

*Opinion Paper*

# **GENDER PERSPECTIVE OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN AFRICA**

*October 2021*



# Gender Perspective of COVID-19 Pandemic in Africa

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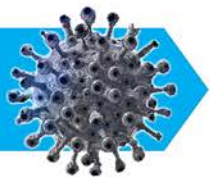
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## THE NETWORK OF AFRICAN SCIENCE ACADEMIES (NASAC)



NASAC was established on 13th December 2001 in Nairobi, Kenya, under the auspices of the Inter Academy Panel, currently known as the Inter-Academy Partnership (IAP). NASAC is a independent consortium of 28 science academies in Africa. Through its membership, NASAC facilitates the discussion of scientific aspects of challenges of common concern, make statements on major issues and provide mutual support to the academies. Drawing from this, NASAC specifically aims to provide credible science advice to governments and regional organizations on pertinent issues to Africa's development. NASAC's networking capacity serves as an effective resource for communicating appropriate thematic information, as well as coordinate efforts among different sectors and stakeholders in academia, policy and society. NASAC aspires to be the voice of science and is the affiliate network for InterAcademy Partnership in Africa.

The membership of NASAC consists of duly established national science academies in Africa that are merit-based, independent, non-governmental, non-political and non-profit scientific organizations. Through its members, NASAC seeks to enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing among scientists by using evidence-based research to African development policy in the domains of social, natural and economic sciences. NASAC aspires to make science academies in Africa vehicles of positive change for science itself, policy and societies. In so doing, academies ensure that science contributes to realizing Africa's full potential and sustainable development.

NASAC's is dedicated to enabling and inter-connecting African science academies to contribute to science, technology and innovation, to make the voice of science heard by African and global decision and policymakers, and to establish a culture of science in the continent.

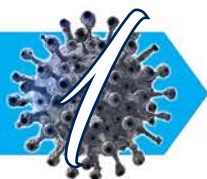
As an independent consortium of science academies, NASAC continues to unite and strengthen its membership to address challenges on the African continent using scientific knowledge and innovative expertise. Specifically, NASAC has continued to provide advice to regional bodies and organizations on science-related issues of importance to Africa's development through its membership. It has also enhanced the capacity of academies in Africa to improve their role as independent science advisors to governments and to strengthen their national, regional, and international functions. In turn, this has assisted the scientific community in the continent to set up national independent academies or associations of scientists where such bodies do not exist. The main goal of NASAC has remained the promotion of scientific excellence so as to create a culture of science in Africa.

NASAC aspires to be an authoritative voice of the science community in Africa. It is therefore only as strong as its members and has remained relevant since its inception by:

- I. Facilitating, through financial or technical support, the formation of science academies in countries where none exist.
- II. Offering science academies a platform for interaction and collaboration with their counterparts worldwide.
- III. Linking scientists and enhancing the voice in science through their national academies.
- IV. Strengthening existing academies through provision of capacity enhancing resources that facilitate their operations as well as offer training opportunities to their officials and staff members.
- V. Championing and facilitating effective networking of science academies by harnessing their collective strengths and enhancing their impact at national and continental levels.

For more information on NASAC, please visit [www.nasaonline.org](http://www.nasaonline.org) or contact the secretariat at [nasac@nasaonline.org](mailto:nasac@nasaonline.org).





## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION



This opinion paper is written in the backdrop of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that has severely affected the world (World Health Organization 2020b). While the pandemic has heavily affected people's health and impacted their ability to earn a living, the question arises whether this impact has amplified existing gender inequalities. COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by SARS Cov-2 that primarily spreads through saliva or discharge from the nose when a person coughs or sneezes. The COVID-19 pandemic was first realized in China in the city of Wuhan in 2019 (World Health Organization, 2020a). Progressively it has spread across different countries and finally hit the African continent. As of July 30, 2021, the infections amounted to >196 million reported cases and >4.2 million deaths worldwide. Africa accounted for more than 4.9 million confirmed cases. The first case in Africa was detected in Egypt as announced by the Minister of Health through the African Union Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Nkengasong, 2020). However, the cases in Africa keep rising, at least in part due to lack of awareness of the virus and inadequate health infrastructure. Several countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Ghana, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Morocco have enforced lockdowns in a bid to contain the spread of the virus.

Lockdowns are restrictions in movement of persons and goods instituted by most Governments, including those in Africa, as a measure to slow the spread of the Coronavirus. Lockdowns have impacted both men and women. However, it has been shown that women suffer more income loss, increased unpaid care work, and violence at home as opposed to men (Pinchoff *et al.*, 2021). With the strict restriction of movement, whereas both men and women have lost income due to job and salary cuts and experienced a decline in businesses opportunities, women's voices in family decision-making have suffered in the process exacerbating their risk of experiencing Gender-Based Violence (GBV). GBV has further been worsened by women's mandatory stay at home with their abusers with no access to support from family and relevant institutions (United Nations Women, 2020b). Furthermore, the pandemic induced school closures witnessed in most African countries have increased the care workload for women. There is a need to inform on the gendered social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on communities in Africa to provide input to, ongoing policy and programmatic interventions aimed at mitigating the impact of the virus.

# CONCEPTS



## 2.1 Gender

Gender is a social and cultural construct, which distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, girls and boys, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, 2017). People can use it for social exclusion by forcing people into a particular way of life that they may not want. For example, men are often socialized into providing for the family by working and earning an income, whereas women do the cooking, cleaning and nurturing of children. Unfortunately, because women’s work is mainly confined to the private space at home compared to men’s work that is in the public sphere outside the home, it is undervalued and not remunerated (Dugarova, 2020). This is especially the case for men and women in the rural areas. These stereotypes form the basis of gender inequalities that are exacerbated by the pandemic.

## 2.2 Stereotype

A stereotype is a generalized view of a particular group of people. Gender stereotyping is the placing of preconceptions on the character and attributes of men and women based on their gender (Bordalo *et al.*, 2016). The stereotypes include roles persons are expected to perform at home. Stereotyping can be harmful, as it promotes inequalities. For example, in many cultures women are supposed to stay home and take care of the household. This stereotype automatically locks women out of the Labour force and impacts their competitiveness in the job market. The negative effects of stereotyping have been exacerbated by the pandemic. With the pandemic, both women and men lapse into poverty, but women are more affected because of ingrained stereotypes relating to what kind of work they can do and where they can work. Thus, more women will continue to work in the informal sector rather than the formal sector, earning less income, with no buffers for the pandemic. The situation is more dire with lockdowns because more women than men are expected to stay home, which subjects them to increased unpaid care work, a higher risk of economic insecurity, and more encounters with the oppression that is domestic violence.

## 2.3 Economic Insecurity

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) defines economic security as the ability of individuals, households, or communities to cover their essential needs sustainably and with dignity (International

Committee of Red Cross, 2020). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), economic security continues to evade women who are relegated to jobs mainly in the informal sector and low paying jobs in the formal sector, therefore, increasing existing inequalities (International Labour Organization 2017). During the pandemic, men, being in formal jobs and white-collar jobs, could work from home or remotely (International Labour Organization (ILO) 2018). Additionally, they could continue earning and making an income. This is not the case for a majority of women, due to the predominant nature of their occupations, which forces them to be physically onsite. For example, in China, 70% of women were at a disadvantage during the pandemic, as they could no longer engage in making apparel in factories (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020b). In South Sudan, and many other African countries, small business owners have also suffered during the pandemic by losing about 50% of their income, due to fewer people going to the markets where the women are traders, and the absence of customers within their restaurants as well (United Nations Women, 2020c). For women who are able to work from home their level of productivity is decreased by also having to look after the household needs.

## 2.4 Gender-Based Violence

Gender-Based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender affecting both men and women (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, 2021). However, the fact that many forms of violence against women are rooted in power inequalities between women and men, with men holding more power, victims of GBV are usually mostly women and girls. The abuse of power and harmful norms is deeply rooted in gender inequality. GBV puts at risk the health and life of victims and goes against human rights and protection principles. GBV is manifested through a multitude of actions, including forced marriage of young girls, trafficking in persons, female genital mutilation/cutting, rape, sexual and physical violence, and verbal abuse. The economic, social and psychological strains occasioned by COVID-19 pandemic have heightened the risks of women experiencing GBV given that women are predominantly at the receiving end of emotional outlets in the family (Pinchoff *et al.*, 2021).



# ESTIMATING INCOME LOSS ACROSS GENDER DURING COVID-19



## 3.1 Introduction

Historically, women were unable to work outside the household, and in cases where they did, they could only engage in low-income jobs. Research done by the International Labour Organization has shown that employment is a big promoter of gender equity (International Labor Organisation, 2020). Work inequality reduces women's ability to bargain even within the household and plan a brighter future for their families. The pandemic has necessitated the need to work from home, which has affected women who predominantly work in the informal sector. This is opposed to men who are predominantly in the formal sector, and are able to adapt and earn income remotely or working from home. Even for women working in the formal sector, their level of productivity has greatly decreased.

According to the International Labour Organization, women are predominantly in the following industries that were hard hit by the pandemic; apparel making, hospitality, tourism and small enterprises. They account for at least 70-80% in these sectors (International Labor Organisation, 2020).

There is limited data on women working in the formal sector in Africa. According to the International Labour Organization, women form about 74% of workers in the informal sector in sub-Saharan Africa (Olk, 2018). This is because they are predominantly responsible for care work of the children, the sick and the elderly. Women who are able to work often have less time to do so making informal employment a more accessible option.

According to the World Bank, women also lack marketable skills due to high levels of illiteracy that may also contribute to low female employment in sub-Saharan Africa within the formal economy (Olk, 2018). Approximately 65.8% of women in the region in contrast to 76.3% of men are illiterate. This is also occasioned by early marriages making them drop out of school.

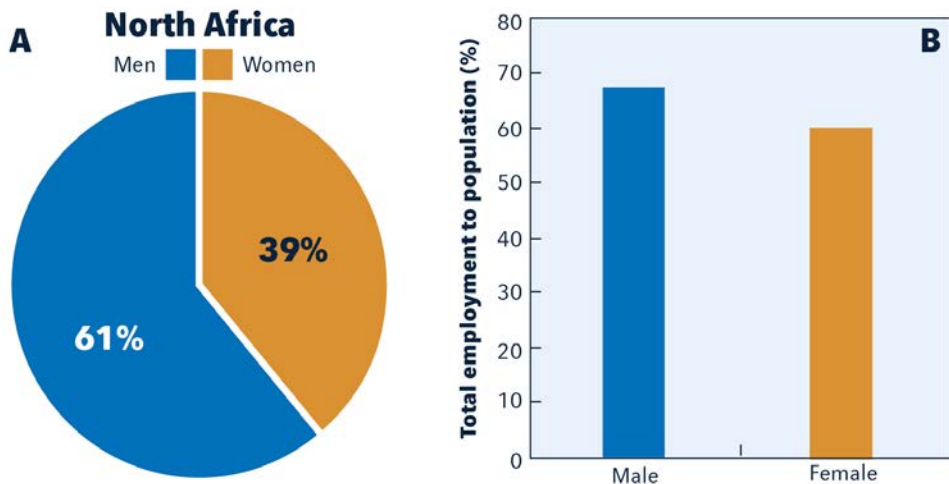
## 3.2 Unemployment

Statistics carried out by the International Labour Organization shows the trickling effect of unemployment and poverty in the youth in Africa (International Labour Organisation 2021). The data is disaggregated to show male and female statistics. However, looking at regions such as



Northern Africa, the disparities in numbers seem to be much higher. In Northern Africa, rates of unemployed women are as high as 57.4% as opposed to their male counterparts who are at 36.1%. This is despite the fact that youth have had access to education and more opportunities to find employment as opposed to older members of the society.

Furthermore, Figures 1a below shows the average rate of youth unemployment in the Northern part of the continent and the gaps between men and women. Therefore, women are more likely to suffer from economic insecurity than men.



**FIGURE 1. (A)** Unemployment rate among youth in Northern Africa (Source: ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: North Africa), **(B)** Employment to population ratio in Africa (Source: ILO Report on Employment in Africa 2020)

The 2020 publication by the International Labour Organization provides the total employment figure for 2019 as 469.7 million, and the employment-to-population ratio for that year as 67.5% for men and 50.2% for women, a disparity of 17.3%. Given these figures, the number of women unemployed in 2019, as compared to men, was approximately 67 million, a significant inequality.

### 3.3 Informal Sector

The lockdown guidelines necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic have affected women severely through the closure of markets, removing their sources of income. According to the International Labour Organization, women in Africa are predominantly in the informal sector, with West Africa leading at 89.7% (Dieterich, Huang and Thomas, 2016). According to the World Bank, 40% of women in Africa work in the agricultural sector; however, women do not own the land they till and cannot leverage it to get credits that can advance their savings. Besides, the product that is

acquired from tilling the land cannot be sold in the markets due to the closures.

In Africa, women who are in small enterprises are heavily affected by the closure of borders and markets, following the guidelines to enforce a lockdown. Therefore, they could not provide basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing for their families sustainably. Second, women in rural areas and those with fewer skills and educational qualifications are likely to suffer more as a result of low or no income. This is because people are maintaining social distancing restrictions and do not come in numbers to the market. These women include older persons such as grandmothers who raise their grandchildren. Third, some women are also the heads of their households, implying that more responsibility to provide falls on them. Statistics by the World Bank show that many families in sub-Saharan Africa that are led by women tend to be poorer (World Bank, 2020). This inequality tends to even grow with a lack of social protection for such households, as is the case during the pandemic.

However, in other African countries the lockdowns and restriction of movement was not upheld strictly. Lack of income forced women in the informal sector not to observe the Covid-19 restrictions and lockdown. Therefore, women would still go to the markets and the children would still gather outside to play together. This may account for the increase in infections as in certain areas business carried on as usual.

The informal sector, which is highly unregulated, has not incorporated benefits such as savings, health insurance, and awareness on private pension plans compared to the formal work environment that can buffer against the pandemic. Moreover, business is uncertain so income earnings are unpredictable and may be insufficient to fund health insurance, savings or after-retirement plans while still maintaining household expenses. With more women reducing their time working on the farms and in the markets than men due to having to cater to the home as many people are staying at home due to the pandemic, they are now more than ever at a disadvantage. The downside is that they lack savings and access to credit leaving the women working more at home and unable to get out of poverty. Even when it comes to wages, women are still paid lower as opposed to men, implying that women still face a greater loss of income during the pandemic than men.

### **3.4 Domestic Workers**

Proper employee regulations for other sectors would include a notice period or severance pay before being laid off, but this is not the case for domestic work in most African countries, as it remains unregulated.



According to the United Nations, globally, 80% of domestic workers across the world are women (United Nations Women, 2020d). The percentage of women who are predominantly engaged in domestic work is estimated to be higher in the African continent due to low skills and qualifications (United Nations Conference on Trade And Development 2018).

Within the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, 72% of domestic workers globally have lost their jobs because when people stayed home, employers could no longer retain their domestic workers (International Labour Organization, 2020b). Moreover, some workers did not receive their salaries as the government enforced lockdowns and staying-at-home guidelines in the middle of the month before payday. Women working in the domestic sector will undergo more economic insecurity than the men who predominantly work in better-regulated areas that will allow for benefits upon loss of income (International Labour Organization, 2020a).

### **3.5 Healthcare Workers**

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to ravage humankind, women have been at the frontline in containment of the virus, with a majority working in healthcare centres and providing support in homes. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), women form 70% of healthcare workers including nurses, caregivers and midwives across the world. However, there is still a wage gap within the health sector. According to the same report, women are paid 28% on average less than men (Boniol *et al.*, 2019). This is because women are in more junior paying occupations such as nursing and mid-wifery instead of their male counterparts who dominate professions such as dentistry, pharmacy, and surgery. Being in managerial positions provides more men with the power to make decisions on overtime and any allowances that can be extended during the pandemic to ease the burden of health workers. Women are again at a loss for not having their needs discussed at the table (International Labor Organization, 2020).

According to a working paper by the World Health Organization, women are less likely to be in full-time employment than men within health care centers (Boniol *et al.*, 2019). The case is even worse in Africa, where women provide healthcare services such as mid-wifery and herbal specialists without being in the formal sector. This means that these women are unlikely to have the earning power that their male counterparts have.

Nurses and healthcare workers across countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe have threatened to down their tools (Chersich *et al.*, 2020). This is after reports that they have not been equipped with the appropriate personal protective equipment. Trying to secure themselves from the effects of the pandemic can likely lead them to loss of their income or loss of life. The pandemic has also necessitated long working hours, especially for nurses, who have to be constantly on standby due to the rising numbers of COVID-19 infections. This is not catered for under hardship and risk allowances that could help ease their burden.

According to the International Labour Organization statistics, 70% of the nurses in the continent are women (International Labour Organization, 2017). The situation is even worse because the health care workers are contracting the virus while on duty. The case is further dire for women nurses who have to go back home and live with their families, running the risk of passing on the virus. There was a proposal for health practitioners to stay within the hospital for the period of combatting the virus; however, this is not usually possible for some women who manage their households and the limited infrastructure to be used such as student hostels (Chersich *et al.*, 2020).





## THE CARE-GIVING ROLE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

OPINION PAPER: GENDER PERSPECTIVE OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN AFRICA



Even before the pandemic, evidence indicates that unpaid domestic work squarely rested on the shoulders of women throughout the world, but more so for African communities where social-cultural norms largely assign care roles to women and girls. Women in African communities are expected to be naturally nurturing, and therefore, the role of caregiving primarily falls on them. In Africa, women spend 3.4 times more time in unpaid care work than men and the women-men ratio of total work both, paid and unpaid, stands at 1.19 in the region (International Labour Organization, 2020a). Such work has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic whose conditions increased household demand for a constant supply of water for hand washing and maintaining hygiene. This is amidst the underlying challenges of water shortage due to climate change in Africa. This means that women and girls are spending even more time collecting water and doing other care work, including taking care of sick and elderly members ailing from COVID-19 and other diseases. Women are also responsible to taking care of children who were at home due to pandemic occasioned school closure (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

For women engaged in formal employment who are now required to work from home because of COVID-19 restrictions, with the layoff of domestic workers, these women perform double the workload given that the housework lies squarely on their shoulders. This shows that women are likely to give up on their jobs or have decreased productivity levels to offer domestic service at home and such may continue even after re-opening of the economies increasing gender inequalities (United Nations Women, 2020b). Moreover, it is estimated that 11 million girls will drop out of school by the end of the pandemic. However, a glimmer of shift in norms was noted in Kenya where there was a slight increase in the amount of time that men spend on care work. This presents an opportunity to encourage a change in norms and perceptions on care work to enable more equitable redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work at the household level, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

# ASSESSMENT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACROSS GENDERS DURING COVID-19



## 5.1 Introduction

**Domestic abuse**, also called “domestic violence” or “intimate partner violence”, can be defined as a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person (United Nations, 2021). The term “shadow pandemic” was coined due to the increase in the number of cases reported about domestic violence. Reports by United Nations Women show that 1 in 3 women undergo domestic violence annually, which has been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. In China, when the pandemic hit, it is reported that the number of domestic violence cases tripled (United Nations Women, 2020a). Closer to home in South Africa, there were 87,000 reports of domestic violence within the first week of lockdown. In Kenya, there was an increase in the use of domestic violence helplines. The United Nations Women have a campaign to create awareness of domestic violence, which is termed the shadow pandemic, and create relief and justice avenues for victims. This violence is attributed to the social isolation that women go through, increased by the lockdowns and restriction of movement.

## 5.2 Impact of Lockdowns

Many women are now forced to stay in their homes with their abusers with no avenues for peer support. In 2014, the National Coalition against Domestic Violence reported that globally, 1.3 million women face domestic abuse each year. The number of women facing domestic violence increased by 25%, and in other areas, the numbers doubled during the pandemic (Mittal and Singh, 2020). The statistics show that women have been facing domestic violence, and the situation worsens with the COVID-19 pandemic. The resource theory states that most dependent on their spouses for provision will have fewer options of leaving because of the frustration of being unable to provide for their families. Social stress theory on the other hand states that there tends to be an increase in tension when there is financial inadequacy in the home. Not only are women likely to tolerate the abuse as long as their families are taken care of, but men may be inclined to turn to misogyny and use violence to show that they still maintain control in the home (Domestic violence is rising amid coronavirus lockdowns – The Washington Post n.d.).

According to a policy paper by the African Union Commission, the Sahelian countries, including Chad, Senegal and Mali, recorded a spike in their domestic violence victims, with some even going as far as sexual abuse (The African Union Commission – Women, 2020). The

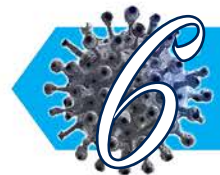
statistics show that the average number of reported incidents increased from 40.6% to 52.2% in 2020. To make the matter worse, health care respondents, the courts and the police are too engaged with containing the COVID-19 pandemic to be able to take care of the reports by the victims. Due to the guidelines of staying home, the courts may also have closed and may not be taking any more hearings. The legal aid centres are likely to be closed and are then unable to provide the victims with any support (African Population and Health Research Centre, 2020). The increase in domestic violence is exacerbated by stress and loss of income suffered by men who are predominantly the breadwinners. It is seen as a tool of control where the men can regain their masculinity within the home. The situation has been made dire by the lockdown, as the partners now have to stay home together. Girls are also not left out when it comes to domestic abuse.

### 5.3 Male Silence

On the other hand, the Men Engage Alliance also argues that men who experience domestic violence are likely to be silent, and most cases go unreported (MenEngage Alliance, 2017). The Alliance claims that the stark difference is because about 81% of women are likely to confide in other people about their experiences in contrast to men, among whom only 51% are likely to confide in others. The ability of women to speak out has empowered research that shows data as to the women who have fallen victim. Unfortunately, the data does not then adequately cover men who opt to be quiet and remain victims. In addition, due to societal standards and stereotypes, men are expected to be aggressive and assertive; they may hesitate to ask for help. However, the statistics by United Nations Women show that women have suffered this shadow pandemic for a long time (United Nations Women, 2020b). Therefore, their numbers are likely to be strikingly higher and still on the increase.

Therefore according to the discussion of the hypothesis on income loss, caregiving role and domestic violence, women are likely to suffer more than men. This is rooted in the study of the historical data showing women have been victims of domestic violence even before the pandemic and the situation has just been made worse. Women are more likely to earn less due to lack of employability skills, wage inequality in the health sector, domestic work and areas of formal employment. Women have also faced income loss with the informal sector being hard hit by the pandemic and industries that are dominated by women such as hospitality and tourism. Women have also had to provide care work at home with school closures and regulations to stay home. This has decreased their productivity levels in terms of being able to work. In conclusion, women are more likely to face economic insecurity, unpaid care work and domestic violence than men.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



## 6.1 Data

Countries need to have very detailed and disaggregated data of women's and men's economic burdens occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic to inform programme and policy decision-making along this issue. Ongoing safety net measures including distribution of relief packages to vulnerable groups in society in Africa among other social interventions aimed at addressing the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 would benefit from timely empirical evidence. For example, due to the nature of work being done by women, which provides for their daily sustenance, the government should create economic relief stimulus packages through direct cash transfers that will ensure women can sustain themselves and their families on a day-to-day basis. This will also ease the burden of having to dip into poverty as they are offering unpaid care and domestic work.

## 6.2 Financial Support

There is need to provide financial support for women-owned businesses by creating facilities such as low-interest loans and tax breaks that will revive the growth of these businesses (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2020a). This support can also go further to include awarding tenders of personal protective equipment such as masks to women groups that can then help them earn an income. This recommendation aligns with the evidence, which indicates that the effects of the pandemic have resulted in loss of income for women and the enlarged poverty gap for women.

There is also a need to expand social protection services to cover items such as child-care and elderly-care that will allow more women to enter the Labour market confidently (Myamba, 2020). There should also be provision for streamlining domestic work so that women can have paid leave, be able to work from home, and still earn an income. Going by the case of women frontline workers, there should be a provision for equal pay for equal work to support women and narrow the gender poverty gap. This will also help women have income that can buffer them in case of crisis. This also applies to health insurance and pension plans.

A suggestion put forward by the African Union is to create special member state funds at national level that can buffer women from economic shocks occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. The



pandemic more than ever has exposed that it is time to embrace digital transformation, especially in Africa and developing countries. There is a need to create avenues for digital literacy and digital transformation for women that will enable them take their trade onto online platforms to ensure they can still get an income in a socially distanced and remote working arrangement. Governments can provide Internet infrastructure in rural areas through universal service funds, for example the one set up by the Communications Authority of Kenya and community networks built by the local companies in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Nigeria and Congo. The government can also launch digital training and boot camps on digital entrepreneurship to ensure the transformation is effective.

Likened to creating gender-responsive budgets, the government should also make emergency funds with a specific outlook on women and girls. Some countries, such as Kenya, also enacted tax breaks at the beginning of the pandemic. Taxes such as value-added tax should be adjusted to cover the essential household goods whose cost is more often borne by women.

### **6.3 Regulation**

There needs to be regulation that can support care work that ensures the family is well cared for while women go to work and have control of finances required for their future. Paid care work being performed by domestic managers employed to take care of people's households should be well remunerated. The government can support care work through social protection benefits such as a minimum wage outlined in contracts, health insurance, saving schemes, and pension plans for those working in this space.

### **6.4 Accommodation**

African countries can aim to take up best practices as shown by the countries in the global North such as France, where hotels have been used to provide shelter for domestic violence victims. Counselors have been able to provide psychological and emotional support remotely. Women are known to have gone to grocery stores to use helplines that could enable them to get help to protect them from their partners. From the discussion above it is, therefore, apparent that women have faced more instances of domestic violence in comparison with men. Though the responses may be government-led, there need to be strategic partnerships with civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, international development partners and the private sector to ensure that



all resources are fully mobilized to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects especially those of GBV.

Girls face a myriad of challenges such as not being able to continue with school through remote learning. This is because some of the areas lack data support and Internet connection is not affordable. Further, at home they are expected to cook, clean and take care of the younger siblings as opposed to their male counterparts. They also face harmful practices such as gender-based violence and early marriages. The government should ensure they provide data support to continue remote learning. Collaboration with other stakeholders such as the private sector and non-governmental organizations to create rescue shelters for those facing violence at home, prohibition of early marriages and prosecution of perpetrators.



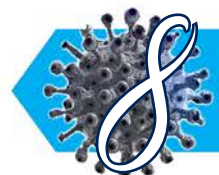


## CONCLUSION

This opinion paper has highlighted the challenges faced by women, compared to men, in Africa, occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. It has demonstrated that while the socio-economic issues under discussion are not new, they have been amplified by the pandemic pushing women further into abuse, poverty and marginalization in African societies. The paper has proceeded to further highlight how the pandemic has exacerbated issues such as economic insecurities, domestic violence, and unpaid care among women. It proves the hypotheses; women are likely to suffer more than men because these gender inequalities were engrained within communities in the continent even before the pandemic. Recommendations that can be used to address the issues have also been outlined. The paper is vital to initiate discussion, dialogue and action for the change needed lest we lose all the gains that came with progress towards gender equality.



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