



SECTORAL BRIEF

GENDER AND EMPLOYMENT IN KENYA



Credit photo : Peter Kapuscinski / World Bank

Introduction

This policy brief is part of the Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP), which assesses the status of gender equality and women's empowerment in Kenya based on recently produced reports and resources. The assessment aims to strengthen national understanding and data on advancing international, regional and national commitments to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE). As the primary source of evidence-driven advocacy and programming, the CGEP provides insights to county and national stakeholders, development partners, the European Union, and the UN System to advance gains and overcome challenges at the county and national levels.

Furthermore, the gender analysis is guided by the transformative and rights-based gender equality and women's empowerment approach embodied in the core European Union values on human rights and reinforced by the new EU Gender Action Plan 2021-2025 (GAP III). The framework recognises that gender equality is crucial in promoting democracy, good governance and sustainable development.

Background and Context

Kenya has made progress in promoting the economic empowerment of women through improved access to finance, i.e., AGPO, Women Empowerment Fund, Youth Enterprise Development Fund, Cash Transfer for Persons with Severe Disabilities (PWSD-CT), and access to employment, entrepreneurship,

As a result, all EU policies and actions in Kenya contribute to the dual goal of advancing gender equality and accelerating progress toward Kenya's SDG goals and targets. Gender analysis is a starting point for gender mainstreaming and integrating gender equality and inclusion perspectives into the EU programming processes, policies, actions and dialogues.

This policy brief serves as a strategic guide for programmes and policies aimed at advancing and strengthening Kenya's integration of gender equality and women's empowerment across key stakeholders: The Government of Kenya (Ministries, Departments, Agencies (MDAs) and structures of governance: national, county and communities); development partners including the private sector and the United Nations (UN) agencies. This ensures that actions aimed at closing gender gaps and ending discrimination are informed by context-specific analysis that reflects the different realities, needs and challenges of men, women, boys and girls in all their diversity.

and Agriculture. Despite this progress, women and girls in Kenya continue to suffer greater barriers to accessing employment and business opportunities with those in the rural areas spending more time fetching water and firewood for domestic use than in other forms of paid work. This brief examines the

background and findings on the effect of policies in enhancing gender equality in employment.

The Government developed the Public Service Diversity Policy 2016 to promote gender equality in public service. The Policy provides strategies for ensuring an inclusive public service that considers the interests of diverse Kenyan communities, including gender, ethnicity, youth, persons with disabilities, minorities and marginalised groups. The Government undertook the Time-Use Survey under the Women Count programme, through the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, to improve the measurement and quantification of the unremunerated domestic activities of women and their recognition in the gross national product. For the first time in Kenya, official data on the Time-Use Survey will inform future programming and policy decisions. Plans to develop a National Care Policy are also ongoing, with the Care Policy formulation roadmap already in place due to the National Care Needs Assessment exercise. Moreover, the Government is open to ratifying the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 189 (2011) on decent work for domestic workers.

THE POPULATION OF WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT STANDS AT

9.89 MILLION

WORKING WOMEN, ABOUT 100,000

MORE THAN THE

9.79 MILLION

EMPLOYED MEN.¹



the national economy is not fully appreciated. In wage employment, the proportion of women's participation increased from 37 per cent in 2008 to 40 per cent in 2014, then declined to 37 per cent in 2018.

Wage employment in agriculture increased from

23% in 2010 to
37% in 2018



The same trend is in the

MANUFACTURING, 20%



WHOLESALE 70%



FINANCIAL SECTOR 38%



In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government launched the county government post-COVID-19 socioeconomic recovery strategy in December 2020 with a three-year implementation period. The KES 132 billion recovery plan prioritises water and sanitation, social protection, transport, education, agriculture, health, gender and youth as anchor sectors that will help counties recover from the effects of COVID-19. Further, the treasury released the Credit Guarantee Scheme-Regulations, 2020, which seeks to promote enterprise development through access to quality and affordable credit to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and

¹ The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. 2019. The Kenya Population and Housing Census. Accessed <https://housingfinanceafrica.org/app/uploads/VOL-UME-III-KPHC-2019.pdf>

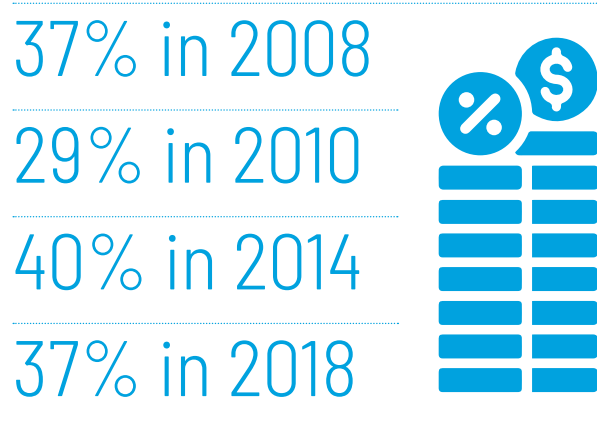
uplift lives through job creation. These interventions aim to increase employability for men, women, and youth within SMEs and improve the health of their businesses.

The county governments also adopted the COVID-19 County Socioeconomic Recovery Strategy 2020/2021-2022/23. Through the support of UN Women, 13 county governments (Tana River, Uasin Gishu, Kakamega, Kilifi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Machakos, Nyandarua, Laikipia, Isiolo, Kericho, Busia and Kisumu) were facilitated and adopted gender responsive operational plans for the implementation and monitoring of the Gender Action Plan that accompanied the county specific recovery strategies. The five pillars of recovery are: (i) Boosting private sector activity; (ii) Strengthening Information Communication Technology (ICT) capacity; (iii) Human Capital Development; (iv) Policy, legislative and institutional reforms; and (v) strengthening county governments' preparedness and response to pandemic and disaster. Gender and youth are considered critical areas that crosscut all the sectors. The challenge has been limited resources available to the gender units to implement the adopted Gender Action Plans.

Most women in Kenya work in the informal sector, thus making their contribution to the national economy/Gross Domestic Product (GDP) invisible and unrecognised. For instance, the Kenya Economic Survey 2021 noted that males accounted for about two-thirds of total wage employment in the modern sector. Females accounted for 14.6, 17.7 and 21.3 per cent of the total workforce in the mining and quarrying, transportation and storage and electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply sectors, respectively. However, females accounted for 56.1 per cent of the workforce in human health and social work and 47.1 per cent in agriculture. Men also participate more in the labour force, earn more than women and have more opportunities to participate in the formal economy. Women mainly engage in low-skilled, low-wage, low-status occupations.²

While working in a largely unregulated informal sector that offers poor income options, women tend to put in more hours of labour that often go unremunerated. They also spend significant time in their agricultural activities and home-based businesses, subsumed by unpaid domestic work. Studies have shown that incomes from women will have a higher impact on children's education and nutrition in the family.³ Furthermore, when women are disadvantaged economically, this directly affects their purchasing power and limits their access to the recommended daily nutrition.

In wage employment, the proportion of women's participation has significantly varied:



Wage employment in agriculture increased from 23 per cent in 2010 to 37 per cent in 2018. The same trend is in the manufacturing, wholesale and financial sectors, where the proportion of women stands at 20 per cent, 27 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively. On the supply side, women's employment and business opportunities are limited by greater household responsibilities and lower educational attainment than men. In contrast, on the demand side, they are disproportionately affected by limited credit access, barriers to business registration and discrimination in the formal sector, including not gaining access to opportunities to participate and benefit from the fast-growing digital economy.

² ibid

³ Ikutwa C., & Magani G. (2020). *Perspectives on Gender Roles in enhancing Food Security in Kenya's Drylands*. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Sciences and Advanced Technology, Vol 1 No. 8 (2020) 83-90. Accessed https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343682634_Perspectives_on_Gender_Roles_in_Enhancing_Food_Security_in_Kenya's_Drylands

Kenya has made progress in promoting the economic empowerment of women and girls. This is in access to finance, i.e., AGPO, Women Empowerment Fund, Youth Enterprise Development Fund, Cash Transfer for Persons with Severe Disabilities (PWSD-CT) and access to employment, entrepreneurship and Agriculture. During consultations, Kenyan women noted that women and girls in Kenya continue to suffer greater barriers in accessing employment and business opportunities. Those in the rural areas spent a significant amount of time fetching water and firewood for domestic use, including time/hours spent engaging in other household chores. Participation in Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) indicates that women spend more time than men on unpaid care work, while men spend almost double the time women spend on paid work (10.5 vs. 5.3 hours per day, respectively). Women and men spend roughly equal time on leisure and sleep, with women spending 11.7 hours, compared to 12.0 hours for men.⁴ The implications of this scarcity of time resources for women include a lack of opportunity to engage in other paid work, community and political life, education and self-

care. Currently, the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics is undertaking the first-ever Time Use Survey, covering 47 counties, to provide an indicative report on the time use of men and women in Kenya.

Participants proposed the need to increase women's participation in leadership and decision-making levels and further increase their opportunity to access credit. Furthermore, women continue to suffer increased gender-based violence. Measures need to be put in place to end GBV and will require more investments in safer spaces for survivors of violence.

Notably, the age groups 20-24 and 25-29 continued to record the highest proportions of the unemployed, at 16.3 per cent and 9.1 per cent, respectively.⁵ These age groups are under 35 years old. The challenges the youth face in the labour market include their relative lack of skills, a weak culture of entrepreneurship, unfair recruitment practices, poor labour rights protection and sexual harassment.

Findings and Current Situation

1. Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

When the country suffers a major crisis, such as the COVID-19 global health pandemic that has been a problem since March 2020, women tend to be disproportionately affected compared to men. Women often face extreme challenges due to the gender inequality and discrimination that existed before. These challenges worsen due to sudden shifts in gender roles and relations during an emergency or epidemic. When the first COVID-19 cases were detected and the country went into partial lockdown, especially in the Nairobi County area, it became apparent that urban households that lived within the socioeconomic margins would struggle. This resulted from the loss of income and lack of access to potable water to allow households

to adhere to safety regulations. In these informal settlements, women are less likely to be employed and the employment that they do have is often tenuous and informal, making it susceptible to disruptions amid a health crisis. Women are also more likely to take on the burden of unpaid childcare and care for dependant adults, forcing them to leave the workforce. This leaves women and female-headed households particularly vulnerable or dependent on men. Along with the social distancing necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic that causes social isolation, financial dependency may also leave women vulnerable to GBV.⁶

Specifically, special catalytic funds are reserved for and dedicated to women, persons with disabilities and the youth. Currently, the following gender

4 Oxfam 2019. Gendered Patterns of unpaid Care and Domestic Work in the urban informal settlements of Nairobi, Kenya.

5 Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. 2019. Quarterly Labour Force Report, Quarter 1, January – March 2021. https://www.knbs.or.ke/download/quarterly-labour-force-report-2021_quarter_1/

6 Pinchoff J, Austrian K, Rajshkhar N, et al. (2021). *Gendered economic, social and health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and mitigation policies in Kenya: evidence from a prospective cohort survey in Nairobi informal settlements*. *BMJ Open*; 11: e042749. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2020-042749

economic empowerment and development programmes have been initiated and are in different stages of implementation in Kenya:

Gender Economic Empowerment Programs	Description and goals
The Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) ⁷	This Fund pursues incentives for women's participation in micro-finance credit and other financial support. The Fund partly addresses the barrier of limited access to credit facilities among women.
The Social Protection Fund	This scheme cushions vulnerable persons from financial vulnerabilities, risks and catastrophes. The Fund is given to senior citizens or older Kenyans (above 65 years) as credit and cash transfers. The program also includes people with severe disabilities.
The Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF).	This Fund provides credit to the youth (young men and women) in Kenya. The aim is to reduce rising youth unemployment by empowering them to initiate businesses and associated income-generating activities.
The Uwezo Fund	<i>Uwezo</i> [ability] is a seed fund empowering women and persons living with disabilities and youth in groups to start businesses. A single group is eligible for up to USD 5,000 or KES. 500,000.
Government Affirmative Action Fund	The Fund was established in 2015 by the national Government in Kenya and administered through the parliamentary caucus of female members of parliament. The Fund runs programs that target socioeconomic empowerment of youth, women, children (including the orphans and vulnerable), persons living with disabilities and elderly persons.
The 30 per cent procurement reservation affirmative action to Special Interest Groups (SIG)	This includes women, persons with disabilities and the youth as Special Interest Groups (SIGs); the SIGs access 30 per cent value of all all-public procurement tenders.

Additionally, there have been institutional efforts to empower women and youth economically. Establishing banking and micro-finance institutions targeting women is a testament to deliberate efforts to bridge gender inequality gaps on the socioeconomic front. Such credit facilities come with favourable interest rates and repayment options. As a result of women's economic empowerment in Kenya, economic welfare and participation for women are improving.⁸

2. Gender and Financial Inclusion

To strengthen financial inclusion, the Government has continued to implement the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO), Article 55 on Affirmative Action and the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act (2015), founded on Article 227 of the Constitution on the fair, equitable, transparent and cost-effective public procurement of goods and services. For instance, the Women Enterprise Fund has facilitated the formation of 157 women-owned SACCOs registered nationwide.

⁷ Women Enterprise Fund 2021 accessed 20 July. <https://www.wef.co.ke/>

⁸ Republic of Kenya (2019). *National policy on Gender and Development*. Sessional Paper No. 02 of 2019.

The National Government Affirmative Action Fund has supported

8,309 Women groups



school girls supported with sanitary towels and mentorship programmes;



128 Women-owned SACCOs for table banking and revolving funds under Women Economic Empowerment



8,296 Groups (all affirmative action groups) provided with funds to up-scale various value addition income-generating initiatives and



95,296

Vulnerable students



3,973,765

Community members reached through civic education which entails training of members of the community and potential groups for funding.⁹



28,258 Vocational trainees through the provision of bursary and scholarships;



107,689 Needy



Credit photo : Paul Heckel

⁹ Republic of Kenya. Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs and Special Programmes. 2019. Twenty- fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995 (BEIJING + 25) Kenya's Report: Progress on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action – Review and Appraisal.

Conclusions

Women in Kenya face significant barriers to employment and professional growth. Despite the fact that education improves access to employment for women, they are still held back by cultural beliefs and their domestic roles. Thus, majority of women take up informal work and engage in small businesses to sustain their livelihoods.

The Government should, therefore, implement policies and regulations aimed at enhancing gender equality, particularly in employment. This will create more opportunities for women's economic empowerment leading to higher economic growth.¹⁰

Sectoral Recommendations

1. Recommendations for the Government of Kenya

- a. Develop and implement gender-responsive public policies and budgets that recognise the extent of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work (UCDW) in people's lives and the contribution of UCDW to social and economic well-being.
- b. Implement legal reforms aimed at changing attitudes and encouraging more women participation in the economy. The government should also hold institutions accountable for ensuring gender equality in the workplace.
- c. Invest in expanding government-supported Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to low-income families to allow women to work and earn incomes.

2. Recommendations for Other Stakeholders and Partners

- a. Support programmes on upskilling women and young people, especially in the informal sector, to enable their access and participation in the formal economy and for "jobs for the future" in the growing green industries and the digitalised economy.
- b. Support capacity-building programmes for women farmers on climate-smart agricultural production and technology to enable them to access e-platforms on agricultural information and price indices.

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¹⁰ Puh M. C Katharine, Yladom Audrey, Johnson Juliet, Fernando Francisca, and Gruet Lucia. Legal Rights: *Women's Economic Empowerment*. IMF eLibrary. Accessed <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/display/book/9798400246968/CH012.xml>



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