

# THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN KENYA

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## Abstract

*Kenya has made significant progress in the empowerment of women. However, the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) threatens to erase the gains made over the past decades and exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities. As the pandemic continues to wreak havoc in the world, it has become clear that it has affected men and women differently. Specifically, it stands on the way of women's economic empowerment. The article explores the economic impact of COVID-19 on women's empowerment in Kenya. The paper is based on a desktop review of secondary information available on the internet, different websites, newspapers, and journals. The review revealed that the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women include loss of jobs and incomes, reduced labour force participation, disruption of livelihoods, increased unpaid care and domestic work, rising incidences of gender-based violence, and psychosocial and health problems. The article concludes that the COVID-19 pandemic has undermined efforts to promote women's empowerment and gender equality in Kenya. The review suggests that significant efforts need to be made by the government and other interested stakeholders to empower women and girls to cope with and survive the social, cultural, and economic hardships wrought by the pandemic as well as enable women reclaim their diminishing level of economic empowerment during the pandemic. There is an urgent need for gender disaggregated empirical data to aid policy planners and actors in creating gender-balanced responses and sustainable strategies for countering the challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, including its gendered impacts.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Empowerment, Gender, Impact, Kenya, Pandemic, Women

## Introduction

Since December 31, 2019, when the outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) was first reported in Wuhan, China, the disease has quickly spread across the globe, disrupting all human activities (Nicola et al, 2020; World Bank, 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) subsequently declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on January 30, 2020, and a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Paules et al, 2020; WHOa, 2020). As of August 22, 2021, the virus had infected more than 212 million people and caused over 4 million deaths

in 210 countries (Worldmeter, 2021). In Kenya, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Nairobi on March 13, 2020, before spreading rapidly to other parts of the country. To flatten the curve of infection, the government of Kenya, like other governments across the globe, imposed an array of containment measures, including closure of all schools, ban on social gatherings, requirement for non-essential staff to work from home, a nationwide curfew, entry restrictions for all visitors except returning citizens and residents subject to a mandatory 14-day quarantine,

and suspension of international flights (flights resumed with effect from August 1, 2020) (Kabale, 2020; MoH, 2020). As of 18 August 2021, there were 222, 894 confirmed cases, 205, 912 recoveries, and 4, 354 fatalities in Kenya (MoH, 2021).

Preliminary evidence suggests that COVID-19 has seriously affected women, men, girls and boys, and other genders differently (Adelle et al, 2021; UN, 2020; UN Women, 2020). Some of the empirical studies that have been published show that while a large majority of those who have succumbed to COVID-12 are men, it is women and girls who are bearing the brunt of the social and economic effects of the pandemic (Pinchoff et al, 2021; UN Women & UNFPA, 2021). The COVID-19 mitigation strategies have not only disrupted many programs and activities for women's empowerment but are also having adverse effects on women's economic empowerment (UN, 2020; UN Women, 2020). The stay-at-home orders have prevented women from participating in the workforce. Furthermore, women in the informal sector are at a higher risk of losing their jobs, which will render them extremely vulnerable to economic hardship, gender-based violence and poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes.

Women constitute more than half of Kenya's total population. Despite their numerical strength, women are stifled and held back in a subordinate capacity. Studies show rampant inequalities between men and women in Kenya (UN, 2020; World Bank, 2021). Before the onset of COVID-19, the government had set ambitious targets and initiated various programs to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment (Kenya, 2019). The pandemic has disrupted these programs and activities, thus threatening to reverse previous progress on women's economic empowerment. Prioritising the fight against COVID-19 has not only slowed down the pace of women's empowerment but also limited the capacity of the government and other actors to maintain and

extend programs for the empowerment of women. This threatens to deepen pre-existing inequalities and to expose women to vulnerabilities in all spheres of life (UN, 2020:2).

This article examines the economic impact of COVID-19 on women's empowerment in Kenya. Hopefully, it will not only fill in the gaps in the literature but also add depth and detail to our understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the economic empowerment of women. Such an understanding can help the government to design evidence based programmatic and policy responses. Timely and regularly updated information is key in designing responses that are mindful of the unique circumstances of women during the pandemic.

## Women Empowerment and COVID-19 in Kenya

Kabeer (1999, 2001b) has defined women's empowerment as a 'process of change' resulting from one's *"ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them"*. According to Narayan (2005) the term 'empowerment' refers to the process of *"gaining power and control over decisions and resources that determine the quality of one's life"*. However, the phrase 'women empowerment is often used to describe "the process of expanding opportunities and choices for women and girls to participate in all spheres of life as equal partners with men". Empowerment is achieved when women have equal value and access to resources and opportunities. Women's empowerment is considered not only to be an effective tool for tackling hunger, disease, and poverty (Kenya, 2018) but also a key indicator of development as it contributes to social justice, cohesion, and the well-being of society. Furthermore, empowerment plays a significant role in transforming social norms, behaviour patterns, and structural inequalities leading to social change and sustainable development.

Kenya has made significant progress in women's empowerment as mirrored in the Women's Empowerment Index (WEI). **Data collected by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) from 14,000 women show that only 29%** of women aged 15-49 years are empowered, with urban women at 40% being twice as likely to be empowered compared to their rural (22%) counterparts (KNBS, 2015).

Globally, the idea of women's empowerment has gained momentum since the mid-1970s when the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution 31/136 which gave birth to the United Nations Decade for Women (UN, 1976). The Women's Decade (1976 to 1985) marked the climax of several years of lobbying by feminists, and activists for the

UN's explicit recognition and support of women empowerment. The Resolution subsequently paved the way for other global declarations, including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which champion women's rights and empowerment. The commitment to improve women's empowerment and gender equality was reiterated in Millennium Development Goal 3 (SGD 3) and Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5). The campaign for women's empowerment has been broadened and included in regional covenants such as the East African Community's (EAC) Vision 2050, the Maputo Protocol, and the African Union Agenda 2063, all of which have clauses that defend women's rights and empowerment. Kenya has ratified all these covenants and others, committing the government to promote women's empowerment and gender equality.

Kenya's framework for women's empowerment is entrenched in the 2010 Constitution (Kenya, 2019). Related policies and legislative acts include the Women Economic Empowerment Strategy (KNBS, 2020); the National Policy on Gender and Development 2019; the Policy on Eradication of FGM 2019; the National Policy on Prevention and Response to GBV 2014; the Prevention Against Domestic Violence Act 2015; the Marriage Act 2014; the Matrimonial Property Act 2013; the Prohibition of FGM Act 2011; and the Sexual Offences Act 2006 (Kenya, 2019). The government has also partnered with Counties and other stakeholders in rolling out programs for the women empowerment. These include, among others, the sanitary towels programme, gender mainstreaming, affirmative action, gender responsive budgeting, Women Enterprise Fund, and the Government Affirmative Fund (Kenya, 2018). These programs are aligned to Vision 2030, Kenya's national development blueprint.

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Empowerment Index (WEI). *Data collected by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) from 14,000 women* show that only 29% of women aged 15-49 years are empowered, with urban women at 40% being twice as likely to be empowered compared to their rural (22%) counterparts (KNBS, 2015). Despite the tremendous progress in the legislative and policy frameworks, enforcement and implementation remain a major problem, thus slowing progress towards the empowerment of women and closing the gender gap. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has ranked Kenya number 137 among 189 countries in the Gender Inequality Index (GII) (UNDP, 2020). In 2020, the World Economic Forum ranked Kenya number 109 out of 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap (WEF, 2020). Findings of the Comprehensive Poverty Analysis reveal that 65% of women aged 35-59 years are multidimensionally poor compared to 56% of their male counterparts (KNBS & UNICEF, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic threatens to reverse the limited gains made in the empowerment of women. However, no major empirical research has been conducted to establish the impact of COVID-19 on women's empowerment in Kenya. This article is a response to that challenge.

## Methodology

Potentially an assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on women's economic empowerment in Kenya requires empirical field research in the country. This could involve interviewing several women and actors in government and civil society. However, that approach was not possible due to lack of resources, time, and COVID-19 restrictions. Under such circumstances, the only alternative was to rely on secondary sources of information. The present study is, therefore, conceptual and draws on an intensive desktop review of secondary information on the internet, including blogs; policy briefs; government, NGOs, and CSOs reports; websites, published and unpublished articles, including newspaper articles,

research papers, statistical, and other information on the impact of COVID-19 on women's empowerment in Kenya. Data from secondary sources was blended with personal observations and experiences. Key words used for the search included coronavirus, COVID-19, women, men, effects, impacts, livelihoods, health, gender, effects, education, among others.

## Findings

Women Empowerment has become an important goal of many development projects that aim to foster economic growth, reduce poverty, and promote good governance (World Bank, 2021). However, COVID-19 poses a significant risk to women's empowerment and gender equality in Kenya. There is palpable worry that the effects of COVID-19 will roll-back years of progress in women's empowerment. However, this will depend on women's access to health care, socio-economic status, position within the household, and wider support networks. Some of the impacts wrought by the current COVID-19 crisis are identified and discussed in detail below.

## Economic Impact

While the actual impacts of COVID-19 are not yet clear, emerging evidence suggests that the pandemic is having negative socio-economic impacts on women (World Bank, 2021). According to UNDP (2020) COVID-19 has pushed more than twenty million Kenyan women into severe poverty. Faria (2021) also opines those women make up 4.1 million of the 7.8 million (16%) people in Kenya who live below the national poverty line of US\$1.90 per day. These numbers might double by the end of 2021, if concrete measures are not put in place to address the needs of women during the pandemic (World Bank, 2021). No doubt, this will exert additional pressures on women with no fixed source of income to cater for the basic needs of their families. This situation will have significant implications for government investments in women's economic empowerment and gender equality.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2020) estimates that globally more than 195 million jobs in sectors dominated by women will be lost due to COVID-19. In Kenya, 50% of women have already lost their jobs due to the pandemic (KNBS, 2021). These job losses have occurred in the services and agricultural sectors which employ more than 75% and 85% of urban and rural women, respectively (KNBS & UNICEF, 2020; World Bank, 2021). This is partly because there has been a decrease in demand caused by restrictions on movement, ban on public transport, closure of markets, and rising inflation during the pandemic. A World Bank (2021) Rapid Response Phone Survey (RRPS) on the Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Households in Kenya reported that more than twenty million women in the service industries, manufacturing, and agricultural sectors had lost their jobs heightening their vulnerabilities during COVID-19. because The World Bank (2021) further reports that working hours for women who remain in employment in these sectors during COVID-19 have been reduced by 30% for women and 18% for men. This means reduced income for women and thus, decreased ability to afford household necessities.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) projects that about 1.6 million women in the informal sector in Kenya risk losing their jobs due to COVID-19 (ILO, 2020). Most jobs in the informal sector, which incorporate self-employment, daily wage work, and domestic work or rely on human movement/travel and social interaction, have been hit hardest by the effects of the COVID-19 mitigation policies. This is partly because women in the informal sector have little savings and have limited access to social security (Onyalo, 2019). The World Bank (2021) reports a significant drop in average earnings for women in the informal sector, who have experienced a 46% decrease from KSh 11,688 in May 2020 to KSh 6,369 in June 2021 due to the pandemic. The loss and reduction of income has deeply affected women,

especially in female-headed households whose financial difficulties have been compounded by the escalating cost of food and household essentials during COVID-19. As a result, most urban women in the informal sector who have lost their jobs have been forced to retreat to their rural homes where they face financial hardship and social stigma for fear that they could infect others with COVID-19.

Related to women's loss of income is the problem of food insecurity. Food insecurity in Kenya has been a persistent problem that is likely to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for female-headed households. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, more than one million people in Kenyan were suffering from acute food shortages. The findings of the RRPS on the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 in Kenya by the World Bank (2021) show that women, especially in single parent families, have been adversely affected by the worsening food situation at the household level during COVID-19. This has put additional pressure on women who now must figure out how to secure sufficient food supplies to feed their families with their meagre and dwindling incomes (ibid). School closures have exacerbated food shortages which has in turn adversely affected households, especially those with children who depend on school feeding programs. Lack of sufficient amounts of food to eat can have detrimental effects which will, in turn, affect the ability of women and their children to live a normal, healthy, and productive life.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2020) reports that since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic unpaid care and domestic work, both of which directly lie in the domain of women, have dramatically increased to include caring for children who are at home due to school closures as well as of the sick and vulnerable elderly family members. This is also the case in Kenya where in the absence of traditional support systems of grandparents, house cleaners, and friends, women and girls have

been forced to shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work. The situation is especially dire for women in single parent households who now require more amounts of energy and time to provide childcare and domestic services. Even in households with two parents, increasing childcare demands are likely to have the greatest impact on women and girls who traditionally perform unpaid household chores which include childcare, housework, cooking, and shopping. Women who cannot change or are unable to change their work schedules so as to accommodate the need for childcare, have been forced to resign or leave their jobs. Increasingly, women have also been tempted to quit work because they earn less than men and this may continue after the pandemic. This will not only limit the amount of time women spend on generating income or doing other economic activities but also exposes girls and women to the risk of contracting COVID-19 from infected household members.

Furthermore, the closures of schools due to COVID-19 is likely to disrupt girls' education. Removing girls from school and assigning them additional caregiving and domestic responsibilities or other income generating activities outside the home will ultimately affect their learning. In Kenya, where social norms have led to huge disparities between boys and girls in school enrolment and retention in school, any form of disruption such as the one caused by COVID-19 could lead girls to permanently drop out of school. Families' inability to pay fees and purchase school supplies resulting from loss of income during the crisis, negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and loss of education infrastructure such as teachers and girls' peer networks are major threats, with long-term effects on the girls' access to opportunities and resources to improve their lives and ultimately, contribute to their economic empowerment.

UN Women (2020) observes that once women become educated, acquire jobs, and grow to be empowered, this leads to a quantifiable improvement in the standard of living and wellbeing of families and countries. Well-educated mothers are likely to take better care of their children, thus significantly enhancing their chances in life. Salaried women tend to prioritise financial investment in improving the well-being and material conditions of their families. Furthermore, when educated girls and women get employment opportunities, they immediately increase the pool of talents, brain power and human resource capacity at their place of work. Giving women equal opportunities, therefore, not only promotes fairness but also enhances the conditions of life for all people in different societies and countries. However, in Kenya's patriarchal societies, women are still not only stifled and held back in a subordinate capacity but also experience disparities in employment and pay, education, promotion, access to resources, and social services. During tough times such as those wrought by the COVID-19 crisis, and when financial resources are deficient, deeply entrenched patriarchal ideas about male superiority dictate that men get served first and women last, be it in jobs, food, or healthcare. Such stereotypical biases will eventually undermine women's economic empowerment and progress towards gender equality.

## **Socio - Cultural Impact**

Even though gender inequalities existed in Kenya predated COVID-19, the impacts of the pandemic have been detrimental to women in a variety of ways. For example, a recent study in Kibra informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya, which is one of the hardest hit spots, shows that women are experiencing limited access to critical social services, including potable water, sanitation, and adequate food supplies during COVID-19 (Onditi et al, 2020). Frequent hygiene practices and staying at home are important to cope with the pandemic, however, lack of access to adequate potable water supplies in the

informal settlements are making women and girls to queue for long hours at the communal water taps for this precious commodity. Due to the continual stress on hand washing in the COVID-19 containment strategies, the demand for water at the household level has increased to the extent that women and girls must wake up early to line up for water at source points. Anecdotal evidence suggests that women and girls are facing different forms of harassment at the communal water joints at rates that were uncommon prior to the pandemic (ibid). Fears about the risk of contracting COVID-19 at the water points is one of the dilemmas facing women and girls due to lack of enough space for social distancing. Furthermore, most women are not aware of the available government support services to address their pressing needs including mental stress and anxiety during COVID-19.

Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, including contraception, treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, pre- and post-natal care, all of which are deemed important to women's health and SRH have been diverted to life saving health services during the pandemic. Health facilities providing SRH services have been closed in efforts to avert the spread of COVID-19, and their equipment and staff have been redeployed to the fight of COVID-19. While travel restrictions and the curfew have hindered women and girls from accessing SRH facilities, women are also deliberately avoiding visits and appointments for fear of contracting COVID-19 at the health facilities. Mobility restrictions have also disrupted SRH reproductive chains, leading to an acute shortage of necessary contraceptives. Evidence from Sierra Leone show that during the Ebola outbreak constrained access to SRH services was responsible for 3, 600 still births and maternal and neonatal deaths (Ngo et al, 2021). Increasingly, adolescent girls idling at home have become pregnant and/or contracted sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV. These girls are likely to drop out of school and to live under difficult circumstances

which expose them and their children to hunger and malnutrition, which negatively impacts on their economic empowerment.

Women and girls are increasingly becoming impoverished due to loss of income and scarcity of new job opportunities. As the impacts of the pandemic continue to bite, women are experiencing extreme social and financial stress which require welfare assistance from the state. Most women, especially single mothers, are finding it extremely difficult to afford necessities such as rent and food. Economic difficulties have forced women to engage in transactional sex to make ends meet. Financial dependence on men, increased care burden, and spending more in proximity have exposed women and children to higher risks of sexual and gender-based violence (WHO, 2020). This is mirrored in the number of women reporting victimization and seeking help since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has resulted in a situation where frustrated men, confronting issues such as job and income losses, unemployment and stay-at-home orders are indulging in alcohol and drug use, leading to an escalation in cases of domestic violence. GBV has the potential to prevent women and girls from participating in economic activities, decrease their productivity, and surrender control over earnings to abusers. Furthermore, control and abuse can cause women to leave paid employment or prevent them from seeking work or lose out on promotional and/or career opportunities. Gender-based violence against women has also led to an increase of separation and divorce rates due to confinement of conflicting couples indoors, isolation from social support networks, increased stress levels, and anxiety due to COVID-19. GBV is a major obstacle to women's participation in the labour force, education and training, and career progression, and by extension in economic empowerment.

The COVID-19 prevention interventions have also interrupted women's access to and use of critical GBV support services. Access to critical health services has been disrupted and constrained as overburdened health workers prioritize COVID-19 cases. Urgent support services such as mental health assessment and care, and medical management of rape, including psycho-social counselling for women who have experienced violence, have either been scaled down or suspended in health facilities, especially those with more COVID-19 cases. Furthermore, access to social services has been undercut by the curfew and stay-at-home orders. The effects of the COVID-19's mitigation responses have made it extremely difficult for survivors of violence to access assistance and support from parental homes or neighbours, the police and the judiciary. This has diminished the courage of the survivors of GBV to seek any help, forcing them to suffer silently.

## Discussion

Previous pandemics, such as the outbreak of Ebola between 2013 and 2015 in West Africa, have shown that women are more vulnerable and face a myriad of problems including loss of income and employment, increased risk of domestic violence and poverty (Ngo et al, 2021; Davis and Bennet, 2016). Pre-existing domestic pressures and gender stereotypes are impeding women from participating in the labour force which is exacerbated by the high rates of female unemployment. More women are likely to lose their jobs, especially in the services and informal sectors, thus rendering them extremely vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic. Many women who are out of employment are surviving on meagre incomes, and without sufficient social protection, they have been forced to bear the brunt of the negative economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most women in Kenya are housewives and on account of that are denied access to resources and opportunities, including employment, adequate social security, education, and training. Subsequently, women and

girls have been forced to become financially reliant on men which heightens their vulnerabilities to abuse during crises. This calls on the government to design and implement innovative policies and programs to address GBV during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

In addition to economic disruptions, COVID-19 has interfered with critical social services that are indispensable to women's health and safety. Constraints to services such as SRH mean that women face the risk of dying of complications during child delivery. Furthermore, with constrained access to essential contraceptives and family planning services, the pandemic has had a detrimental effect on women's SRH rights, which will reinforce patriarchal ideas about women's sexuality. Whilst Kenya has been praised as one of the countries in the world which has over the last few decades enacted and implemented several gender sensitive and friendly laws, policies, and programs geared towards promoting the empowerment of women and gender equality, the review reveals that government led interventions in these two dimensions have been limited or have been totally absent during the pandemic. Programming of women empowerment will, therefore, be greatly impacted at various levels as resources and manpower are diverted to COVID-19 and the epidemic ramps up. This, in turn, could reduce support services and drive many women into poverty, which, by extension will have far reaching ramifications on women's economic empowerment.

The plight of women, particularly Kenyan women during COVID-19 has been covered in different media reports. After the government-imposed restrictions, many women lost their jobs and as a result, returned to their rural homes where they continue to face a myriad of sociocultural, and economic challenges. These challenges highlight the vulnerability of women, and the need for the Kenyan government to prioritize programs and activities to meet the practical and strategic needs of women and girls.



Rural women and girls are disproportionately affected due to inequities of access to critical information, prevention, care, financial, reproductive, and social protection services. Addressing these challenges often exposes gender and human rights issues which either deter women and girls from receiving services or increases their risks and vulnerabilities.

Most women in Kenya are engaged in agriculture, paid domestic work, education, health, and the informal sectors. These are sectors in Kenya that have been hit hardest by the pandemic and women are the most affected because these sectors are highly unregulated and insecure and have few or no provisions for social security. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) predicts that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have long lasting effects on the informal sectors. Women in the informal sectors have historically not only been marginalized but also rendered vulnerable as they do not have any alternative means to cope on their own with adversities such as those wrought by the COVID-19 crisis. The majority of the women in the informal sectors rely on public systems of transportation such as matatus to get to work but due to mobility restrictions women have been rendered the most vulnerable group during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Besides food scarcity and extreme poverty that characterise most of the workers in the informal sectors, prolonged curfews and mobility restrictions have cut off many from their sources of income. Most women have depleted their savings and because of that, they are increasingly disintegrating into poverty, financial hardships, malnutrition, and psychological stress because of the increasing demand on their time doing unpaid domestic work in the household and caring for the young and old members in the household.

Within the pre-existing gender norms and the socially constructed roles, women and adolescent girls take on disproportionate care burdens at the household level. Unpaid care work has dramatically

increased during COVID-19. Many women have subsequently stopped working or lost their sources of income to shoulder domestic responsibilities and consequently have become increasingly dependent on others, majorly men for survival. This is especially the case for women in female-headed households who are not only burdened both economically and domestically but also severely impacted. COVID-19 crisis has shrunk the employability prospects of women because of increased burden of unpaid care work. Furthermore, with schools closed due to the pandemic care burdens have dramatically increased for women, especially mothers as they help their children with online classes and assignments, while simultaneously caring for the sick and elderly family members. Working mothers have been forced to multi-task juggling between professional duties online and household chores. Because of the long hours of work, women are experiencing high levels of stress, feelings of social exclusion and isolation. The abrupt changes in routine, from being employed to being jobless have also negatively affected women's social and psychological wellness which, in turn, has negative effects on their economic empowerment.

## Conclusion

It is evident from the above discussion that the COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced pre-existing patriarchal gender inequalities which render Kenyan women vulnerable socio-economically. To capture the impact of COVID-19 on women's empowerment clearly, there is an urgent need to collect accurate gender disaggregated statistical data because, as noted earlier, the effects of the pandemic are gendered. This desktop review suggests that COVID-19 induced pressures are threatening to erase past progress towards women's empowerment and achievement of SDG 5. As Kenya grapples with the pandemic, it is important for the government and her development partners to initiate programs that support women's empowerment and gender equality in all spheres of life. Towards this end, policy makers

and planners should develop a socially targeted strategic plan for addressing the effects of the pandemic on women, keeping in mind their unique experiences and needs. In addition, it is imperative for the government of Kenya to set up a special social protection scheme and income-generating projects to support women, especially those who are breadwinners in single parents' households. It is also important to capture women's voices when analysing the effects of the pandemic to gain a better view of their influence on women's economic empowerment.

Finally, women's economic empowerment is a multidimensional issue that cannot be achieved overnight. Therefore, greater emphasis should be put on awareness creation, improving women's social status in the household and society, and giving them a greater voice in decision-making on important issues, such as SRH and equal access to resources and opportunities. It is essential for the government to provide incentives to companies

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