CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract: *The article is devoted to achieving gender equality and overcoming gender discrimination in the Republic of South Africa. The analysis of the scientific literature on this issue attests to the variety of problems that negatively affect gender equality in society. The urgency of solving this scientific problem lies in the fact that to improve the situation; it is necessary to accumulate financial and intellectual resources to expand the rights and opportunities of women. For the needs of this study, the methods of conceptual analysis were chosen, which involve a careful study of rational relationships between terms, concepts, variables, definitions, constructions, hypotheses, theories and statements, as well as categorization of their consequences and assumptions. The collection of information for the office study lasted 3 months. The Republic of South Africa was chosen as the case of the study because, starting in 1994, a democratic regime was established in the country, which helped to overcome the problems of racial inequality and discrimination. The normative basis for ensuring gender equality is determined by the second chapter of the International Bill of Human Rights and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The issue of protecting gender inequality in the workplace is also regulated. The study empirically confirms and theoretically proves that despite the legislative regulation of the problem of gender equality and the strengthening of the international community to this issue, women still cannot take on strategic roles and leadership in management decision-making due to gender disparity in both political and administrative positions. To ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men, which are defined at the legislative level, it is necessary that the top management of companies is aware of the gender equality programs that can be implemented in their respective divisions and that gender awareness is integrated into the organizational culture and processes monitoring. The work emphasizes the need to change the paradigm from a gender-biased to a gender-oriented society. The study results can be helpful for policy makers to implement a gender mainstreaming strategy to promote gender equality.*

Introduction

Gender, as defined by Inglehart and Pippa (2003:1), is the socially constructed distinction between the feminine and the masculine. Additionally, the terms 'masculine', 'feminine', and 'neuter' are the main grammatical categories that have historically been used to describe gender, according to Inger and Smith (2002:10). Feminists hijacked the term 'gender' to differentiate biological distinctions from social and psychological characteristics, as stressed by Mikkola (2016:1, cited in Nhlapo, 2020:141). The first writers on transsexuality to use gender language in this way were psychologists. Gender was only ever used to describe masculine and feminine nouns, such as le and la in French, until the 1960s (Mikkola, 2016:1, cited in Nhlapo, 2020:141). As a result, gender is defined to include a wide range of socially constructed responsibilities, positions, roles, mindsets, personality traits, behaviours, beliefs, values, and power relationships that society allocates to the two sexes on a distinct basis, according to Esplen and Jolly (2006:3, in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2016:140).According to Nussbaum and Glover (1995:3), gender is a grammatical category that determines agreement with the choice of modifiers, referents, or grammatical forms and is used to categorize nouns, pronouns, objectives, and in some languages, verbs. This classification may be arbitrary or based on traits like sex or animacy.

The words 'gender gap', 'gender discrimination', and 'the politics of gender' all utilize the word to describe sex-based categories in recent years. In this perspective, gender is essentially employed as both a biological categorization and a social and cultural construct, as emphasized by Phala (2011:27). A fundamental distinction is made by Pryzgoda and Chrisler (2000:554, mentioned in Jansen, 2023:36), who says that although the social, behavioural, and psychological traits that distinguish males from women are referred to as gender, sex refers to a person's biological characteristics that determine whether they are male or female. Various texts exist on understanding gender. According to Jackson and Scott (2002:2), gender therefore includes the social and cultural separation between men and women as well as traits often connected to femininity and masculinity. In defining and interpreting gender, the observation once more blends social, cultural, and biological aspects. This is supported by Aguilar's assertion (2004:1, referenced in Jansen, 2023:36) that gender is shaped by social interactions, culture, and the environment rather than by biological distinctions between men and women.

Accordingly, Reeves and Baden (2000:2, quoted in Nhlapo, 2020:145) state that gender equality means that women are afforded the same opportunities in life as males, including the ability to participate in public life. According to Fields (2002:14), inequality refers to differences in how a certain measure is distributed. This metric can be money, health, or any other tangible or intangible value.

The causes of gender inequalities are varied. The power, principles, and practices of patriarchy have an impact on how women are positioned in society. The patriarchal system strengthens male supremacy by increasing privilege, egotism, domination, and control. This crucial component includes women, their responsibilities, possibilities, and resources. This conduct has been inherited from one generation to the next in a culture where males alone were granted benefits and privileges. Men's viewpoints are the only ones that matter, or what Johnson refers to as patriarchal mirroring (Manqele, 2018:24). Males invented the concept of patriarchal supremacy as an ethical standard. Inspires men to free themselves, as stressed by Manqele (2018:24). According to a social business called Funds for NGOs (2023:3), inadequate access to quality labour to support their family forces women into dangerous jobs in unregulated or informal settings, which is a significant socio-economic cause for abuse, victimization, and exploitation. Women are thus more prone to experience forced marriage, human trafficking, or bonded labor during bad times, and in many places, they are also less likely to own official identity, have access to higher education, or obtain formal skill training. Kamrany and Robinson (2012:1, cited in Jansen, 2023:2) also pointed out that the reasons and degree of gender inequality differ from one country to another and indicate that some causes include, but are not limited to femicide, honour killings, rape, misogynistic violence, infanticide, and sex-selective abortion. Funds for NGOs (2023:3) claims that in addition to being harassed and abused at work, women are also paid less than males. Based on the nature of the current government system, which has always been a male-dominated industry, Maharaj and Maharaj (2004:66) claim that a woman's point of view in the political sphere in general is never taken seriously or their inputs are never considered more than a man's. Another challenge that contributes to this situation is that meetings typically take place at municipalities or any government

institution generally, the work done can sometimes lead to hours of which women would rather not spend. The purpose of the study is to investigate the state of gender [in]equality in South Africa.

Research Methodology

According to Antwi and Hamza (2015:220; Chiware, 2021:15, cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023:414), when there is relatively limited knowledge available about a particular subject or circumstance, but researchers are curious to learn more, then qualitative research is employed to gather information related to that issue. It is also sometimes used to generate new hypotheses and theories. According to Babbie (2016:92, referenced in Soga, 2022:33), the exploratory research design is typically employed to explore an old subject matter from a fresh viewpoint and/or an old or frequent phenomenon that, while being well-investigated, remains less intelligible to society. As a result, Creswell (2009:115, referenced in Soga, 2022:33) said, exploratory research concentrates on the 'what' relating to a particular occurrence. What are the reasons of gender disparity in South Africa, for example? is one of the 'what' questions that the research seeks to address. A literature review that presents background information, context for current understanding of the subject, and a persuasive argument in support of the presumptive thesis stance is how the information is prepared. According to Robson (2011), referenced in Makhubu 2020:10 and modified by Mutandwa (2023:39), a literature review entails finding and analyzing material from the body of literature that corresponds to a certain study issue. It is an essential part of the research process to provide a thorough analysis of recently released research findings in certain areas of interest that have been determined during the study (Houser 2019:109, referenced in Mutandwa, 2023:39). Conceptual analysis is used to analyze the data, which entails carefully examining the rational relationships between terms, concepts, variables, definitions, constructs, hypotheses, theories, and assertions as well as categorizing their implications and assumptions (Petocz & Newberry 2010, cited in Soga, 2022; 51).

Gender Equality Challenges in South Africa

Inadequate education, training, employment, support, and other constraints, such as an apartheid environment, traditional practices, and patriarchal social norms, are some of the things that impede the ability of women compete, participate and represent in the professional sphere. To comprehend the causes of these issues and how they affect Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 that aims to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, the section looks at a few of them. Hanekom and Sharkansky (1993:98) contend that in South Africa, the processes of forming and formulating public policy were guided by the ideas of colonialism and apartheid, that were strongly tied to historical constitutional tendencies and political goals. Philosophies turned out to be the driving forces behind many issues that have persisted and oppressed people's freedoms, such as the right to pursue the vocations of their choice. According to Andrews (1998:324), there have been several causes that have contributed to prejudice against women. Women agreed on a charter for women's rights to convey their desires to be recognised and granted equal rights and opportunities legally and during laws establishment and enforcement because, for instance, the women were denied the rights to customary marriages, property ownerships, contracts, inheritance, and participation in courts.

Styodana (2015:60) points out that although in South Africa, 60% of people are women, yet they are underrepresented among those in positions of power. The complicated history of racial discrimination in South Africa has been translated into gender discrimination, where gender disparities are maintained by favoring males over women. The labor market is likewise affected by this circumstance, which lowers women's economic position. Nearly 50% of South African women, according to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) (2022), do not participate in the labour force. Women have a greater unemployment rate than men do, which indicates that males are more likely than women to be absorbed into the economy. There are additional economic elements that have a role in the limited number of work options for women. For instance, men often earn more than women when it comes to compensation payouts. Only 6% of women hold the same degree of management, with more males than women.

The African National Congress (ANC) is today's national government. According to Rule 6 of the 2017 ANC Constitution, there must be 50% female presence in bodies that make decisions. To ensure fairness, this serves as

a tool for affirmative action and adequate influence for women (ANC Constitution 2017:7). Women and the empowerment of women are given top priority in the policy decision of the 54th National Conference of the ANC. First, the ANC Constitution already requires a minimum 50% female participation among those holding public office. Second, before the National Conference makes a final decision, branches should continue debating the proposals for 40% youth representation and the current provision for 60% continuity. Be certain that the ANC public representatives are selected and educated in a transparent manner, as emphasized in the 54th National Conference Report and Resolutions (2017:43). The statistics of women in political portfolios, as obtained from the source Gender Links (2020), are examined in research by Vyas-Doorgapersad and Shava (2022), which reveals a lack of attention for women, stated in Figure 1.
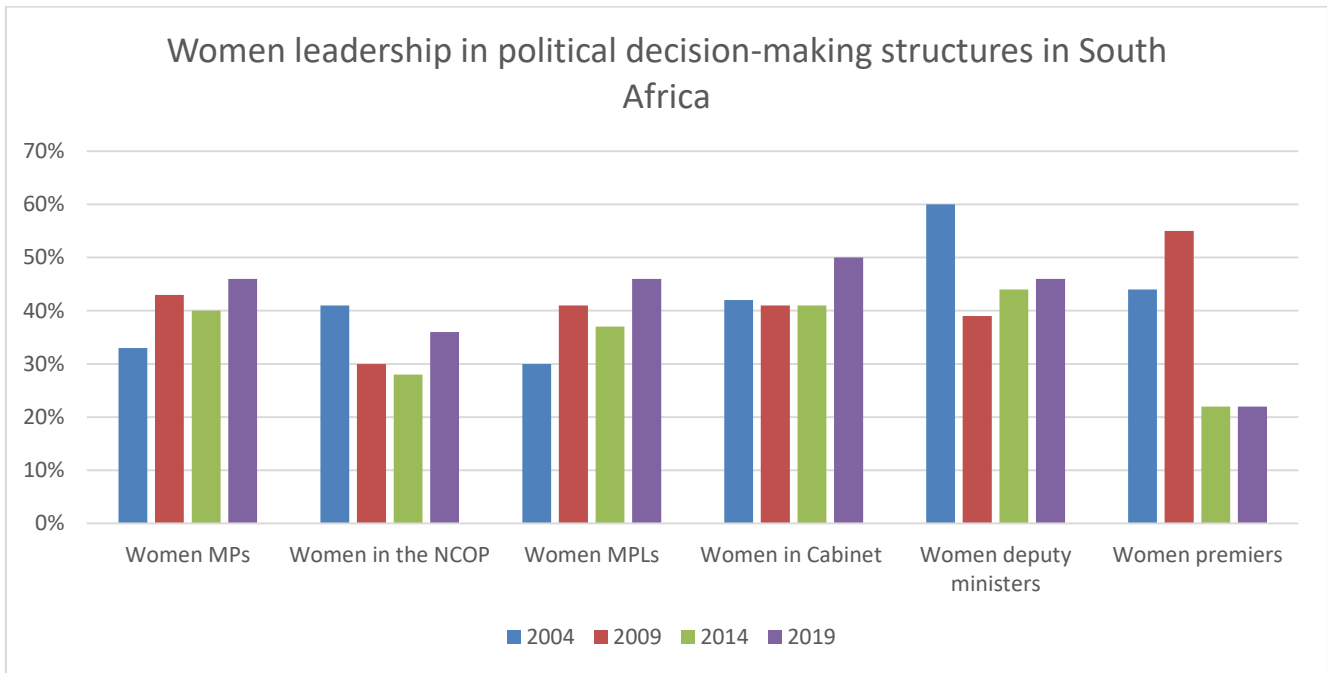

Figure 1. Women leadership in political decision-making structures in South Africa

Source: Author's compilation from the information obtained from Gender Links, 2020:1, cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad & Shava, 2022:146.

According to the statistics shown in Figure 1 (obtained from Gender Links, 2020, as cited in Vyas-Doorgapersad & Sava, 2022:146–147), even though the proportion of female Members of Parliament (MPs) increased in 2019 (46%), it is still below the political goal of 50% representation as preferred by the current government, the African National Congress (ANC). The same is true for women serving as Members of Provincial Legislatures (MPLs), whose representation has grown since 2004 (30%) to 46% in 2019, but which is still below the 50% threshold. Women's presence in the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) has decreased from 41% in 2004 to a low of 36%, necessitating gender mainstreaming with strategic choices. The number of female premiers is indicative of the poorest statistics, which dropped from 55% (2009) to 22% (2019). The portfolio of women in the cabinet, which was attained in 2019 for the first time, is the only number that is favorable. To maintain this number in the cabinet, political processes need gender mainstreaming, and all political parties need to make sure that their manifestos contain a section on gender equality. To strengthen gender-based representation in political decision-making structures and processes, this strategy may also boost the presence of women in other portfolios (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Shava, 2022: 146–147). The circumstance has not changed. This claim is supported by a compilation of findings from prior studies that examine the variables influencing women's active participation in political and administrative structures and how this affects the SDG 5 realisation in South Africa.

Previous Studies

The section describes several important research projects that have been conducted in South Africa that examine the problems with gender equality and justify the goal of the current study.

Research by Vyas-Doorgapersad (2017) showed a link between women's empowerment and regional economic growth. The study's justification was that women can pursue local employment opportunities and raise the socioeconomic standing of their households. However, a report released by the International Labour Organization (2010, in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2017:170) outlines several barriers that impede women's involvement in local development projects. There is a glaring underrepresentation of women in positions of power, and a shortage of possibilities for girls and women to advance their education, which, among other limitations, hampers their utilization of knowledge, information, accessibility to resources as well as possibilities for acquiring expertise in specific careers and positions.

Women's economic opportunities and prospects are significantly harmed by a trend of male domination in customary procedures by traditional power structures, according to Beall (2005: 35, in Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2017: 170-171).

To evaluate the standing of women in the South African public sector, Bangani undertook research in 2019. Several secondary sources were analyzed on desktop research to establish a pattern of low women's engagement in the workforce. Some of the findings of the study as summarised as: at the senior executive level, women are significantly underrepresented. In comparison to the other sectors of the economy, the percentage of women as middle managers in public service is lower (Thompson & Woolard, 2002:19, cited in Bangani, 2019:104); the numbers of women in the workforce are lower than those of males, especially at the strategic and decision-making levels, since gender is not mainstreamed in the recruiting and appointment procedures (Bangani, 2019:107); trends analysis from 2010 to 2014 (for all employers) show that in terms of gender, men have always made up the majority at the highest management level, while women have been underrepresented compared to their Economically Active Population (EAP) (Commission For Employment Equity 2014 - 2015 Annual Report, 2015, cited in Bangani, 2019:109). Some of the reasons of lack of women representation as deduced by Bangani in her study are that gender mainstreaming is not well-understood in most departments or at all levels. Transforming vision into strategy and execution is a challenge for senior management. This is mostly due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of what needs to change, why it has to change, how to conduct the change process, and what results should be attained, as per the records of the Public Service Commission (PSC, 2006:47, cited in Bangani, 2019:114); senior management doesn't support gender mainstreaming since they don't know 'how' to achieve it and have other departmental desired outcomes. Inadequate understanding of gender mainstreaming and senior management's conservative attitudes about gender equity can have a cascading impact, as further confirmed by the PSC (2006:49, cited in Bangani, 2019:115); and there are no discussions on gender mainstreaming, insufficient knowledge transfers from the top management to lower levels, no assistance provided to those who attempt to advance the cause, and no requirement for considering gender other than to achieve goals (PSC, 2006:49, cited in Bangani, 2019: 116).

A study was advanced by Nhlapo in 2020 where additional challenges related to gender inequalities in South Africa were identified. Some of the significant findings are summarised as: equity goals and targets must be raised in order to increase gender equality, as stressed by the PSC (2006:ix, cited in Nahlpo, 2020:227); there is a dearth of mentorship and assistance to help new hires integrate their new abilities into the workplace, and succession planning has not been properly adopted in every department, as further emphasised by the PSC (2002:xvi, cited in Nhlapo, 2020: 228); and there are many gender imbalances and disparities in the nation, especially when it comes to gender-based issues, an absence of stakeholder awareness, knowledge and dedication to gender mainstreaming, a preponderance of gender inequalities in the nation, an inability to provide input on current legislation and bill, and inadequate oversight capacity and specialization on policies and programmes, all may adversely impact on the social and economic empowerment of women (Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, 2014:31,35, cited in Nhalpo, 2020: 229).

In further research published in 2022 by Vyas-Doorgapersad and Shava (2022:142), the authors examined the fact that in South Africa's numerous government ministries, boosting women's ability to access appropriate support, resources and employment possibilities has not yet been fully institutionalized. Women are therefore stuck in the patriarchal society where males control politics and the economy, which has become more masculine. According to the findings (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Shava, 2022:142), prejudice against women in political positions may be widespread in South Africa since so many of them lack the confidence and fundamental political knowledge necessary to run for office. A wide-ranging and discriminatory phenomenon has led to a low degree of engagement by women in national politics up to the local level of government.

An updated study is done by Malesa in 2023. The study focuses on the status of gender equality at the following three management levels: top, middle and lower. The top management level comprises a board of directors and a chief executive or managing director. The top management is the ultimate source of authority, and it manages goals and policies for an enterprise. It devotes more time to planning and coordinating functions (Juneja, n.d.:1; Malesa, 2023:34). The branch managers and departmental managers constitute the middle management level, who, according to Juneja (n.d.:2; Malesa, 2023:34-35), are responsible to the top management for the functioning of their department and devote more time to organisational and directional functions. The lower management level is also known as the supervisory/operative level of management. It consists of supervisors, foremen, section officers, superintendents, etc. According to Davis (in Aradhya, n.d.:2; Malesa, 2023:35), supervisory management refers to those executives whose work has to be largely linked with personal oversight and direction of operative employees. The status of gender equality in all these three levels of management is presented in bar charts 1-6.
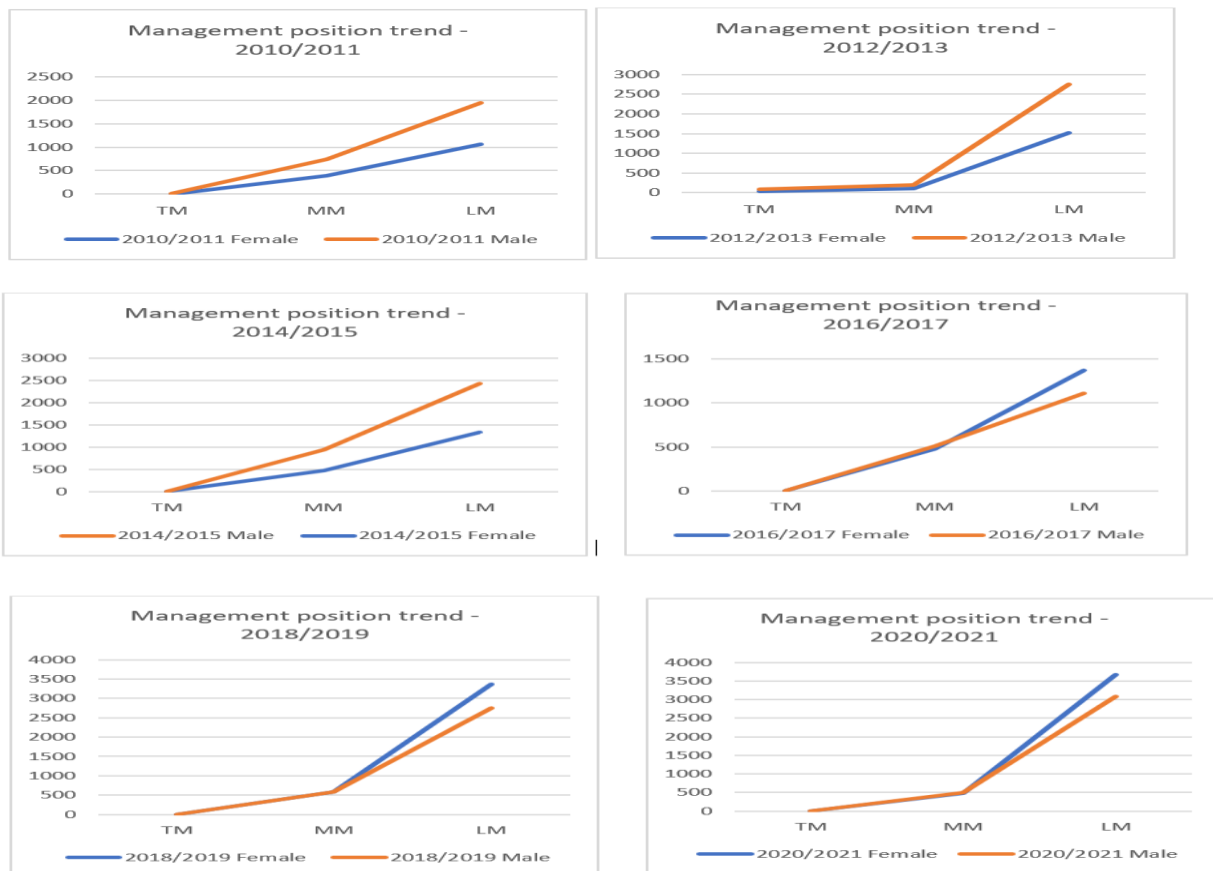
Bar charts 1-6: The total percentage of women and men in the top, middle and lower management positions, the trend from 2010/11 to 2020/21

Source: Author's compilation from annual reports of the DoL 2010:190; 2012:283; 2014:101; 2016:104; 2018:124; and 2020:102, also refer to Malesa, 2023:35.

The findings in Malesa's study also confirm that: in high management positions, women are less likely than males to get promoted (Hough, Oswald and Ployhart 2001:152, cited in Malesa, 2023:56); supporting legal and policy frameworks have not been adopted or implemented fully. The lack of national laws and policies that are grounded in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women as well as CEDAW as well as gender-neutral laws, policies, and programs that disadvantage women by failing to take into account their biological variations, stereotypes concerning gender, and past experiences of discrimination as well as some unclear policies are some of the possible causes (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015:6, cited in Malesa, 2023:56); and a few problems preventing the proper implementation of SDG 5 in South African public sector include the gender digital divide and women's marginalization in information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Shava, 2021:17911, cited in Malesa, 2023:56) that is important to consider in the era of fourth industrial revolution (4IR).

Discussion and findings

Findings show causes of gender inequality vary in the country, such as there are sociological (societal norms, patriarchy, gender-biased household tasks), economic (poverty, unemployment, lack of job opportunities), political (lack of quota for gender mainstreaming, political will), institutional (lack of adherence to legislative frameworks, inadequate understanding of gender equality), technological (gender-based digital divide), to state a few.

By analysing the information gained through literature review, it is considered that government policies and programmes that support equal opportunities and abolish gender-based discrimination in fields where males are viewed as having greater skill sets can enable gender-based involvement in economic growth. This can be accomplished by implementing market-based programmes for the empowerment of women, allocating financial resources to train women to comprehend the requirements of the employment market, and supporting talent management initiatives that provide women with opportunities to maintain their market-relevant skills. The job prospects will help reduce demographic disparities, raise household socio-economic standards, and eventually strengthen the county's economy on a macro level.

The analysis of the literature has further confirmed that women find it difficult to advance in their careers since top management positions are filled by males owing to gender-neutral human resource procedures. If women are given career possibilities, they often struggle to advance since they are not given equal access to training opportunities. For career and succession pathways, women are not considered. Due to a lack of talent management activities inside the organizations, most women are appointed to lower and middle management levels and continue to hold those roles, which hinders the presence of women in high level management positions. At the organizational bureaucratic levels, there is prejudice. To change this, organizations must implement gender-based recruitment and selection procedures for women, gender-sensitive performance indicators, gender equity in training programmes to increase women's empowerment, and consideration for gender when making promotions to higher positions within the organization. To ensure that legal frameworks governing gender equality are followed, that line managers are aware of gender equality programmes to be implemented in their respective units, and that gendered awareness is integrated into organizational culture, monitoring and evaluation processes must also be in place.

However, women are underrepresented on the political front as well. The factors that have a detrimental influence on women's consideration for leadership posts include a lack of political will, an insufficient quota system, and a lack of gender mainstreaming in political manifestos, to name a few. Considering quotas to increase women's participation while acknowledging the significance of women in politics, providing adequate civic education to prepare women for the political platform, and embracing gender mainstreaming in manifestos are all necessary steps for political parties that want to advance gender equality.

In addition to advancing gender equality on the political and administrative fronts, societal norms must be changed via acceptance of gender differences. In this arrangement, it is recommended that families and communities abandon the stereotypical attitude that encourages boys and men to perform work related to the outside world while restricting girls and women to domestic duties solely. To start training boys and men to help around the

house and prepare girls and women for life outside the home, society must undergo a gradual mental shift. The necessary paradigm changes from a gender-biased to a gender-based society requires investment in both boys' and girls' education.

Conclusion

A democratic regime was established in South Africa in 1994, which helped the country address its problems with racial inequality and discrimination. Due to this, the Constitution was put into effect in 1996. The institutionalization of a liberal atmosphere cleared the ground for the implementation of several legal frameworks designed to end discrimination and provide equality on the job front. Subsequently, several institutional frameworks were built to protect gender-based workplace disparities. However, the study shows that there are a variety of problems that negatively impact gender equality. These levels include social, statutory, institutional, political, and economic ones, to mention a few. According to the study, to improve the situation, the required resources must be made available to empower women, including interventions that raise their potential, appropriate training opportunities, policies that take women into account when making recruiting choices, etc.

To advance gender equality, South Africa has therefore introduced various legislative frameworks. Some of the significant ones are the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) to promote gender equality stated under Bill of Rights, the Public Service Act (1994) and related Public Service Regulations to avoid gender discrimination at the workplace, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997) to ensure acceptable working conditions for both men and women without gender-based discrimination, and the Employment Equity Act (1998) to ensure equal opportunities to women and men. Additionally, there is a White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service (1998) to eliminate any form of discrimination in the workplace. The country also has policy frameworks to promote gender equality that includes the South African National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality as a measure to avoid gendered biases. To ensure the compliance of such frameworks, it is important that organisations have reporting measures. Each department must submit an annual report to the Public Service Commission that is custodian of public service, stating measures, interventions and programmes that are adhered to encourage gender equality. It is suggested that political parties also need to submit such reports to the Parliamentary Monitoring Group to accommodate gender representation in their manifestos.

There are various progressive waves for gender equality, such as women and development (WAD), women in development (WID), and gender and development (GAD). There are other theoretical perspectives that support the importance of gender equality as well. The welfare approach, the equity approach, the empowerment approach, the efficiency approach, and the gender mainstreaming approach are a few of the important ones. The gender mainstreaming strategy functions best as a theoretical framework, according to the study's findings. The awareness that gender mainstreaming requires addressing the representation of women and men in a specific policy domain and applying a gender viewpoint to the content of various policies, justifies the use of this strategy (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2018:2, cited in Bangani & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020:3). The justification is supported and cited by Vyas-Doorgapersad (2018:10; adapted by Bangani & Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2020:3), highlighting that the approach seeks to include gender in the development of the nation, hence advance discussions on gender equality resulting in achieving SDG 5. The study advances the subject of public administration and governance by starting a discussion about gender equality with the intention of carrying out the investigation over time.

The study's use of a qualitative desktop analysis is regarded as a drawback. The current state of gender equality in particular government departments may be the subject of future investigations. Interviews might be used in future research to get comments from employees and understand the reasons and state of gender inequality.

Author Contributions: conceptualization, S. Vyas-Doorgapersad; software, S. Vyas-Doorgapersad; formal analysis, S. Vyas-Doorgapersad; investigation, S. Vyas-Doorgapersad; resources, S. Vyas-Doorgapersad; writing-original draft preparation, S. Vyas-Doorgapersad; writing-review and editing, S. Vyas-Doorgapersad; visualization, S. Vyas-Doorgapersad; supervision, S. Vyas-Doorgapersad.

Conflicts of Interest: Author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

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ISSN (print) – 2520-6621, ISSN (online) – 2520-6214

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