

Developing and Implementing Diversity Inclusion Programs: An Intersectional Approach to Gender Equity in India and the Democratic Republic of Congo

Emmanuella Tumba Banu¹, Mukesh Parashar², Pooja Goel³

¹Research Scholar, School of Business Management, Noida International University, Greater Noida, India

²Registrar, Noida International University, Greater Noida, India

³HoD, School of Business Management, Noida International University, Greater Noida, India

¹Author for correspondence emmanuella.banu027@gmail.com,

²registrar.office@niu.edu.in, ³hod.sbm@niu.edu.in

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study is to explore diversity and inclusion initiatives, by emphasizing on how women's leadership experiences are shaped, intersecting social identities, including gender, nationality, and immigration status, through an intersectional lens. Further, we attempted to compare Indian women, Congolese women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Congolese women in India in order to pinpoint structural obstacles and offer policy suggestions for inclusive leadership models.

Design/Method/Approach: Eighteen women were interviewed using semi-structured interviews as part of a qualitative design. Participants had a life experience with the inclusion of diversity, which is why we opted for purposive sampling. The data were subjected to a thematic analysis led by intersectionality as a theoretical framework in order to determine nuanced patterns of inclusion and exclusion in different contexts.

Findings: The study's findings underline notable differences in the difficulties that women continue to face, which are certain barriers associated with migration, such as institutional racism, professional exclusion, and challenges with cultural adjustment, affecting Congolese women in India. While in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Congolese women face gender-based limitations, with leadership chances being restricted by customary societal expectations. Caste, class, and gender all together affect leadership representation, inclusion frameworks, and professional access, a reason why Indian women experience intersectional discrimination.

Originality/Value: The study offers new insights on comparative intersectional analysis due to the gap that exists in literature related to diversity, inclusion, and leadership. Beyond general gender equality activities, policy recommendations emerging from the thematic analysis provide tailored solutions that ensure context-specific interventions that address the multifaceted barriers impacting diverse identity groups.

Keywords: Gender equity, discrimination, intersectional feminism, diversity, inclusion, equitable policy framework

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the workplace, we encounter numerous people who differ from one another in terms of age, ethnicity, culture, gender, race, origin, and a variety of other characteristics (Diversity). Because of these distinctions, each employee has a unique way of seeing, understanding, and doing things, and also responding or reacting to a given circumstance. It is critical to understand how everyone works, to allow them to express themselves while respecting everyone's opinion, to contribute new ideas, and to engage in company-sponsored training and growth. This equal and fair treatment of all employees at all levels promotes the organization's proper functioning and development by allowing employees to freely engage in work, be active, and stay with the company for an extended period of time because they feel valued, respected, listened to, and appreciated. (Inclusion). Not only that, but this helps project the company's positive image and reputation to the outside world, allowing some to do business with the company, attracting more clients and job applications by applying for various positions, and keeping others loyal to the company's services and products. However, it should be mentioned that gender and racial discrimination still exist in the firm today.

The use of diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives in international organizations and public policy has grown significantly in the last few decades. A number of factors have contributed to this increased importance, including the adoption of legal and regulatory frameworks intended to promote equal opportunity across diverse regions (White, 2011), a growing awareness of social inequalities, and the recognition of the business benefits of workforce diversity (such as increased innovation and greater market reach), (Cox 1994; Robinson and Dechant 1997; Iorbiecki and Jack 2000). Even while these stated

goals frequently involve creating inclusive workplaces and attaining fair representation, underrepresented groups still encounter enduring structural obstacles that prevent them from rising to positions of leadership (Homan & Abbaszadeh, 2024). It is important to keep in mind that women from groups that are underrepresented frequently experience increased disadvantages that are frequently not sufficiently addressed by current diversity and inclusion initiatives (Areheart, 2011). Even though gender gaps are acknowledged and attempted to be addressed by many current diversity and inclusion initiatives, their frameworks frequently rest on a one-dimensional understanding of identity. The complex and cumulative impacts of other important social variables, like nationality, ethnicity, migration status, and socioeconomic background, are often ignored by these programs. This constrained approach leads to solutions that might not adequately or even effectively address the complex realities that persons with intersecting marginalized identities must deal with.

The intersectional viewpoint, a framework created by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989) is used in this study. The theory of intersectionality states that various social categories intersect in multiple planes simultaneously, which enhances systematic injustices and produces unique forms of discrimination (Jorba & Lopez de Sa, 2024). Through this method, the research will aim at exploring how diversity and inclusion programs impact the lived experiences of Congolese women in various contexts, focusing on diasporic women and their countries of origin. The women in Congo face a specific range of challenges in these specific environments. Such challenges may incorporate the procedures of acculturation, complex immigration policies, and even discrimination in foreign work environments to those members of the diaspora (Katehi, 2022).

Congolese women can also be affected by the sociopolitical instability, strongly established traditional gender roles limiting their opportunities to engage in community life, and significant economic disparities limiting their opportunities to develop in their home countries as well (Hyland et al., 2020). Their gender, nationality, migration status, and financial situation all combine to form complex obstacles that typical diversity and inclusion initiatives either do not consider at all or, at best, do not address well enough (Logie et al., 2020). As an example, a Congolese woman seeking employment in a new country could be discriminated because of her nationality, gender, accent, and, perhaps, her immigration status, which would present her with very different barriers than those that women in more represented countries or men with the same background would face (Ortiz & Roscigno, 2009).

Most of the studies on gender inclusion, although helpful, have not been able to answer the question of how this inclusion can be achieved (Adamson, Kelan, Lewis & Rumens, 2016) in western cultures have either studied gender alone or at best together with another dimension such as race (Kamenou, 2007). This knowledge gap has especially contributed to a low level of understanding of the special challenges that women experience when they are at the intersection of gender and other factors, such as nationality and migration especially in the African scenario (Ogbemudia, 2021). This gap has a terrible effect on policymakers and practitioners, who find it harder to develop and implement tailored diversity programs that can appropriately reflect the complex nature of women who face intersectional discrimination (Manuel, 2006). Current investigation aims to build the crucial gap by adopting an intersectional approach to explore experiences of women in different situations. Precisely, this examines effects of diversity and inclusion programs on lives of Congolese women in India, Indian women in India and other women in DRC, and how they can gain access to leadership positions. Ongoing research aims at offering a more sophisticated insight into systematic problems faced by these 3 groups, uneven efficacy of existing diversity and inclusion programs in wide range of sociocultural and geographic environments, and potential routes to more inclusive leadership development, that would truly address complexity of co-existing identities, contrasting their experiences and challenges. The study will also serve a significant role in this important topic to provide a comprehensive study on lives of Indian women in India, Congolese women in India, and other women in DRC. This paper will contribute to this very important field and give valuable information that could be utilized in designing more intricate and effective diversity and inclusion policies or strategies.

Significance of the Study

The research is of value in its theoretical and practical implications on how one can view diversity and inclusion in the globalization era.

Theoretically, it gives a thorough analysis of how gender interacts with nationality, immigration status, and income level to influence the experiences of women in leadership roles, adding to the expanding literature of research on intersectionality. This research offers a nuanced perspective that goes beyond dominant, monocentric Western analyses of gender and diversity by focusing on the understudied

experiences of Congolese women, both in their home country and in the diaspora, and by contrasting them with those of Indian women in India. By emphasizing the various obstacles experienced by women with numerous and marginalized identities, it immediately fills up the gap in the literature and enhances our theoretical frameworks for comprehending systemic injustices.

In practical terms, the results of this research could guide the creation and execution of more successful and situation-specific diversity and inclusion initiatives. The research contains valuable lessons to all diversity and inclusion managers, organizational leaders, and legislators by showing how the existing programs have unique effects on women with different intersecting identities. Developing the interventions that will promote gender equality and leadership inclusivity, one should consider both the universal concerns and the specifics of the Indian and Congolese reality. The research identifies, in particular, strategies and routes that would be more appropriate to the real lives of Congolese women in different circumstances, which would lead to more targeted and effective support systems. Also, focusing on the views and experiences of these marginalized groups, this research will be able to promote a more equal and inclusive global agenda about the promotion of women in leadership positions. The final aim of the study is to provide evidence based views that may assist in the development of situations that are genuinely inclusive as well as providing women of all walks of life with equal opportunities of leading and succeeding.

Key contributions

The paper's main contributions are

- . In the way it speaks specifically about the interplay of gender, nationality, and migrant status especially in relation to Congolese women, it makes a significant dust in the literature of diversity and inclusion.
- . Give a comprehensive view of the implications of diversity and inclusion programs in different socio-cultural settings through the comparison of the experiences of the Indian women of India, Congolese women of India and other women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
- . Gives real-life statistics on structural barriers encountered by underprivileged and multi-identity women in their endeavor to reach leadership positions.
- . Works towards the development of more focused and effective diversity and inclusion approaches, which take into the account the specifics of intersectionality.
- . It allows voicing the underrepresented women and thereby contributing to a more equitable and inclusive global agenda of women leadership development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Conceptual Framework: Intersectionality and Diversity Inclusion

The most significant model of intersectionality that was formulated by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) gives a critical insight into the manner in which the social identities (gender, race, nationality, and socioeconomic status) interact in political systems to create unique experiences of inequality and equality. The main significance of this framework in research on diversity and inclusion is that it highlights the relevance of the policies and initiatives in identifying and mitigating multidimensional discrimination over simple generalized approaches that often oversimplify the realities of experiences.

Intersectionality in India illustrates the peculiarities of the situation under the influence of the sufficiently developed system of caste, significant economic disparities, and prevailing gender norms (Negi et al., 2023). Based on the research, Dalit women, as an example, experience marginalization that is not similar to that of upper-caste women or Dalit men because it is higher in level of discrimination due to both gender and caste identity of the women involved (Nyaaya). Congolese women in India faces the difficulties of cultural adaptation and possible institutional bias in professional and educational contexts which are the two other migration-related obstacles that might further limit their access to leadership positions.

2. Existing Studies on Gender Equity and Leadership Barriers

Institutional inclusion strategies that attempt to increase the presence of women in various sectors have been the focus of extensive research on gender equity (Grogan, 1999). However, an increasing amount of research criticizes these methods for often not taking into consideration the intersectional challenges that women from underrepresented groups face (Sinnes, 2012; Rutherford, 2011; Lam et al., 2024).

More attention is being paid to the following in studies on women's access to management-related roles:

- Women from underprivileged origins are far more likely to be excluded from leadership positions due to societal norms and enduring structural views in businesses (Setyaningrum, 2024).

These biases might manifest in the hiring process, the promotion process, and the opportunities for networking and mentoring.

- Migration status has a major impact on career growth with migrating women generally confronting more challenging workplace discrimination, including challenges linked to the acceptance of foreign qualifications, language barriers, and xenophobia, than their native-born counterparts. (Gächter, 2022)
- Cultural views and traditional norms influence leadership opportunities.

Women are excluded from positions of power, control and decision-making in the Democratic Republic of the Congo due to the presence of the dominant patriarchal systems (Lusey et al., 2018; Tutu & Moi, 2024). These structures function both within leadership institutions, where representation is still limited, and at the societal level, where gender norms impact expectations. Similarly, India's caste system creates additional institutional limitations, notably for women from lower castes who face both gender and caste discrimination (Nyaaya).

3. Comparative Analysis: Congolese Women vs Indian Women

An important chance to compare intersectional barriers across various national and cultural settings is presented by the inclusion of Indian women in this study. With the help of this comparison, the similar and unique challenges women face when negotiating different sociocultural arrangements and various inclusion contexts can be determined.

In India, Congolese women face a unique combination of migration-related challenges which can be affected both by their socioeconomic background and gender. These barriers can limit their access to leadership roles, and they can even comprise institutional prejudices within the systems of the host country, cultural adjustment challenges that might arise in professional relations, and limited access to established professional networks.

The biggest challenges faced by Congolese women in the DRC are patriarchal systems and customary gender roles that often prevent them from taking up leadership roles in different spheres, including social and cultural, political and economic (Kabeer, 2010).

Indian women are victims of intersectional discrimination because of the interplay of caste, class, and gender. Notably, the caste system's historical and current oppression of Dalit women contribute to their exclusion, combining with patriarchal norms that restrict women's advancement in general (Talat & Singh, 2023)

4. Gaps in the Literature

Even though diversity inclusion is receiving a more academic and practical attention, there are still a lot of gaps in the research that has been done so far in using truly intersectional approaches, especially in comparative studies that look at the leadership experiences of migrant and non-migrant women in various national contexts. Among the critical gaps discovered are:

- Few studies directly explore and compare Congolese women's leadership experiences in their homeland and diaspora to those of women from other cultural contexts, such as India. We are unable to understand how varied institutional and sociocultural contexts influence the outcomes of distinct inclusion programs on women with overlapping identities due to a lack of comparative research.
- There are few ideas for intersectional legislation that are expressly designed to address the multifaceted inequalities that women from various socioeconomic, migrant, and national backgrounds face. The complexities of current policy frameworks usually fail to accommodate women's aspirations for leadership positions.

A scarcity of detailed qualitative insights documenting the perspectives and actual experiences of women negotiating diversity inclusion activities in these difficult settings. Understanding their subjective experiences is critical in order to make efforts that are completely inclusive and empowering. This review of the literature underlines the critical need for research that uses an intersectional approach to examine the lives of Indian and Congolese women in diverse situations.

METHODS

Research Design: This study uses a qualitative methodology to document lived experiences and investigate structural trends influencing women's participation in leadership and inclusion initiatives.

Sampling: Strategy for sampling participants are guaranteed to have firsthand knowledge of the obstacles to leadership through the use of purposeful sampling. 18 women with a mean age of 32.28, were sampled and split up into three groups: There are **six Congolese women in India who are migrants, six Congolese women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo who are country of origin and six women from India** (intersectionality within local diversity policies).

Criteria for Inclusion: Women who are actively involved in leadership, academic, or professional settings and who have firsthand knowledge of the difficulties associated with inclusion.

No	Categories	Age	Education level/Degree	Marital Status
	Group A/ Pseudonyms			
1	Ritu	31	Diploma in Civil Engineering	Single
2	Rooney	26	Bachelor in Business Administration	Married
3	Priya	27	Bachelor of Education	Single
4	Nishu	35	Bachelor of Science in Computer Science	Single
5	Saloni	38	Bachelor of Art in Sociology	Married
6	Melissa	40	Master of Business Administration	Married
	Group B/ Pseudonyms			
7	Marina	27	Master of Business Administration	Single
8	Diana	32	Master in Art (Journalism and Mass Communication)	Single
9	Monica	36	Diploma in Business Administration	Married
10	Gabriella	35	Bachelor of Economics	Married
11	Candice	24	Higher secondary	Single
12	Rosemie	29	Bachelor of Computer Application	Single
	Group C/ Pseudonyms			
13	Happy	30	Master of Law	Single
14	Leyla	32	Master of Commerce	Married
15	Stella	40	Master of Art in International Relation	Married
16	Blessing	27	Bachelor of Law	Married
17	Sephurah	32	Bachelor of Business Administration	Divorced
18	Victoria	40	Master of Biotechnology	Married

Key: Group A – Indian Women

Group B – Congolese Women Living in India

Group C – Congolese Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Key note: I chose India and DRC as countries in order to examine the challenge of diversity inclusion in two different socio-cultural environments. We are all aware that India presents institutional and caste-

based gender barriers, having Black-skinned Indians. While the DRC highlights traditional societal restrictions on leadership. By including migrant Congolese women in India, it allows for cross-national analysis of how host-country policies affect diversity access. The study ensures a broader intersectional perspective, capturing local and diaspora experiences to inform policy-relevant inclusion frameworks.

Interview

Semi-structured interviews were carried out in the DRC and India. The interviews were conducted in the neutral setting where both the interviewer and the interviewee could easily access. The purpose of these interview questions is to investigate the structural barriers to inclusion and access to leadership. For instance, the following questions were asked: "Can you describe your experiences navigating leadership opportunities as a Congolese woman in India?" Or "Can you describe your experience with diversity inclusion programs in your region?" "How have these programs influenced your opportunities for career advancement?" "Do you believe these programs effectively address intersectional barriers (race, class, disability)?" "In your opinion, what changes or improvements would make these programs more effective for women in diverse social positions?". Both French and English were used for the interview, which was recorded and subsequently translated into English. As a foreigner, it should be mentioned that I had an issue with an Indian woman who spoke only Hindi. I was fortunate that she was with her friend, who served as a great interpreter. I asked her questions in English, and her companion translated them into Hindi for her before responding in English. In order to avoid bothering the third party too much, I eventually started utilizing Google Translate. She responded in Hindi after I spoke in English, and I was able to understand when it was translated into English, and so on. This was the longest interview, lasting almost 1.5 hours. The rest were conducted for 50 minutes or 1 hour. Because I am a woman myself, it was generally simple to delve deeply into the participants' experiences, and they felt at ease sharing their stories.

Data Analysis

After conducting the interview, the data were translated into English and transcribed to facilitate the systematic analysis. Finding recurrent themes and important takeaways from the experiences of the participants was the main goal of the methodology. Then the transcripts were reviewed several times to guarantee that the coding was thorough and consistent, and also the interview replies were re-examined as part of a self-validation process to improve observations and preserve analytical coherence. Furthermore, feedback from chosen participants confirmed that the findings correctly reflected their experiences, enhancing the study's credibility.

Ethical Consideration

The approval for conducting this study was given by Noida International University. All ethical concerns for researching human subjects in the present study were carefully considered. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants, with clear explanation of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality safeguards.

Privacy was maintained by using pseudonyms and removing identifying information. Interviews took place in impartial, participant-friendly environments, with language support available when needed. To ensure accuracy, participants reviewed their response summaries. The procedure also adhered to ethical guidelines for research with underrepresented groups at each stage.

Results

Group-A: Indian women

Among the Indian women that were interviewed, 2 are dark-skinned; the other 4 are light-skinned. But two of the four said that even though they are light-skinned, they face some discrimination because of their appearance because they are from North India, and other Indians think they are Chinese or Korean. "They know that we are Indian like them, but they deliberately treat us differently" explained one (Rooney, age 26). During the interviews with each of them, I noticed a common phrase that was said by those of Black skin and those from the North, namely, "It is difficult for us to make a place for ourselves in society; we have difficulty finding work, and when we have this opportunity, we try at all costs to keep this job, for fear of becoming unemployed again and starting to look for work here and there. There was one thing that Priya said: even in the workplace, not all our colleagues accept us; some do everything to look for trouble so that we react, and it has serious consequences." Sometimes our suggestions are not taken into consideration, and we feel less considered. Instead of being treated equally with other employees, we face unfairness since some are occasionally preferred at our expense." Ritu, a 31-year-old from North India, revealed that she was promised the TL post during an interview at one of the organizations. When she was employed, she was shocked when she realized that her role was CRM

(customer relationship manager) rather than TL. And the manager requested her to stay in this job for a while after being promoted to the TL post. To her astonishment, one month later, when someone else needed to join the company, the TL function was allocated to him. She continues by saying "We women are free to make our own decisions; we are free to say no." Some of our company leaders must understand this." Regarding the two fair-skinned Indian ladies, one stated, "I am fair-skinned, yet I experience certain hurdles in the workplace. Melissa, a 40-year-old Indian woman, stated, "I am fair-skinned, but I face certain barriers in the company." Even though I have an MBA, it makes no distinction in comparison to a man with a BBA degree.

Group-B: Congolese women living in India

On top of that, nearly all of the Congolese women residing in India gave the same explanations: that it is challenging for them to get employment in India due to their origins. Furthermore, they would rather run their own business so that they may care for themselves (for those without responsibilities) or the children (for mothers). Diana (27 years old), one of them, stated, "I worked in an Indian company, and because I had clients from French-speaking nations, I spoke French or English, depending on which language the client preferred. I occasionally made suggestions since I was concerned about the company's long-term success, but we eventually discovered that the manager simply did what he wanted. He didn't listen to anyone. Why would I be in a professional setting where my viewpoint is irrelevant? In what ways would that enable women to thrive and advance in their careers? How could that inspire women to set lofty goals and think about holding a more senior role?

Group-C: Congolese women in DRC

One significant finding on the DRC was that women's marital status is one of the main issues. Only married women are taken into consideration in an organization. Besides that, some women choose to wear rings, known as wedding rings, as a sign of marriage in order to prevent being harassed by men at work. However, some men categorically do not care about those rings that they wear since they are determined to get what they want. For example, Leyla, who is 32 years old, had to share her experience: "The diversity inclusion program is not respected in my professional environment; women remain the weak link that is only respected if they are married, and this is destabilizing." In order to access or benefit from these initiatives, I imposed myself, reiterated my preferences for being called upon or approached by my colleagues, and, most importantly, stayed focused on my administrative duties. As for Happy, who is 30 years old, in her remarks, she mentioned this: Women are often not comfortable in their workplace because they are either minimized or underestimated, or they find themselves limited in their skills due to the bad behaviour of their colleagues or superiors, which does not allow them to flourish in a healthy way, and they are forced to abandon their position in favour of their respect and dignity as a human being. Knowing how to say NO to the advances of this or that superior, firmness, rigor, and self-denial in our daily lives is one of the measures we adopt, but this can have consequences later, such as being demoted or, worse, being fired. And what about Sephora, who is divorced? She emphasizes that divorced women are very poorly regarded in society because they are very exposed to facing discrimination in almost all environments. She recounted her mother's experiences of working and being a housewife. Her mother told her that in her time, it was difficult for a married woman to work, to be hired without her husband's consent. Everything depended on the husband.

DISCUSSION

Workplace Discrimination and Intersectionality

These results support that there are widespread prejudicial views against women in the workplace, particularly because of their skin colour and ethnic identification. Also, the research on workplace inclusion in India reveals that people with darker skin or from particular regions frequently experience employment obstacles, which is similar to worldwide colourism trends (Chakraborty, 2021; Karan & Misra, 2020). It is difficult for minorities to feel appreciated and have their efforts recognized because of these biases, which they say continue throughout professional relationships and after hiring. A study predicts that the economic environment in India is likely to strengthen dominant regional and ethnic identities, strengthening systemic disadvantages for individuals viewed as outsiders (Bhatia, 2022). Congolese women living in India serve as another example of how ethnicity affects work prospects. Studies already conducted indicate that the lack of official work opportunities for immigrant women of African civilization often drives them to opt for entrepreneurship (Adepoju, 2019). As local cultural hierarchies continue to dominate leadership, the lack of respect for their efforts in organizations reflects broader patterns observed in diaspora populations (Sharma, 2020). This exclusion limits not only the

freedom of movement in the career but also enhances institutional obstacles to intercultural inclusion in the workplace.

Leadership and Gender Biases

The discussion was common among the participants as they were unable to obtain leadership positions despite meeting the professional requirements. It is not a hidden that gender disparities in job advancements remain despite the official promises of inclusion, particularly in South Asia, where women are likely to receive barriers to access in general (Rajan & Sinha, 2021). Much evidence regarding gender disparities in career advancement, particularly in South Asia, where women tend to be hindered even after formal promises of inclusion, still exists (Rajan & Sinha, 2021). Research indicates that a majority of executive positions are still dominated by men and gender stereotypes affect the hiring process (Basu, 2020). The current diversity initiatives are weak, which is reflected by the fact that the company is not willing to offer women clear and merit-based leadership opportunities. Research suggests that even now, most management jobs are taken by males and that gender stereotypes affect the decision of promotion (Basu, 2020). There are inadequate diversity programs as demonstrated by the fact that the company is not ready to offer women definite and meritocratic leadership opportunities.

Marital Status and Gendered Workplace Expectations

Based on the information collected, one of the key findings was that marriage was very important in different organizations, particularly in the DRC, to solve the problem at the workplace. According to sociological evaluation, the marital status of women and their professional status are closely connected and this influences the stability of their careers and relationships within the workplace as well (Tshibanda, 2017). Married women have a higher chance of being considered to take up leadership positions as compared to single and divorced women (Kabuya, 2019). Another informal tactic that women employ in dealing with male-dominated workplace is the use of rings to prevent workplace harassment. Mukendi and Kazadi (2020) reveal that the existing body of evidence points to the fact that such strategies remain largely ineffective.

The issue of discrimination in the workplace, especially against single or divorced women, reveals deeper structural issues of gender and power differences. Studies also note that gender bias is a factor that affects the workplace relationship and that harassment is not only tolerated but is ingrained in the cultures of businesses (Lwamba, 2021). As a result of all that, women have to suffer due to the absence of institutional protection, which leaves them at the mercy of leaving their workplace altogether or tolerating the discriminatory environment.

Limitation

Taking into account the broad scope of collected information, there are several limitations that need to be identified. On the one hand, the large sample size might not reflect the multiplicity of the experiences of Indian and Congolese women in all spheres of activity and socioeconomic statuses. Second, self-reported data are not statistically representative of any greater systemic tendencies, but rather are founded on personal impressions. Lastly, cultural and linguistic barriers could be affecting the subtleties of responses, especially when it comes to cross-national comparisons and this should be explored further in future studies.

Recommendation

The challenges that the research highlights need the shift in the workplace rules to ensure the real inclusion instead of the symbolic representation. As the bias based on gender, race and the colour of the skin continues to impede career growth, it is important that the corporations establish structured anti-bias initiative. Training programs ought to be aimed at helping the management and employees to recognize and fight the unconscious biases that affect the hiring, promotions, and interactions in the workplace. There should be strict measures to enforce transparent hiring and promotion practices so that the opportunities would be allocated based on the merits and not on the preferences of the individual. Labour laws should also be enhanced so as to ensure that women are not left out due to their marital status or cultural affiliation.

Companies ought to initiate career development systems encompassing mentorship and leadership training to guarantee fair opportunities in leadership positions among women. Seeing as we all know that such gender gaps in the leadership positions exist as of today, there are numerous cases where women end up finding themselves in the position where their input is underestimated. To counter this, companies need to establish accountability systems which would make it possible to select their leaders based on their qualifications, but not on their gender. Moreover, there should be an attempt to eliminate

the institutional factors that inhibit the attainment of leadership roles by the Congolese women such as the establishment of formal programs that assist in promoting them in the corporate world.

Work place discrimination is an issue that undermines career growth and dignity. There must be tighter policies that ensure that women can feel secure and appreciated at work. There should be a zero-tolerance policy and reporting tools that are effective so that employees can report without fear of any punishment. Besides, altering the culture of the workplaces to prevent gendered biases and harmful behavioural standards is essential to ensure that professional settings are suitable to the productivity and development. Economic empowerment programs should be considered taking into consideration the issues that Congolese women face in securing official employment in India. Entrepreneurship is not a choice made by the majority of immigrant women, who pursue it due to necessity, and unless they have appropriate financial assistance and structural guidance, their businesses are likely to collapse. Governments and organisations need to facilitate access to financing, mentorship programs, and professional networks by the women who face structural barriers. To that, more cross-cultural activities ought to be encouraged to fill the gaps that have existed between the local and the immigrant business owners and also encourage cooperation and the long term economic involvement.

Through such steps, the workplace environment and the institution system as a whole can transform to actual inclusivity so that every woman, irrespective of race, country, or marital status, has an equal chance of succeeding in their careers.

CONCLUSION

Using the two countries, DRC and India, this paper set out to argue that women in the organization are exposed to various challenges that restrict their progress. The results demonstrate the interplay of systemic perceptions to produce complexities of discrimination on the basis of skin colour and ethnicity, lack of access to leadership roles and harassment at workplaces. The comparison between the life of Indian and Congolese women proves that, although the regions are different, the fight between genders is never over. Systemic change that is required to deal with these issues has several levels. To do that, companies should implement practical and measurable diversity programs as opposed to performative diversity programs. Moreover, the frameworks should be supportive of policies that offer workplace equity and equal leadership opportunities so as to prevent poor support. Other than that, the economic independence strategies offer a good means of inclusion and independence, particularly to Congolese women, who are limited by their work. To sum it up, the workplace norms should be reconsidered, and it should not only be an inclusion but in the structural policies, and also, women of all backgrounds should be provided equal opportunity in leadership, security, and professional standing. In the absence of crucial actions, disparities will continue to exist, which will strengthen systemic exclusion in workplace dynamics.

REFERENCES

1. Cox, T. (1994). *Cultural diversity in organizations: Theory, research and practice*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
2. Robinson, G., & Dechant, K. (1997). Building a business case for diversity. *Academy of Management Executive*, 11(3), 21–31.
3. Lorbiecki, A., & Jack, G. (2000). Critical turns in the evolution of diversity management. *British Journal of Management*, 11(Special Issue), S17–S31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.11.s1.3>
4. White, K. (2011). Legislative Frameworks for Equal Opportunities. In B. Bagilhole & K. White (Eds), *Gender, Power and Management* (pp. 20-49). Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230305953_2
5. Homan, A. C., & Abbaszadeh, Y. (2024). Obstacles for marginalized group member in obtaining leadership positions: Threats and opportunities. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 58, Article 101971. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2024.101971>
6. Areheart, B. A. (2011). Intersectionality and identity: Revisiting a wrinkle in Title VII. *George Mason University Civil Rights Law Journal*, 17, 199–236. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.908605>
7. Obgemudia, J. (2021). Confronting discrimination and structural inequalities: Professional Nigerian women's experiences of negotiating the UK labour market. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(4), Article 2.
8. Jorba, M., & López de Sa, D. (2024). Intersectionality as emergence. *Philosophical Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-024-02155-1>
9. Katehi, L. P. B. (2022). Leading While Female: A Personal Journey. 205–218. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-85668-7_12
10. Hyland, M., Islam, A., & Muzi, S. (2020). Discriminatory Environment, Firms' Discriminatory Behaviour, and Women's Employment in the Democratic Republic of Congo. *World Bank*. <https://doi.org/10.1596/1813-9450-9224>
11. Logie, R., Camos, V., & Cowan, N. (2020). *Working memory: The state of the science*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197693070.001.0001>
12. Ortiz, S. Y., & Roscigno, V. J. (2009). Discrimination, Women, and Work: Processes and Variations by Race and Class. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 50(2), 336–359. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2009.01143.x>

13. Adamson, M., Kelan, E. K., Lewis, P., & Rumens, N. (2016). The quality of equality: Thinking differently about gender inclusion in organizations. *Human Resource Management International Digest*, 24(7), 8-11. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HRMID-04-2016-0060>
14. Kamenou, N. (2007). Methodological considerations in conducting research across gender, 'race', ethnicity and culture: a challenge to context specificity in diversity research methods. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18(11), 1995-2010. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190701638234>
15. Manuel, T. (2006). Envisioning the possibilities for a good life: Exploring the public policy implications of intersectionality theory. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 28(3-4). https://doi.org/10.1300/J501v28n03_08
16. Negi, D. P., Abdul Azeez, E. P., & Rani, A. (2023). "The black is going": A phenomenological study on young rural women's experience of colourism. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 43(5), 487-502. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/0144-333X.htm>
17. Grogan, M. (1999). Equity/equality issues of gender, race, and class. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35(4), 518-536. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00131619921968743>
18. Sinnes, A. T. (2012). Three Approaches to Gender Equity in Science Education. *Nordic Studies in Science Education*, 2(1), 72-83. <https://doi.org/10.5617/NORDINA.451>
19. Rutherford, A. (2011). From the ground up: Feminist approaches, methods, and critiques. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 35(1), 175-179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684310395912>
20. Lam, J. T. H., Coret, M., Khalil, C., Giroux, R. J., Martimianakis, M. A., & Butler, K. (2024). The need for critical and intersectional approaches to equity efforts in postgraduate medical education: A critical narrative review. *Medical Education*, 58(6). <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.15425>
21. Setyaningrum, G. (2024). Gender-Based Challenges in Women's Leadership Careers: A Literature Synthesis. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v63i1.11929>
22. Gächter, A. (2022). Migrant workers and discrimination: realities, threats, and remedies. *Revista Tecnológica ESPOL*, 34(1), 92-112. <https://doi.org/10.37815/rte.v34n1.907>
23. Lusey, H., Lusey, H., San Sebastian, M., Christianson, M., & Edin, K. (2018). Prevalence and correlates of gender inequitable norms among young, church-going women and men in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. *BMC Public Health*, 18(1), 887. <https://doi.org/10.1186/S12889-018-5742-9>
24. Tutu, K., & Moi, E. (2024). Influence of Gender Representation in Leadership on Organizational Performance in the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Children, Democratic Republic of Congo. *Journal of Leadership and Governance*, 3(1), 44-61. <https://doi.org/10.58425/jlg.v3i1.241>
25. Kabeer, N. (2010). Women's empowerment, development interventions and the management of information flows. *IDS Bulletin*, 41(6), 105-113. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2010.00188.x>
26. Talat, & Singh, S. (2023). Dalit Women as Outsider Within: A Standpoint Exploration. *Asiatic: IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature*, 17(2), 153-166. <https://doi.org/10.31436/asiatic.v17i2.3003>
27. Adepoju, A. (2019). African migration patterns and the challenges of inclusion. *Migration Studies Journal*, 17(3), 215-234.
28. Basu, S. (2020). Gender biases in leadership: Examining systemic exclusion in South Asian workplaces. *Journal of Organizational Studies*, 28(2), 110-125.
29. Bhatia, R. (2022). Regional identity and workplace dynamics: Understanding exclusion in Indian corporate structures. *International Journal of Social Inclusion*, 15(1), 78-96.
30. Chakraborty, P. (2021). Colourism in the Indian labour market: A structural analysis of discrimination in hiring and promotions. *Journal of Socioeconomic Research*, 29(4), 305-320.
31. Kabuya, T. (2019). Marital status and professional mobility: Investigating biases in employment decisions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Gender & Society*, 34(2), 212-230.
32. Karan, A., & Misra, G. (2020). Ethnicity and professional opportunities: The interplay of race and identity in South Asian workplaces. *Journal of Human Resources*, 19(1), 52-69.
33. Lwamba, E. (2021). Workplace harassment and cultural norms: Examining gendered power imbalances in professional environments. *Global Women's Studies Journal*, 22(3), 89-108.
34. Mukendi, P., & Kazadi, M. (2020). Symbolic protection and gendered workplace strategies: The role of marital status in professional inclusion. *Journal of African Sociology*, 27(4), 135-150.
35. Ngoma, C., & Mwamba, S. (2018). Women's leadership in African corporate environments: Barriers and prospects for inclusion. *African Business Review*, 14(2), 44-63.
36. Rajan, S., & Sinha, P. (2021). Gender inclusion policies in South Asia: Examining the impact on women's career advancement. *Policy & Development Studies*, 16(1), 95-117.
37. Sharma, V. (2020). Corporate hierarchies and exclusion: Analysing the limitations of diversity initiatives in Indian workplaces. *Journal of Business & Society*, 25(3), 142-160.
38. Tshibanda, M. (2017). The intersection of marriage and professional success: Cultural expectations in the DRC. *African Sociological Review*, 18(2), 67-85.