts of exploitation in terms of their rights, as was shown in this study. For example, one participant had been let go by her previous employer right before she was about to give birth. Such consequences were seen as a struggle by some participants when considering the role of maternity rights in SMEs, since the financial burden of paid leave would impact too profoundly on the company's finances. Nevertheless, participants emphasised that in order for Kenya to achieve gender equality, companies need to start prioritising the rights of their employees over financial aspects. To achieve this, policies need to be put in place that are followed by companies and this requires action, support and reinforcement by the national government. Additionally, the need for more public funding for the SME sector was expressed by participants to be able to provide, for example maternity leaves.

From the interviews, it became clear that the participants are aware of the efforts that the Kenyan government are making in order to achieve gender equality in the country. However,

major criticisms were expressed that policies such as the two-third gender rule exist only on paper and fail to be implemented effectively and with strong implementation in real life. As mentioned in Chapter 2.2.1 Akech argued in 2010 that the 2010 constitution does indeed have the means to create justice, but the sticking point is the strong execution of it.

This study revealed that the top positions in parliament are still occupied mostly by men, which holds back companies in the private sector believing in female leaders. These criticisms are in line with Okech (2019) who found that the inefficient enforcement of the laws and policies in Kenya was responsible for the modest progress that has been made thus far. Participants felt strongly that if the government's goal was to achieve gender equality in the country, including companies in the private sector, it is vital to have visible female leaders with a strong voice in the most senior positions. Female participants expressed the importance of having female leaders in parliament to lead by example and also to be role models for young girls and women at the beginning of their careers. In summary, the Kenyan government must send an authentic and believable message that women have the right and the competence to be leaders as much as mem.

Alongside having a greater number of women in parliament and ensuring they have a voice, participants see a need to involve educational institutions such as universities, schools and children/teen clubs. One of the research findings was that the policy of lowering grades for women in order to enter universities was met with all-round disapproval. It was explained by participants as counterproductive, as it would strengthen the perception of women of not being as good as men. Many participants felt it should be the duty of schools to teach mutual respect between men and women and incorporate the message that girls are as worthy as boys, so a degradation of womenS and girl's academic performance would only reinforce the perception that women are not enough. As discussed in Chapter 2.2.2 Nilsson (2013) warns of a strengthening of the negative perception of women, if teachers are not free from stereotypes and pessimistic beliefs around them, which is why clear policies and guidelines - as discussed in the previous subchapter - could give a helpful framework. Additionally, early inclusion and mixing of male and female students in clubs and after-school situations can create a natural, collaborative environment where women are not excluded anymore.

The exclusion of women from certain settings seems to be carried into the workplace and can have a huge impact on decision-making situations. Interview participants reported that women are excluded from afterwork drinks or other social gatherings, where men would get together and would often take important work decisions in informal settings. A similar exclusion was presented in Chapter 2.2.3 and referred to as "the old boys network" in the literature (Vinnicombe et al., 2008; Mwagiru, 2019; Fraser-Moleketi et al., 2015). Whilst the author Radtke et al. (2014) reasoned such events and settings were purposeful initiative created by men in order to gain power over women (see Chapter 2.2.3), this perception was not confirmed by the interview candidates. It was merely reasoned that it would look inappropriate for a woman to join such settings, or that women would not have time to take part as they had family responsibilities to attend to. Nevertheless, such informal decision-making situations can lead to men being promoted to more senior positions, which can result in male-dominated leadership teams. Such male domination in leadership teams leads to women feeling dismissed in meetings. It was reported that women often struggle to get their ideas and suggestions implemented if they are without female support. Examples were given where women would make a man on their behalf and talk about their (the woman's) idea, which was then accepted. If an idea or suggestion presented by a woman has difficulties getting through the decision committee, but the same suggestion finds consent when presented by a man, the lack of opportunities for women and the discrimination they face is clearly illustrated.

The study results suggested that it is also important to shift the focus from workplace to family settings and evaluate the dynamics and decision-making power between husband and wife. One male participant claimed that decisions are being taken equally in his family, but then immediately added that his wife would be his "helper" (P6), whilst he labeled himself as the "head of the family" (P6) due to his Christian belief. Such distinctions imply huge power differences between men and women within one family.

5. 3 Theme 3: Sociocultural Barriers

An initial objective of this study was to understand the sociocultural barriers that hinder women from rising up to leadership positions. The responses of the interview candidates neatly tie with the literature analysis. Researchers (Bush & Gao, 2017; Wangila, 2015; Mungai & Ogot, 2012; Murugami, 2018) witnessed the subordination of women at the workplace in societies with

patriarchal cultures, and their findings were strongly mirrored by the participants' experiences. The cultural factors established by other scholars, which have been analysed in Chapter 2, were revealed when conducting the interviews.

Chapter 2 discussed the denial of land rights and resources for women (Akech, 2010; Kameri-Mbote, 2006), whilst this study revealed the unequal distribution of inheritance between men and women. Both factors contribute to the disempowerment of women, within the family and outwith it. The stereotypical expectation of women to be submissive, agreeable, and caring (see Chapter 2.2) was in line with the impressions of common stereotypes expressed by the interview candidates. Men were described as assertive throughout the interviews, which is a quality characterised as a prescriptive stereotype by Phelan & Rudman (2010). It is important to note that the factors which were explored under the theme "Sociocultural Factors" cannot be strictly separated from each other, but rather build up, interweave and influence each other. Whilst a stereotype might be that a woman is supposed to be submissive and caring and a man is assertive, another gender role which might arise from these beliefs might be that a woman should have her focus on the family rather than on her career. The resulting financial dependence of a woman on her husband can put him in a superior role as the head of the family, and then this mindset leads to the belief that women at work are less worth and that men have more power. So stereotypes and gender roles are not merely two separate, exclusive factors, but rather can be seen as two variables that affect one another in a myriad of ways and the larger outcome is a creation of a culture which is hard to break free from. This dynamic strengthens the perception of men being in a superior role generally which, in turn, affects attitudes towards women.

Phelan & Rudman (2010), Ely et al., (2011) and Murugami (2018) claim that the role of a leader is more likely to be connected with men, since the associated male stereotypes fit the leader role better than female stereotypes. It could not be confirmed whether interview participants would connect a leader with a male figure from their own point of view, however a strong tendency was shown that generally women would have to prove themselves more and show more of their knowledge to gain authenticity and approval in order to break the glass ceiling, which was in line with a study conducted by Murugami (2018).

Chapter 5 Discussion

At this point, the previously discussed backlash effects (see Chapter 2.2.2) were discovered. Literature suggests that women need to act counter-stereotypically in order to gain respect in their leadership roles, but that contravening with the female stereotypes would lead to dislike and disapproval (see Chapter 2.2.2: Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012; Ibarra et al.; 2013). Female interview participants reported being labelled as "too much", and "too bossy", which made them feel uncomfortable around their colleagues. These reactions can be explained with the role of congruity (see Chapter 2.2.2: Eagly 2002 in Rudman & Phelan, 2008; Hoyt & Burnette, 2013) which suggests that a female leadership role does not sit in harmony with the prescriptive female stereotypes. Men reported that women would be seen as too aggressive, whilst women reported that whenever they tried to be strict or present their knowledge, they would have the feeling of showing off or being too much. Female participants revealed that they often had a sense of wanting to be invisible because of intense feelings of discomfort, which stemmed from the fact that they were either the only women around men, or because they would feel that they advertised themselves too much if they talked about their own work, or because they felt they were not heard. Discomfort was classified as one of the top reasons for women leaving their leadership positions in a study conducted by Rudmann & Phelan (2008). Grossmann et al. (2015) suggested that qualified women would decline leadership roles out of fear of not being respected. The results of this study suggest that it is male-dominated boardrooms and senior management teams that make women feel misplaced, dismissed and uncomfortable because they are simply around too many men. It is the dismissal of women that results in a lack of confidence and self-doubt, which leads to them fearing to take on more senior roles. Participants reported the difficult situation that more women are needed in male-dominated areas, however it is this very male domination in certain sectors and/or levels that holds women back from feeling accepted and comfortable there.

Previous studies evaluated if women would help or hinder other women from acquiring leadership positions (Abendroth et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2020; Bell, 2005; Ibarra et al., 2013). As discussed in Chapter 2.2.3 there was no clear consensus around this issue. However, the participants of this study clearly mentioned the importance of having female supervisors and female mentors. Female mentors and supervisors can be role models, set standards for equal pay, and might also better understand if women have to take care of a child that is ill, as it was discovered during the research interviews.

Chapter 5 Discussion

Female participants reported that their role in the family and the unequal distribution of household work had a huge impact on their career possibilities. It occupied a lot of time during their day and they received little support from their husbands. Women's domestic roles exhausted them, as they had to do a lot of household chores after they came home from work. Identities are very much connected with gender roles, which is why it is hard to change men's beliefs around the concept of doing household work. One male participant did not see any motivation in helping with that and stated that if it did not inspire him, he would not want to do it. His view was that men and women should complement each other, whereby he meant that his wife would do the household work whilst he fulfilled his career ambitions. Such family dynamics limit women's choices immensely, as they do not get the chance to prove their abilities in a work setting. Women may also be prevented from attending after-work social functions because of societal pressure to be a perceived as a good homemaker or from pressure and disapproval from male family members.

A striking finding that was not given enough importance in the literature chapter was the huge burden of sexual harassment in the workplace for women. It was identified as being a major barrier for women when they considered applying for leadership positions. The female participants worried that if sexual harassment is not punished in non-work situations, it will stay in the workplace, and will keep negatively influencing women when they are deciding whether to apply for leadership positions, as they would often prefer to stay in roles or places where they feel safe. A general sense of women belonging to men due to traditional beliefs, especially in tribal cultures, was observed throughout the interviews. The fact that women need the permission of their husband for medical procedures such sterilisation or accessing contraceptives, limits women's freedom immensely and bolsters the idea that women cannot make important decisions about themselves, let alone others.

The aforementioned themes all influence each other at various points. The final research finding was the interplay between culture and traditional mindsets and behaviours and the composition of men and women in boardrooms. Stereotypes are embedded into mindsets which can heavily influence opportunities that are given to either a man or a woman based on their sex. This is why the argument that equal opportunities are given to both men and women - an idea which was mentioned by many participants - should be considered with extreme caution. If mindsets and beliefs portray women as being inferior to men, and thus should inhabit gender

roles that befit their status, then women will always be the person solely responsible for household work. Then opportunities are not equal whatsoever.

Firstly, this study revealed that women's abilities are questioned more, which means that a man may be given an opportunity more easily as he is considered more likely to succeed, whilst a woman might need to perform extra well to even be considered at all.

Secondly, if men have less work to do in the household, they have more time and energy to focus on their careers which allows them to focus on climbing the career ladder. As leadership positions are already overwhelmingly filled by men - who are more likely to hire other men - the status quo of a male-dominated boardroom looks set to continue.

Also, laws and policies are dependent on the existing culture and its variables in the environment they reside in, and the societal mores of the country they exist in. Nevertheless, laws and policies are very much needed to be in place to provide a framework and to set limits, boundaries and penalties for overstepping them. The power of laws and legislation should not be underestimated as they provide a guideline as to what kind of conduct is expected and what behaviour will and will not be tolerated. It is also vital when creating a safe environment for all members of the workplace, not just men. It is the government's responsibility to execute established laws with stronger enforcement measures and penalties, as people will quickly lose hope and belief if this is not done.

5. 4   Limitations

The researcher of this thesis is aware of the limitations that come with the study. Whilst this study aimed to explore and understand barriers and factors of different areas that influence women's pathways to leadership in SMEs, regardless of which industry they worked in within Kenya, future research might differentiate between specific sectors and explore its specific characteristics and dynamics.

It could be interesting to look at tech companies and the experiences of female software engineers, for example. Technology products are being used by men as much as by women but due to the male domination in the tech industry are mostly designed by men (PwC, U. K., 2017). To meet everyone's needs, more women in the tech industry would be beneficial for a

better product and experience, as well as the wider societal benefits. Future research could look at how the underrepresentation of women in tech can be overcome.

This study sample included only three men, whereas further data collection could assess more male participants. A focus group discussion could add a lot of value in getting valuable insights, as comments occur in a natural way in the form of a debate or discussion.

Given that culture plays a major role, future research could incorporate cultural frameworks such as (Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*) and draw comparisons with other countries.

Closer analysis should be placed on the different tribes, communities and cultures within Kenya to see if experiences, values, mindsets and cultures differ and lead to varying outcomes for women in the workplace and/or leadership roles. A comparison between urban and rural areas would also be a valuable research exercise.

Factors that have not been addressed within this study are age of an employee; the years of experience of an employee; and the company size within the SME sector (see Chapter 2.4.6). Considering the factor of age could bring several insights such in how age is related to respect towards women. Future studies could include participants over 45 to get their opinions on what has and has not changed over the years, how fast the country and institutions are progressing, and most importantly the relation of age, experience and respect in work contexts.

Since this study mentioned that women are helpful for the career advancement of other women, future research could investigate how mentorships within companies can be successfully implemented.

Chapter 6   Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the barriers and gender backlashes that women face in their pathways to leadership in SMEs in Kenya. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with founders, directors and managers in Kenyan SMEs to discover various perspectives and experiences to successfully match the research objectives with the research findings.

The results of this research suggest that whilst the gender composition in lower and middle positions may be more or less equal, the lead of companies is mostly taken by men. Whilst previous research proves that gender diverse teams and boards lead to a positive firm performance and increased employee satisfaction, managers still do not consider gender-balanced management teams to be of high importance. The fact that management teams in SMEs in Kenya are still so dominated by men is justified by arguing that employees are selected or promoted purely based on their qualifications and abilities - the subtext being that women are less qualified and less able than men, a conclusion which is unjust, unfair and, most importantly, untrue. It was repeatedly emphasised that men and women generally have equal opportunities in the workplace, a statement which was completely disproved by this study.

With culture being recognised as the main barrier to female leadership, all participants - male and female - were open about the fact that women face huge amounts of prejudice in the workplace which flow from their sex, manifesting themselves in gender roles that are difficult to shake off, regardless of their capabilities. Different factors emerged that all contribute to strengthening existing cultural mindsets that women are not as good as men, which results in the unequal treatment of women and men. Culturally, only men have been in positions to wield power and have placed women in inferior positions because women are perceived to be lesser to men. Traditions such as men inheriting either everything or the majority of the family's wealth and the discrimination that women face in terms of ownership of land in comparison to men, alongside the requirement for women to ask for their husband's permission if they want to access reproductive healthcare, all underline the subordination of women to men, and also the ways in which they are forced to depend on males.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The stereotypes and gender roles that women are confronted with which keep them in an inferior position to men were highlighted in this study and are in line with previous literature findings. This study suggests that because women are being perceived as less than men, they need to work harder and longer and prove themselves twice as much in the workplace- all while taking on the second job of running a household and caring for children - to get to the same senior positions that men are in. The bulk of household chores and family responsibilities which are often left to the woman limits their capacity to have energy and time to focus on their careers. A this point the study presented the difficulties in changing a man's mindset and thus supporting household work, since gender roles are tied to such rigid notions of what it is to be male and female.

Women are liked to be seen as agreeable and submissive, whilst men are seen as straightforward and assertive. The latter characteristics ones perceived to be more desirable for candidates for leadership positions. Conversely, however, these qualities in women are disliked and criticised as the prescriptive gender stereotypes are violated. This observation is named "gender backlash" in the literature and was confirmed in this study as the consequences of women gaining authority in their leadership position were dislike, prejudices and accusations.

This study suggests that the continuing domination of men in leadership positions excludes the few women that are at the top from important decision-making processes, either because decisions are being made in informal situations where women are excluded, such as over an after-work drink, or because women experience dismissal in senior meetings because of their perceived gender role. Feelings of being less than, being dismissed, being put into rigid gender roles and/or being ignored - regardless of their expertise - lead women to feel insecure about declaring their opinions and suggestions, which in most cases means they do not speak up. By not voicing out their ideas, the prejudices around women that they are not able to say something meaningful are being strengthened and repeated research shows that companies where this happens fare less well than those where men and women have parity and equal respect.

Additionally, this study uncovered the fact that it is often male domination in management positions that holds women back from climbing the career ladder to the most senior roles, as it is hard for other women to be promoted if companies recruit internally and vertically for leadership positions, where from second-level management upwards, most positions are

already held by men. So is it male domination that impacts women's success in leadership at two important points: firstly from actually receiving a promotion in the first place and secondly, stopping the few women that are at the top from participating in decision makings and generally feeling secure in their position.

One of the more significant and disquieting findings to emerge from this research was the ubiquity of sexual harassment for Kenyan women in the workplace, the normalisation around it and the culture of impunity that exists for the men who perpetrate it. Objectification, sexual comments and stronger forms of harassment are all tools that men use to disempower, discriminate and disadvantage women at work. This study pointed out that women clearly feel unsafe and uncomfortable in their working life, which often means they face the dilemma of either declining a leadership position to avoid sexual harassment or going for it, but facing the subsequent harassment and vilification. The need for strict internal policies was made clear; loose verbal agreements are wholly inadequate if the goal is to prop up a framework that is transparent and create and maintain a safe working environment for women.

This research underlined the importance of a top-down as well as bottom-up approach in order to successfully strive for equality between the sexes and an end to discrimination against women. The role of the government is critically important to establish rules, policies, and laws which set an outlook and framework for what the country wants to achieve in terms of equality. If the Kenyan government is serious in achieving this goal, they need to do two very significant and important things. Firstly, the government needs to strongly enforce the rules and laws that already exist, to ensure that they are taken seriously and provide assurances that men who break these rules will face some kind of punitive action. Secondly, if the government's goal is to achieve equality of the sexes in the private sector, they need to lead by example by not only placing striving for parity in numbers between men and women in parliament, but by also giving voice to women in politics and to include them in decision-making committees. Women who are in these political roles need to truly believe that they are there to be able to change something, not just to tick a diversity box. Women in the most senior of roles in governments must be given the space to be role models and set examples for other women, who in turn will then be given the chance to believe in themselves and to change the one-way view that only men can lead.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

In terms of bottom-up approaches, if it is the goal to have younger generations of Kenyan boys and girls growing up with a different mindset than those currently held, with traditional beliefs around concepts of gender roles, it is important to teach children from early childhood onwards about equality and relieve them of the burden of rigid gender roles being assigned to men and women. Educational institutions such as kindergartens and schools can set out the framework of how women are portrayed. Universities can also play a major role in how the capabilities of women are perceived and there needs to be recognition that sometimes policies that are put in place in an attempt to be progressive can backfire. For example, this study found that if women are given grade reductions to enter university, this just upholds the perception that women are inferior to and less capable than men and thus would only add to the existing negative, stereotypical concepts of what it is to be woman that currently exist in Kenyan society.

Taken together, these findings suggest that it is cultural mindsets that are the biggest barriers for equality between men and women in the workplace. If traditional mindsets can be released from the thought that women are less worth than men and actually be replaced with beliefs around equality and dignity between men and women, the economic as well as societal benefits will be immense. The elimination of barriers to women's success at work will not only be advantageous for women as a class, but also for fathers and husbands, for partners and friends, teachers and students and co-workers and managers. Diversity brings in different perspectives that lead to favorable results and this potential can only be fulfilled if a space is created where no one feels oppressed. Equal distribution of decision-making power, as well as household work in family settings, transparent practices in the workplace and consequent penalties for discriminating behaviours – in whatever form - are crucial for equality between men and women. Simultaneously it is the responsibility of educational institutions to have the next generation grow up with the belief that no sex is worth less than the other and that the abilities for someone to lead and perform are not dependent on biology and traditional assigned roles. It is important to break old structures and to let go of conservative stereotypes and gender roles that hold women back from reaching their full potential. The era of justifying inequality with excuses such as traditional cultures and existing mindsets is over. Kenyan women - and women everywhere - deserve the chance to take on leading roles in society and to be judged on their qualities, competency and achievements, rather than their biology and (in)ability to fulfil prescribed - and often suffocating - gender roles, which do not just limit women but also societal progress in general.

References

Abendroth, A.-K., Melzer, S., Kalev, A., & Tomaskovic-Devey, D. (2017). Women at Work: Women's Access to Power and the Gender Earnings Gap. *ILR Review*, *70*(1), 190–222. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793916668530

About Generation Equality | Get involved: Generation Equality: Realizing women's rights for an equal future. (n.d.). UN Women. Retrieved 6 March 2020, from https://www.unwomen.org/get-involved/beijing-plus-25/about

Access to Government Procurement Opportunities. (2017). https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2fPPRiCAq hKb7yhsglff%2fiazrVw%2bcyfdY9GxZ4qs0%2f%2f6%2bISOPieXnJX5bSbMNMh y8L0QJb1Msoi4tf3a%2fRZoZGoB2%2bSHneb0l8QBLSNoBXbYwnuQYk8OiITNP EF. Retrieved on 11.02.2021.

Adu, P. (2019). *A Step-by-Step Guide to Qualitative Data Coding*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351044516

Akech, M. (2010). *Institutional reform in the new constitution of Kenya*.

Bauer, N. M., & Carpinella, C. (2018). Visual Information and Candidate Evaluations: The Influence of Feminine and Masculine Images on Support for Female Candidates. *Political Research Quarterly*, *71*(2), 395–407.

Bell, L. A. (2005). Women-Led Firms and the Gender Gap in Top Executive Jobs. In *IZA Discussion Papers* (No. 1689; IZA Discussion Papers). Institute of Labor Economics (IZA). https://ideas.repec.org/p/iza/izadps/dp1689.html

Bolin, A. (2018). *Transforming gender relations: Upscaling collective action in women's entrepreneurship*. International Institute for Environment and Development. https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17992

References

Bush, S. S., & Gao, E. (2017). Small Tribes, Big Gains: The Strategic Uses of Gender Quotas in the Middle East. *Comparative Politics*, *49*(2), 149–167.

Bwisa, H., & Ndolo, J. M. (2011). *Culture as a Factor in Entrepreneurship Development: A Case Study of the Kamba Culture of Kenya*. Undefined. /paper/Culture-as-a-Factor-in-Entrepreneurship-A-Case-of-Bwisa-Ndolo/c6b4d05860398a68fb38474f310b96aa620986d7

Chabaya, O., Rembe, S., & Wadesango, N. (2009). The persistence of gender inequality in Zimbabwe: factors that impede the advancement of women into leadership positions in primary schools. *South African Journal of Education*, *29*(2), 235–251.

Chang, C., & England, P. (2011). Gender inequality in earnings in industrialized East Asia. *Social Science Research*, *40*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2010.06.014

Christensen, L. B., Johnson, R. B., & Turner, L. A. (2014). *Research Methods, Design, and Analysis, 12th Edition* (12th ed.). Pearson Education.

Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003 concerning the definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. (2003). In *OJ L* (Vol. 124). Access to Europena Union Law. http://data.europa.eu/eli/reco/2003/361/oj/eng

Deloitte East Africa. (2021) / East Africa Tax Alerts. *Deloitte Ethiopia*. Retrieved 6 February 2021, from https://www2.deloitte.com/ke/en/pages/tax/articles/EA_tax_alerts.html

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, *109*(3), 573–598. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573

EIGE. (2019). *Gender Equality Index 2019 in brief: Still far from the finish line*. European Institute for Gender Equality. https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-brief-still-far-finish-line

References

Ely, R. J., Ibarra, H., & Kolb, D. M. (2011). Taking Gender Into Account: Theory and Design for Women's Leadership Development Programs. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, *10*(3), 474–493. https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2010.0046

Employment Act, Kenya. (2012). National Council for Law Reporting Kenya.

Fėlix, E. G. S., & David, D. S. T. (2019). Performance of family-owned firms: The impact of gender at the management level. *Journal of Family Business Management*.

Fraser-Moleketi, G. J., Mizrahi, S., & Bank, A. D. (2015). *Where are the Women: Inclusive Boardrooms in Africa's Top Listed Companies*. African Development Bank.

Gatrell, C., Cooper, C. L., & Kossek, E. E. (2017). Maternal Bodies as Taboo at Work: New Perspectives on the Marginalizing of Senior-Level Women in Organizations. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *31*(3), 239–252. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2014.0034

Gender: Definitions. (n.d.). World Health Organization. Retrieved 11 June 2021, from https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/gender/gender-definitions

Gender parity. (n.d.). European Institute for Gender Equality. Retrieved 11 June 2021, from https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1195

Grossman, P. J., Komai, M., & Jensen, J. E. (2015). Leadership and gender in groups: An experiment. *The Canadian Journal of Economics / Revue Canadienne d'Economique*, *48*(1), 368–388.

Heidari, S., Babor, T. F., De Castro, P., Tort, S., & Curno, M. (2016). Sex and Gender Equity in Research: Rationale for the SAGER guidelines and recommended use. *Research Integrity and Peer Review*, *1*(1), 2. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41073-016-0007-6

Heilman, M. E. (2012). Gender stereotypes and workplace bias. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *32*, 113–135. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2012.11.003

References

Hills, J. (2015). Addressing Gender Quotas in South Africa: Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Legislation. *Deakin Law Review*, *20*(1), 153–184. https://doi.org/10.21153/dlr2015vol20no1art498

Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values* (Vol. 5). SAGE.

Hoyt, C. L., & Burnette, J. L. (2013). Gender Bias in Leader Evaluations: Merging Implicit Theories and Role Congruity Perspectives. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167213493643

Hughes, M. M., Paxton, P., & Krook, M. L. (2017). Gender Quotas for Legislatures and Corporate Boards. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *43*(1), 331–352. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053324

Ibarra, H., Ely, R. J., & Kolb, D. M. (2013, September 1). Women Rising: The Unseen Barriers. *Harvard Business Review*, *September 2013*. https://hbr.org/2013/09/women-rising-the-unseen-barriers

International Women's Day: Progress on gender equality remains slow. (2020, March 5). UN News. https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1058811

Ionascu, M., Ionascu, I., Sacarin, M., & Minu, M. (2018). Women on Boards and Financial Performance: Evidence from a European Emerging Market. *Sustainability*, *10*(5), 1644. https://doi.org/10.3390/su10051644

Jhaveri, N. J (2020). *ANNEX 1* (FOREST TENURE PATHWAYS TO GENDER EQUALITY, pp. 133–135). Center for International Forestry Research; JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29162.10

Kameri-Mbote, P. (2006). Women, Land Rights and the Environment: The Kenyan experience. *Development*, *49*(3), 43–48. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.development.1100274

References

Kimenyi, M., Mwega, F., & Ndung'u, N. (2016). Kenya- Economic Growth, Labor Market Dynamics, and Prospects for a Demographic Dividend. In H. BHORAT & F. TARP (Eds.), *Africa's Lions* (pp. 109–144). Brookings Institution Press; JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt1hfr23q.7

Kirchherr, J., & Charles, K. (2018). Enhancing the sample diversity of snowball samples: Recommendations from a research project on anti-dam movements in Southeast Asia. *PLoS ONE*, *13*(8). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0201710

Krook, M. L. (2015). Empowerment versus backlash: Gender quotas and critical mass theory. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, *3*(1), 184–188. https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2014.999806

Kulich, C., & Ryan, M. (2017). *The glass cliff*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190224851.013.42

Kumar, R. (2017). *Targeted SME Financing and Employment Effects*. World Bank, Washington, DC. https://doi.org/10.1596/27477

KUNG'U, G. K. (2011). *Factors influencing SMEs access to finance: A case study of Westland Division,Kenya* [MPRA Paper]. https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/66633/

Lapan, S. D., Quartaroli, M. T., & Riemer, F. J. (2011). *Qualitative Research: An Introduction to Methods and Designs*. John Wiley & Sons.

Lohini Moodley, Tania Holt, Acha Leke, & Georges Desvaux. (2016). *Women Matter Africa 2016* (No. 9; Woman Matter). McKinsey&Company. https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Women%20matter/Women%20matter%20Africa/Women%20Matter%20Africa%20August%202016.ashx

Lorber, J. (2005). *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics*. Oxford University Press.

References

Løvgren, R. (2015). *Masculinity and mass violence in Africa: Ongoing debates, concepts and trends*. Danish Institute for International Studies. https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep13404

Malach-Pines, A., & Kaspi-Baruch, O. (2008). The role of culture and gender in the choice of a career in management. *Career Development International*, *13*(4), 306–319. https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430810880808

Martín-Ugedo, J. F., & Minguez-Vera, A. (2014). Firm Performance and Women on the Board: Evidence from Spanish Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises. *Feminist Economics*, *20*(3), 136–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2014.895404

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.

Mukabera, J. (2019). Woman's political representation in Rwanda: Analysing how Quota System increases female leadership and changes patriarchal society towards Gender Equality: research. *African Journal of Democracy and Governance*, *6*(2–3), 134–164.

Mungai, E. N., & Ogot, M. (2012). *Gender, culture and entrepreneurship in Kenya*. http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/86491

Muriithi, S. (2017). AFRICAN SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMES) CONTRIBUTIONS, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS. *International Journal of Research & Reflection in Management Science*, *5*, 13.

Murugami, P. (2018). What Holds Women Back from Becoming Transformational Leaders? An Exploration of Factors Found in the Kenyan Environment. *ISM Journal of International Business*, *2*(2), 53–57.

Mwagiru, N. (2019). Women's leadership in business and higher education: A focus on organisational experiences in South Africa and Kenya. *Agenda*, *33*(1), 117–128. https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2019.1600374

88

References

2016 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) (2017), *Kenya National Bureau of Statistics*. https://www.knbs.or.ke/?p=2704

Nguyen, T. H. H., Ntim, C. G., & Malagila, J. K. (2020). Women on corporate boards and corporate financial and non-financial performance: A systematic literature review and future research agenda. *International Review of Financial Analysis*, *71*, 101554. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.irfa.2020.101554

Nilsson, P. (2013). Gender and Development: The Challenge of Mainstream. *Consilience*, *10*, 125–135.

Nomoto, R. (2017). Gender equality: GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS. *UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia*, 17.

Nordentoft—2020—Labour Market Profile 2020.pdf. (n.d.). Retrieved 3 December 2020, from https://www.ulandssekretariatet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Kenya_lmp_2020.pdf

Okech, A. (2019). Gender and state-building conversations: The discursive production of gender identity in Kenya and Rwanda. *Conflict, Security & Development*, *0*(0), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2019.1609762

Olivetti, C., & Petrongolo, B. (2016). The Evolution of Gender Gaps in Industrialized Countries. *Annual Review of Economics*, *8*(1), 405–434. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080614-115329

Ong'olo, D., & Awino, S. (2013). Small and Medium Enterprises and Devolved Government System: An Assessment of the Regulatory and Institutional Challenges Affecting the SMEs Development in Kenya By. 59.

OSAGI Gender Mainstreaming—Concepts and definitions. (n.d.). UN Women. Retrieved 11 June 2021, from https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsandefinitions.htm

References

Pala, A. O. (1983). WOMEN'S ACCESS TO LAND AND THEIR ROLE IN AGRICULTURE
AND DECISION-MAKING ON THE FARM: EXPERIENCES OF THE JOLUO OF
KENYA. *Journal of Eastern African Research & Development*, *13*, 69–87.

Petrongolo, B., & Ronchi, M. (2020). Gender gaps and the structure of local labor markets.
Labour Economics, *64*, 101819. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2020.101819

Phelan, J. E., & Rudman, L. A. (2010). Prejudice Toward Female Leaders: Backlash Effects
and Women's Impression Management Dilemma. *Social and Personality Psychology
Compass*, *4*(10), 807–820. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00306.

Pollmann, L. A. (2017). *Women in Business:* (Women's Leadership in Latin America, pp. 8–
10). Atlantic Council; JSTOR. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03714.8

Poole, D. L. (2018). Entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship and SMEs in developing economies: How
subverting terminology sustains flawed policy. *World Development Perspectives*, *9*,
35–42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wdp.2018.04.003

Poushter, J., Fetterolf, J., & Tamir, C. (2019). *A Changing World: Global Views on Diversity,
Gender Equality, Family Life and the Importance of Religion*. 45.

PwC, U. K. (2017). *Women in Tech, Time to Close the Gender Gap*. PwC.

Puzyreva, M., Roy, D., & Murphy, D. (2018). *Gender and Water* (Adaptive and Inclusive
Watershed Management:, pp. 20–26). International Institute for Sustainable
Development (IISD). https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21909.7

Radtke, H. L., Stam, H. J., & Stam, P. H. J. (1994). *Power/Gender: Social Relations in Theory
and Practice*. SAGE.

References

Reguera-Alvarado, N., De Fuentes, P., & Laffarga, J. (2017). Does board gender diversity influence financial performance? Evidence from Spain. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *141*(2), 337–350.

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Lewis, P. of S. P. J., Nicholls, C. M., & Ormston, R. (2013). *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. SAGE.

Rudman, L., & Phelan, J. (2008). Backlash Effects for Disconfirming Gender Stereotypes in Organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior - RES ORGAN BEH*, *28*, 61–79. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2008.04.003

Sanchez Puerta, M. L., Johansson de Silva, S., & Rizvi, A. (2018). *Kenya: Capturing Skills Requirements and Assessing Skills Gaps in the Modern Economy*. World Bank.

Scheu, A. M. (2018). Auswertung qualitativer Daten in der Kommunikationswissenschaft. In A. M. Scheu (Ed.), *Auswertung qualitativer Daten: Strategien, Verfahren und Methoden der Interpretation nicht-standardisierter Daten in der Kommunikationswissenschaft* (pp. 1–10). Springer Fachmedien. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-18405-6_1

Sedgwick, P. (2013). Snowball sampling. *BMJ*, *347*. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.f7511

Shannon, G., Jansen, M., Williams, K., Cáceres, C., Motta, A., Odhiambo, A., Eleveld, A., & Mannell, J. (2019). Gender equality in science, medicine, and global health: Where are we at and why does it matter? *The Lancet*, *393*(10171), 560–569. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)33135-0

Steyn, G. M., & Parsaloi, M. W. (2014). Moving towards gender equality: The case of female head teachers in Kenya. *Gender and Behaviour*, *12*(1), 5980–5993.

The Constitution of Kenya. (2010). National Council for Law Reporting. https://www.refworld.org/docid/4c8508822.html

References

The Contribution of Social Dialogue to Gender Equality. (2021). [Report]. http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_679957/lang--en/index.htm

Thirikwa, J. W. (2018). Emergent momentum for equality: LGBT visibility and organising in Kenya. In N. Nicol, A. Jjuuko, R. Lusimbo, N. J. Mulé, S. Ursel, A. Wahab, & P. Waugh (Eds.), *Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights* (pp. 307–322). University of London Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv5132j6.19

Tokyo 2020: Organisers boost number of women on board. (2021, March 2). *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56256804

User guide to the SME Definition—European Commission. Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs. (2020). Publications Office of the European Union. https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/42921

Wangila, A., Mary Nyangweso. (2015). *Female Circumcision: The Interplay of Religion, Culture and Gender in Kenya (Women from the Margins)*. Orbis Books.

Warner, J., Ellmann, N., & Boesch, D. (2018). *The Women's Leadership Gap*. Center for American Progress. https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2018/11/20/461273/womens-leadership-gap-2/

WESTBROOK, L., & SCHILT, K. (2014). DOING GENDER, DETERMINING GENDER: Transgender People, Gender Panics, and the Maintenance of the Sex/Gender/Sexuality System. *Gender and Society*, *28*(1), 32–57.

Winston, B. E., & Patterson, K. (2006). An integrative definition of leadership. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, *1*(2), 6–66.

References

Woodhams, C., & Lupton, B. (2006). Does size matter? Gender-based equal opportunity in UK small and medium enterprises. *Women in Management Review*, *21*(2), 143–169. https://doi.org/10.1108/09649420610650710

Woetzel, J. (2015). The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality can Add $12 trillion to Global Growth. In *Working Papers* (id:7570; Working Papers). eSocialSciences. https://ideas.repec.org/p/ess/wpaper/id7570.html

Women in Business 2020 Report: Thailand's Private Sector Leads the Way, While Government Still Lags Behind Despite Minor Improvements. (2020). Grant Thornton Thailand. https://www.grantthornton.co.th/press-releases/press-release-2020/women-in-business-2020-report2/

References

Appendix A. Form of Consent

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

Research Project:

Examining the Barriers and Gender Backlashes of Women's Pathway to Leadership in Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Kenya

Purpose:

By conducting in-depths interviews, the researcher believes to identify the barriers and factors that influence women's chances rising to leadership positions in Kenya.

Consent:

I volunteer to participate in the above mentioned research project conducted by Julia Flöttmann from ISCTE-IUL Lisbon (**Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa**). I understand that the project is designed to gather information for academic work. I will be one of approximately 10 people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

3. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. I agree that the the interview will be recorded.

4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.

Appendix A

Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

5. Faculty and administrators from my campus will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____   _____

Signature   Julia Flöttmann

Date: Date: 21.03.2021

Appendix B. Interview Guide

In Depth Interview question guide

10(+) interviewees

A. Contextualization
- ✓ What is your nationality?
- ✓ What is the sector that your company operates in?
- ✓ Is it a family business?
- ✓ How long have you been working in this organization?
- ✓ What is the role that you currently perform?

B. **Gender Composition in the management team of your organization**
- ✓ What is the core business of your organization?
- ✓ How many people are within your organization? Men? Women? What is the composition of the management? How many men? How many women?
- ✓ What criteria do you use to promote gender equality within your organization?
- ✓ What results have you experienced while promoting gender equality in your organization? What benefit have you had with the top management as women/men?
- ✓ Do you think a balanced men and women composition in the management team is beneficial for the organization? Please elaborate and give example if possible.

C. Factors promoting or hindering women from rising to management (institutional/legal)
- ✓ What structures and systems are you aware of within your organization that promote or hinder women management and gender equality?
- ✓ Are they aware of the existing laws and policies that promote gender equality in Kenya?
- ✓ What policies do they have within the organization – sexual harassment policy; Gender mainstreaming policy; Anti-GBV policy; HR manual

D. Barriers and stereotypes – cultural, perception, norms

- ✓ Do you think men and women should be treated equally in Kenya? In what ways are women and men treated differently in your culture? Can you relate this to your organization?

- ✓ What are the root causes of gender inequality and exclusion of women in your organization? What practices deny or exclude categories of women from management or participation in decision making within your organization?

- ✓ What does it mean to be a woman or man (of different ages) in your organization and how do the roles shape the decision-making power in the organization?

- ✓ What norms structure the ways men and women relate to each other (power relations) and who enforces these norms and how?

- ✓ What efforts are people doing within your organization to overcome the norms that cause inequalities and hinder/deny women from rising to management?

- ✓ What are the common stereotypes (*generalized behaviours and attitudes that are thought to be normal and appropriate for a person solely based of his or her biological sex*), cultural and religious norms, beliefs and practices you hear about men and women?

- ✓ Do these gender stereotypes, cultural and religious norms, beliefs and practices appear to be more incorrectly portrayed to and stronger for females or males or both? Why? How do they deny them the opportunities, access and control of resources and services in your organization?

Appendix C. Quotations Qualifications over Gender Balance

I'm not sure the criteria they use currently. But I'm sure they just give it to a qualified individu...

So ,in the in the business and enterpreneurship, it doesn't matter, male or female, what matters is...

They have to apply. Then you have to look at the academic, the their qualifications. If someone as g...

I would say that the most important thing that they will look into is ability. The ability of that p...

Qualifications over Gender Balance

I choose depending on the skill.

So, you just apply. I actually do not even choose who will be in and who won't be in. Provided you h...

And when opportunities arise we give to everybody who is qualified for them.

I don't think so. I, I don't think it's something that they're consciously thinking about or doing....

Source: Own Illustration