



NATIONAL CONVERSATION ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF COVID -19 ON WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN KENYA

Background

The Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK) is a national media association established in 1983 and registered under the Societies Act as a non-profit membership organization for women journalists from the print, electronic media and other areas of communication.

Founded in 1985 prior to the UN Women's Conference held in Nairobi, AMWIK seeks to use the media to promote an informed and gender responsive society in Kenya and Africa. AMWIK's strategies include capacity building and knowledge expansion on issues of human rights, democracy, governance, women leadership and gender based violence to community groups and journalists as well as production of content for print, electronic and community radio listening programmes, and advocacy.

In March 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was announced in Kenya, subsequently Nairobi, Mandera, Kilifi were locked down, banning movement in and out of these cities. Much as the COVID-19 preventive measures instituted by governments were well intentioned, women traders and employees, whom largely are in small and medium businesses were negatively impacted.

For the market and cross border traders, sales made by women drastically dropped since they could not reach their suppliers and clients. Due to the government restrictions, the overhead costs for doing business rose, forcing many small and medium women traders to go out of business. Factories, hotels and other bigger enterprises that have been forced to lay off their employees, have largely pushed women out of employment, since majority are at the lower rungs, employed on temporary contracts or casuals.

Analysing the evolution of COVID-19, The Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative (EASSI), together with its members and partners launched a survey in April 2020 to assess the impact of the pandemic on women small scale traders.



The evidence so far generated indicates that COVID-19 has economically hit women harder because of their employment in low-paying, insecure and informal jobs and trade. The economic disruptions, including restricted movement, have compromised women's ability to make a decent living and meet gender responsibilities and the basic needs of their families. The women traders indicated that due to challenges of limited access to basic needs, including providing food for their families and the restrictions placed on their ability to earn, those dealing in agricultural produce have been forced to consume their merchandise and spend their savings which would otherwise have been used to support the repayment of the business loans they had got. Preliminary data obtained by EASSI, all traders expressed uncertainty about the future of their businesses given the stringent loan repayment terms.

As a result of the emerging challenges Gender Based Violence (GBV), has been exacerbated both at home and in the public spaces as the women's dependence on male provision for household needs increases. As feminist and women's rights organizations working on Women's Economic Empowerment, Association of Media Women In Kenya, EASSI and other partners see the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic as a global calamity but at the same time an opportunity to intensify the women's movement advocacy initiatives for progressive, gender-responsive business regulations, institutions and social norms advanced by governments and the private sector.

As the world economies emerge out of lockdown and the resultant global economic recession, it is critical for both state and non-state actors to become proponents for inclusive markets, businesses and employment practices where women's voices and agencies are amplified in economic decision making. With COVID-19, there is an urgent need to invest in the strengthening of individual and collective capacities of women in trade and business and also strengthen the capacities for research of the various Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) actors so as to change the narratives through policy engagement and advocacy, communications and media engagement.

With support from Urgent Action Fund-Africa (UAF-Africa), EASSI together with partners in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, including: AMWIK, IIDA Women's Development Organisation; Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA); Platform for Labor Action (PLA) in Uganda; Femme Forte Uganda; Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP); and Friends of Lake Turkana (FoLT) have launched a



regional campaign in Eastern Africa to provide an equal voice for women in decision making in the response to COVID-19 and the long-term impact planning in the post-COVID-19 recovery programs. The campaign seeks

- To provide a platform for women affected directly by COVID-19 to share their lived experiences and the implications therein on Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) activism, policy and practice.
- To reveal the existing inequalities against Women's Economic Empowerment and advocate for an enabling policy environment that recognizes and supports women entrepreneurs, traders and employees.
- To enhance public discourse on suitable policy and practice post COVID-19 recovery measures that foster Women's Economic Empowerment as well as resilience in the face of similar catastrophes in the future.

Expected Outcomes

- Reshaping of policy making and practice in the post-COVID-19 era towards gender-sensitive policy measures that ensure business continuity to keep afloat small and medium-sized businesses owned and run by women, during and after COVID-19.
- A mobilized and sustained regional coalition of WEE actors that will support and participate in strategic policy advocacy engagements aimed at promoting public awareness on the gendered dimensions in business, trade and employment for better economic policy solutions in the post COVID-19 era.

Delivery

- Key note speeches.
- Panel discussions.
- Thematic break away sessions.
- Video documentaries of COVID-19 impact on women's businesses and livelihoods played.
- Plenary discussions and experience sharing.
- Social media engagement



Social Media Advocacy

#SaveWomensTrade

#WomensEconomicEmpowerment

#Covid19Impact