



Gendered Impact of COVID-19 on Women in Kibera

(Socio-Economic, Psychosocial
& the Digital Divide)

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“COVID-19 has been the most disruptive global force in a generation. And where there is disruption, there is the potential to rebuild, reimagine, and create a radically better world. We can allow the coronavirus crisis to reinforce the worst impacts of the digital gender divide; or we can use the crisis to accelerate change, expand horizons, and get millions of girls and women online.”

**UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka
& Plan international CEO Anne-Birgitte Albrechtsen**

INTRODUCTION

Women living in informal settlements such as deal with everyday economic, political and social burdens that they need to overcome in order to create cohesion in their families and communities. Moreover women are critical contributors to the survival of their households tasked with ensuring the family is well fed, clothed, housed and children have access to education. Despite these roles, the majority of these women are still excluded from planning and decision-making processes.

The COVID-19 outbreak in Kenya has and will continue to disproportionately affect women especially in the informal settlements such as Kibera, in as far as taking up additional economic responsibilities for their families and communities or experiencing domestic abuse while isolating with their abuser(s) is concerned. This report aimed at understanding the impact of COVID 19 on women in Kibera, and provides key recommendations. The report further intends to contribute to effective and locally relevant COVID 19 responses through a gender lens. Additionally, it highlights the role of community centric approaches such as community networks and communities of care in supporting women during and beyond the pandemic.

BACKGROUND

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought an unprecedented impact the world over. To curb the spread of the virus, governments all over the world have enforced lockdowns and social distancing measures as a way of containing the pandemic. Kenya has been enforcing such measures since it reported its first case on the 12th of March 2020. As of 21st of September 2020, the Coronavirus Worldometer indicated that the number of infected cases in Kenya was at 36,981, 648 deaths and 23,887 recovered patients. Similar to other countries, the impact of the pandemic in Kenya is much more than a health crisis.

The pandemic is creating a devastating crisis in the economic, political and social sectors, greatly affecting vulnerable and marginalised communities such those living in informal settlements. Kibera, the largest informal settlement in Nairobi Kenya, has an estimated population of 500,000- 700,000 people.

For these people living in Kibera, the COVID19 pandemic has escalated their pre-existing economic inequalities such lack of proper housing and sanitation, overpopulation, insufficient water and electricity, access to technological infrastructure and an inadequate number of schools.

The digital divide has resulted in marginalized communities being left behind from accessing digital tools to facilitate economic opportunities, education, information, and communication more so now in the COVID-19 era. Just like other global crises, the impact of COVID-19 is not gender-neutral. Women who are poor and marginalized continue to lag behind due to the pandemic. COVID-19 responses are largely online excluding the unconnected not just from access to the internet, but also the much-needed information and services that affect livelihoods, education and health

First case of corona virus in Kenya

<https://www.health.go.ke/first-case-of-coronavirus-disease-confirmed-in-kenya/>
last updated: September 21st , 2020, 09:07 GMT). The analysis in this research is based on data available as on September 21st 2020.

<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/kenya/>

UN-Habitat kibera population statistics UN-HABITAT.:

Kenya | Activities | Integrated Water Sanitation and Waste Management in Kibera

METHODOLOGY

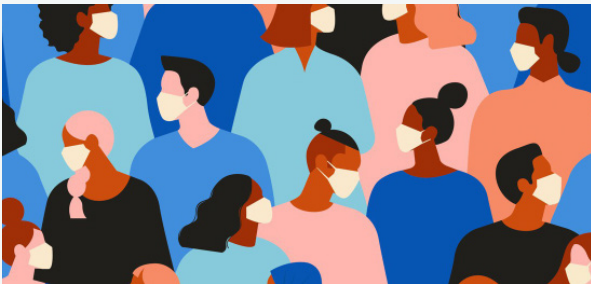
The report employed both qualitative and quantitative research methodology approach to data gathering and collection. Primary data was collected through administering questionnaires to women representing 6 villages in Kibera namely Kianda, Olympic, Kisumu Ndogo, Makina, DC, and Gatwekera.

In addition, face to face interviews, and telephone interviews were conducted. Secondary data was gathered from existing literature that is relevant to the study. The Socio-economic and psychosocial themes the report sampled 20 women, while the digital divide sampled 23 women an additional 3 for the extensiveness of that section. The research process observed all COVID19 preventive and protective measures as issued by the government of Kenya

A provisional analysis of the impact of telecommunications policy and regulatory frameworks in Africa and COVID-19: A community networks perspective

<https://africaninternetrights.org/sites/default/files/Josephine%20Miliza.pdf>

KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS



4.1

Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has both direct and indirect socio-economic impact. A direct example is the death or sickness of a family's breadwinner which impacts the dependants. In Kenya, at least one million people have lost their jobs or have been put on indefinite unpaid leave, since the start of the pandemic. Kibera residents' lives and livelihoods, just like many others living in informal settlements across the globe, have been negatively impacted by the implementation of the strict control measures. Lack of proper housing and sanitation, insufficient water and electricity,

inadequate number of schools, and a depleted economic infrastructure during the COVID-19 pandemic, has resulted in residents experiencing threats posed by the effects of the spread of the virus. Other effects include high unemployment rate, loss of businesses, lack of access to health services, lack of technological opportunities, lack of proper sanitation facilities, and overpopulation which affects the implementation of social distance policies.

Where women are concerned, there is an increase in unpaid care work, what with children out-of-school, heightened care needs of older persons and overwhelmed health services. This resonates with a policy brief by the United Nations on the impact of COVID19 on women at the very beginning of the pandemic which highlighted that the economic impacts will especially be felt by women and girls who are generally earning less, saving less, and holding insecure jobs or living close to poverty.

Over one million rendered jobless in Kenya as Covid-19 takes toll on business

<https://www.theestafrican.co.ke/business/Covid19-Over-a-million-rendered-jobless-in-Kenya/2560-5571598-ui6l8d/index.html>

<https://bmcmecine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-020-01779-4>

Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women

<https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/report/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en-1.pdf>

The report predicted the health of women will be adversely impacted through the reallocation of resources and priorities, including sexual and reproductive health services.

The study explored how COVID-19 has affected the respondents financially. 70% of the respondents stated that they had been affected extremely while 30% stated that they had been affected considerably.



4.1.1

Effects of COVID19 on the women

Access to healthcare services were also affected by the pandemic, out of the 20 women who answered the survey 17 responded that access to hospitals has proven difficult due to the closure of clinics in the area they reside in, fear of contracting the virus hence avoiding the hospitals, and little or no income to put into healthcare services which are deemed expensive and unaffordable.

The respondents were asked how COVID-19 has affected their normal way of living. 70% of the respondents reported that they had

been extremely affected, 25% stated that they had been affected considerably while 5% stated that they had not been affected at all. In addition, the study explored how COVID-19 has affected the respondent family and 65% stated that they had been affected extremely, 20% stated that they had been affected considerably while 15% stated that they had not been affected at all.

The respondents were asked how COVID-19 has affected the availability of food, medicine and other basic needs in their life. 60% of the respondents stated that they had been affected extremely while 40% stated that they had been affected considerably.

On whether the government was doing enough to protect and safeguard its citizens interests, 15 out of the 20 women respondents did not think so. They cited corruption as the vice that erodes trust, hampers democracy, and destabilizes the economy. 2 out of 20 of the women interviewed thought that the government is doing enough with one respondent highlighting that she has received relief funds for food surplus. 1 respondent was conflicted whilst 2 out of the 20 respondents did not give a response



4.2

Psychosocial impact of COVID19 for women in Kibera

Currently, there is no documentation on the psychosocial, psychological and mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on women living in Kibera .

This research attempted to establish the effect of the pandemic in the last four weeks from when the surveys were administered.

20% of the women had developed fear that they may contract COVID-19, 35% have been feeling very stressed, 20% have been feeling close to other people i.e. friends and families and 25% have been feeling optimistic about the future.

The study explored how COVID-19 has affected the respondents emotionally. Here, 55% reported that they had been affected extremely, 40% stated that they had been affected considerably while 5% stated that they had not been affected at all.

The respondents were asked how well they would say they are coping with COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of the respondents (75%) reported that they were holding up, while 15% and 10% were coping better and worse respectively.

When feeling stressed or anxious during the COVID-19 period majority of the respondents stated that they sought to talk to someone about it for instance a friend/sibling/relative/partner , spend more time than usual online, spend time alone , eat too much, and pray..

Attempts were made to determine the sources of information that the respondents use for getting informed on coping with COVID-19. Most respondents (40%) mentioned TVNews as their main source of information. Facebook, radio and WhatsApp were mentioned by a significant number of respondents (30%, 20% and 10%, respectively).

Respondents were asked whether they have experienced any form of gender based violence during this period, and 25% said yes.

In summary more than half of the respondents have experienced the psychological impact of the pandemic as acute and reported frustrations, uncertainty, boredom, loneliness and heightened levels of anxiety, and stress. These psychosocial impacts of COVID-19 to women in Kibera raise the question of what measures can be put in place to address concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic among women in this informal settlement



4.3 The Impact of COVID 1 on the Gender Digital Divide

On the gender digital divide, 23 women participated in the survey, with 18-30-year-olds having a 50% representation, 31-40 yrs having 33% and 41-60, 17%. Among the group of 23 women interviewed, 90% depend on their mobile phone for Internet access and are in informal employment, hence do not have resources to buy data bundles.

Although 91% of the respondents own a smartphone, most of them are forced to share their devices with family members and this poses different risks like data leakage and privacy. The women use the internet for a number of things including communication, information, entertainment and content sharing.

On affordability of internet access, the respondents spend between 0.20\$ to 1\$ 100 per day on internet bundles depending on the length of time intended for use and the internet service provider. Seven of the respondents who belonged to a group

named , power women group, a group that runs a craft-making business, only access the internet during the day at their center because they have access to free wi-fi from TunapandaNET. During the pandemic as a COVID 19 response, the women started making cloth masks as the surgical masks were considered expensive and scarce for the community. 80% of the women who had the smartphone often sought help to navigate through several mobile applications and functionalities like app downloads, social media account creation and access to the privacy settings of the different applications. Out of the 23 women surveyed 10 of them have basic knowledge on technology skills, 12 intermediary knowledge and 1 didn't have the knowledge at all.

An example of an interesting case is one of the leaders from the Power Women group shared, as they had an intern create a Facebook page for the business but had the last update in 2016 simply because they did not have the logins. Sometimes, women take a back seat when it comes to technology thus lack skills to fully participate online. Women in general are considered late comers in the digital age and as a consequence technology is portrayed as male domain. Social media is a source of information and a representative of social change, used for access to a wide range of information. During the pandemic social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter

AND WhatsApp are used as tools for spreading awareness and COVID-19 related information such as preventive measures and safe practices.

The women reported the use of the internet for a number of things including access to information, communication with family and friends, job networking, entertainment and content sharing on social media platforms.

Online gender based violence is also a contributing factor to the widening gender digital divide. The COVID 19 crisis has sparked and exacerbated the structural violence and inequalities for the most vulnerable in the society including women, youth, and children, and Persons Living with disabilities (PWD) . During this COVID19 period, violence against women has manifested itself in different forms, including domestic violence, and online and technology facilitated violence. The forms are manifested in physical threats, sexual harassment, stalking, hacking, and impersonation

Leaving no one behind <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/news/dspd/covid-19-disability.html>
Issue Brief: COVID 19 and Ending Violence Against Women <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/issue-brief-covid-19-and-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls>
Trends of Online Violence against Women in Politics During the COVID19 pandemic in Kenya
<https://webfoundation.org/2020/04/covid-19-shows-why-internet-access-is-a-basic-right-we-must-get-everyone-connected/>
<https://www.kictanet.or.ke/mdocs-posts/trends-of-online-violence-against-women-in-politics-during-the-covid19-pandemic-in-kenya/>

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

5.1

Towards Communities of Care for Women: Socio-economic & Psychosocial Interventions

Despite decision making bodies globally and at national levels issuing new public statements and reports, they continue to fail to address COVID-19 from a gender lens. Statistics around gender centered COVID19 effects are scarcely available. The key findings from this research are a reflection of the unprecedented impact of COVID19 on women living in kibera, and the need for rapid reforms, policies, budgets and strategies to have a gendered approach to effectively ensure women are no longer marginalized.

This research makes the following recommendations and interventions:

1. *Documentation and collection of sex, disability and age disaggregated data, on varying rates of infection, economic dimensions, care burden, and incidences of domestic violence and sexual abuse during and post COVID19.*
2. *Bottom-up approaches in developing a long-term economic strategy, which address gender inequalities in the economy. Economic*

strategies should be inclusive of women's participation, incentives to stimulate women's participation in potential growth areas such as ICT and innovation and seed funding to women SMEs and businesses. National reforms should improve gender equality.

3. Participation and contribution of diverse women's leadership in rapid response programs in decision-making at the local, county or national level. Employing a multi-stakeholder approach that is inclusive of community care initiatives, civil societies and women's rights organizations.

4. Recognizing the seriousness of psychosocial effects and the need to safeguard the mental health of women

5. Establish localised initiatives or build on pre-existing ones such as community cares that drive for free and easy access to psychosocial support within communities, through online and telephone counselling sessions for women and girls from the informal settlement and referral services that address anxiety and stress related to the COVID-19 outbreak.

6. Community driven gender-centered research and documentation on psychosocial data focusing mental health issues experienced by the women in the slums and the development of COVID-19 policies while planning interventions to fight the pandemic.

7. Majority of the women in Kibera are part of a social group for example table banking groups locally known as chamas. Additionally, there exists several women centers or spaces in Kibera such as the power women group center. These centers can be equipped to become safe spaces that offer support on the wellbeing and mental health issues of women in Kibera. The centers can also host women learn from each other.

5.2 Towards Women Centered Community Networks



Tunapanda

TunapandaNet: A case study on how community networks can support women in Kibera ICTs present unprecedented

ICTs present unprecedented opportunities for advancement of women's participation and contribution in social, political and economic aspects. Technology is not gender-neutral and is predetermined by existing power dynamics. The reality is that the same barriers that women experience offline are also translated in the digital space. This coupled with the offline to online transition as a result of the pandemic further amplifies the gender digital divide across the different social and economic groups.



However, when it comes to technologies

and the digital space the difference in priorities, needs, desires and approaches for women and men, deployment of infrastructure and services often do not take these into consideration. Women are considered as beneficiaries and not citizens with equal rights to participate and contribute towards shaping the internet. Bottom-up approaches to closing the digital divide such as community networks present a holistic solution to ensuring no one is left behind.

Community networks are telecommunication infrastructure built with and for the community to support economic and social activities. These types of networks are emerging as complementary access models that adopt a holistic approach to addressing digital exclusions. In Kibera, TunapandaNET is a low-cost community wireless network championed by Tunapanda Institute whose goal is to build a digital ecosystem with the aim of addressing digital inequalities for the socially and

economically disadvantaged living in Kibera, an informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya.

The network addresses these by focusing on the provision of access to connectivity, building digital capacities, digital platforms and the creation of locally relevant content by, with and for the community. To date, TunapandaNET has connected a total of 23 centers and the number is growing.

From the connected centers, TunapandaNET provides connectivity to Power Women Group located in Sarang'ombe village in Kibera. In addition to internet provision, TunapandaNET has offered training on basic digital literacy and online safety to the group of 15 women. Although TunapandaNET has made efforts to implement gender sensitive approaches in the deployment and operation of the network, they are still insufficient. From a team of 8 individuals, only 3 are women.

The technical team of 5 only has one woman. One of the contributing factors is that there are fewer women compared to men in the ICT industry. This is as a result of structural gender based inequalities and barriers such as unequal access to education, exposure and opportunities. Out of the 23 connected, only one is a women's center. The TunapandaNET team expressed a lack of interest in getting connected from the women centers they had approached which is as a result of lack of awareness on the value of getting connected and did not find access to connectivity as one of their immediate needs.

To ensure women's appropriation of technologies, special and intentional efforts have to be taken in identifying their needs and co-creating solutions for, with and by women. To overcome the barriers identified during the research, we propose the following interventions.



5.2.1 Applying A Gender Lens In Designing, Implementation And Operation Of Community Networks

Women are a valuable resource of first-hand knowledge of what works and what does not work in their communities. In order for community networks to explicitly address the needs of women, they need to integrate a gender perspective from the design to the operations of the network. Women have to be central to the process if community networks are to completely eliminate the structural barriers to the effective access and use of technologies by women.

From the research conducted, it was established that some of the barriers to access were geographical and economical. To address the geographical barriers, TunapandaNET can work towards ensuring network coverage especially in areas with significant women populations. One way of doing this is through connecting more women centers, and hotspots near homes and market places so that the women in the community can have access to unlimited internet plans unlike the bundles plans which limit their usage. In order to address the economic barriers to access,

TunapandaNET can co-create favorable pricing plans that are affordable and accessible to women in spite of their economic status.

In 2018, PamojaNET, a community network championed by La Difference in Idjwi, DRC started working towards a women centered application. They collaborated with women from a local cooperative to co-design an interactive voice response service, Salama, which aims to enable users to call an emergency number and record a “help me” message that is immediately forwarded to six pre-nominated family and friends. Anyone who responds can then record and trigger a follow-up message notifying the other recipients that help is on the way.



5.2.2 Build digital capacities of women and support development of women centered content, applications and services

In order for women to actively engage with technologies, participate in the design and implementation of technology related services, they have to build their capacities and confidence. From the research, the majority of the women had access to smartphones. Mobile e-learning platforms and multimedia digital content offer a major opportunity for women to overcome many obstacles to education, such as time, reduced mobility, cost and sociocultural norms. The increased access to mobile phones, smartphones, tablets and the internet are an important step towards accessible and better education. As first time users, women often struggle to navigate online spaces due to large amounts of information. Access to content that fits their context and in the local language is challenging to find.

Community networks such as TunapandaNET can have local to local dialogues with the women to understand their interests, needs and priorities so that the digital content is curated to fit the context.

The content should be created in collaboration with the women and incorporate existing local knowledge. Dissemination of content should also be to a format that is not only easily accessible but also information innovations coming directly from the women. In 2019, TunapandaNET in collaboration with Murambinda Works in Zimbabwe collaborated on a joint catalytic intervention supported by APC aimed at creating an educational digital platform with e-learning and school administration functionalities. As a continuation of this, TunapandaNET can work on making the platform available on mobile and co-creating women centered digital content.





5.2.3 Promoting women's participation in community networks

In order to ensure broad participation, activities need to be organized in spaces that are safe, accessible and socially acceptable for both men and women. The greater the extent to which an account is taken of people's daily tasks, responsibilities and social environment, the higher the attendance is likely to be. Equal participation and gender issues should not only be considered at user level. It is important that both men and women are well represented at all levels. This includes the level of the initiative itself, but also the design of the network, content and platforms.



5.2.4 Mitigate and respond to the threats online that hinder women's access to and use of technology

Provide a secure digital environment for the women in Kibera to be able to protect both their online and offline freedom of expression. This can be done through workshops and training to learn how to increase their online security and also how to combat cyber violence

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CONCLUSION

Goal number 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The progress made in the last decade is threatened by the COVID 19 pandemic which has not only amplified and exposed the existing inequalities but also created a global crisis. Gender inequality is multifaceted thus there a one size fits all approach will only contribute towards widening the existing inequalities. The use of local and gender sensitive approaches, strategies and interventions that intentionally focus are key in supporting women and building their resilience during and post the pandemic.

APPE

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APPENDIX

Socio-economic & Psychosocial Questionnaire Analysis

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1nP-drG8xc4pTu04zfsmT5102vg3FPZ6IJHd60BdfIEoE/edit?usp=sharing>

Gender Digital Divide Questionnaire Analysis

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1QRGDPYnp4urVVEbFu-ez-PQNvMcWcmxqQ9a8oDdMPv8c/edit?usp=sharing>

END



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