

Bridging the gender gap in oil and gas

[Business](#), [Company](#)



Introduction

For many countries, the extractive industry plays a major role as an economic driver, creating jobs, revenue and opportunities for development and growth. There are also social, economic and environmental risks associated with these industries which affect men and women differently. Research by the World Bank (2009) has indicated that men have the most access to the benefits of these industries, whilst women are more likely to suffer the consequences of the social and environmental harms associated therewith. The different experiences of men and women in these industries significantly affect the ability of women to contribute to active growth and development in their respective economies. The gender gap in the oil and gas industry exists in two separate forms, the first being the top-end employment discrimination where there is a lack of females at the higher end of the employment spectrum seeing very low numbers of female engineers, and science and technology employees (European Commission, 2009). On the one hand this problem is a reflection of the imbalance of opportunities for adequate education, and on the other is what is referred to as the 'leaky pipeline' conundrum which describes the phenomenon of disproportionate numbers of women leaving these professions in each consecutive career stage in this industry. The second form of the gender gap is the very low numbers of female employees at the bottom end of the employment spectrum, that which requires lower education standards, but which may be more physically intensive. The World Bank reports (2009) that in most companies there is a female workforce of less than 10%, as these types of jobs are generally considered to be a 'man's job'. This is so because

of the inherent physicality required in these work environments and the exposure to chemicals which presents a problem for female employees that are pregnant, meaning more time away from work and the inability to work if pregnant. This research will consider the existence of the gender gap, the justifications therefore, the effects of the gap and recommendations for closing this gap in the industry in terms of ensuring that the opportunities for growth and development, both economic and social are equally accessible in modern oil and gas industry.

Research Objectives

To determine the causes of the gender gap in the oil and gas industry.

To determine the effect of the gender gap in the industry.

To determine a succinct set of recommendations for companies in the industry, as well as regulatory authorities in order to close this gap moving towards equal employment opportunities in this industry.

Methodology

The research is primarily a conceptual research dissertation that focuses on an extensive conceptualization, contextualization, evaluation, and analysis of the key issues relating to Corporate Social Responsibility in the oil and gas industry. A conceptual research employs an analytical framework that is based on “ a set of broad theories and ideas that help the researcher to identify accurately the problem(s) they seek to address, frame their research questions appropriately, and locate appropriate literature on the research subject” (Smyth, 2004: 168). In using the conceptual research method, this research combines theoretical and analytical aspects in order to achieve its

aims and objectives and provide pertinent answers to the research objectives.

In light of the fact that conceptual research requires access to an extensive pool of resources, there is a great reliance on diverse sources of secondary materials for analysis. In this regard, some of the sources of secondary data for the research and analysis include electronic databases such as Questia, Jstor, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar. Of specific interest are journals that focus on gender issues in extractive industries in general as these are analogous with the oil and gas sector, but particularly those that are based on the study and evolution of the gender gap in oil and gas companies, focusing on developing nations and the Gulf countries, as these represent compounded historical gender issues.

The relevance of education in enforcing this gender gap

If one considers the vast differences in education priority placed in Gulf countries by comparison to African oil-economies such as Nigeria, one can see a very different picture of the relevance of education. On the one hand, Gulf countries are more likely to actively discriminate against female executive employees as there is a larger pool of adequately qualified female candidates, where in developing countries there are fewer qualified candidates, because of the lack of priority given to education and particularly education of females.

Cultural Sensitivities and Pragmatism

In certain regions of oil and gas exploration, companies base their hiring discrimination on 'cultural sensitivities' where there is a concern for hiring

women in higher-paying jobs would cause a backlash against women by their male colleagues (Musvoto, 2001). This has resulted in communities with soaring unemployment rates of up to 87% of women, despite the female demographic representing over half the local population. Particularly in developing countries, there is a trend towards rural-urban migration of the working population which often sees the breadwinner of a family leaving to work in an urban environment which perpetuates this gender gap by enforcing the role of the female as a caregiver rather than a breadwinner.

In addition to these cultural sensitivities is a pragmatic approach taken by oil and gas companies which represents the bottom line in the sector in terms of cost implications. There is an argument to be made either way, with diversity goals becoming a secondary concern in favour of productivity and outcome. Male workers often have had greater educational opportunities and therefore less training and education is required, as well as less concern for factors of work-life balance. In the current economic climate, cost effective labour solutions are being of primary importance, particularly considering the growing importance of labour standards and quality of work environments which also present greater cost implications. On the other hand, studies have shown that in employment that is non-physical in nature women perform more productively and effectively, coupled with the barrier to private sector growth and development that employment discrimination breeds, increased female representation in the oil and gas sector may prove to be a more economical labour practice. Unfortunately however, despite evidence of long-term benefits of gender equality in the sector, companies choose short-term benefits which perpetuate and enforce this gender gap.

The broader socio-economic effect of the culturally enforced gender gap

A theoretical expose on the broader socio-economic effects of the gender gap, e. g. continued lower education levels of women, perpetuated poverty for single parent households, lack of diversity in the workplace.

There are a number of potential explanations for this anomalous situation of women in high end oil and gas jobs, one of which is the role of women in many societies as the primary caregiver of their families (United Nations, 2008). Therefore, as women progress through their careers there is a likelihood of their care responsibilities, as well as job responsibilities increasing proportionately and simultaneously, and as a result they are less able to meet the demands of higher level employment. Whilst certain industry competitors have been recorded as saying that they attempt to incorporate individual career plans that take account of these increasingly personal responsibilities of employees (Al Tukmachy, 2012), the reality is a labyrinth of professional obstacles described as the 'glass ceiling' metaphor where female progression in the industry is limited due to concerns of increased need for consideration of factors of the work-life balance that are less present in their male counterparts (European Commission, 2009). As a result, women are often worked out of these executive and management positions, because companies offer incomprehensive policies that do not consider individual career and family outcomes (European Commission, 2009).

Conclusion

The gender gap in the oil and gas sector is very current and topical debate as gender equality in the workplace is becoming a diversity goal around the world. Careful understanding of the causes and effects thereof are imperative for the management of these companies and the greater macro-economic goals of development and growth. This research therefore aims to contribute to the current understanding of these goals in order to further the studies and make concrete recommendations in order to close this gap and further growth and development in the sector.

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