

# Hub to lead study on effectiveness of women empowerment projects

The Kenyatta University research centre will establish whether such programmes have an impact on women's life in bid to guide policy formulation

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In Kenya women's economic empowerment programmes have been operating for a long time. However, no available data shows how successful they have been.

Against this background, early last year, Kenyatta University launched the Women's Economic Empowerment (KU-WEE) hub. Financed by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the centre will serve as the national research facility for gender-related matters and its research will be used to formulate policy in the country.

Under the initiative 'What Works for Women's Economic Empowerment, the project operating under the Centre for Gender Equity and Empowerment aims to build evidence on gender equality to guide policymakers and others when formulating transformative policies on empowerment of women in Kenya.

"Women's representation in the economy is marred by poor gender representation at the policy decision-making levels. Lack of clarity in policies to address workforce segregation while existing programmes and policies have not been independently evaluated are some of the rationales towards the programme," says Prof Judith Ndombi Waudo, the hub leader.

The establishment of the hub, she says, was informed by the need for gender data

## WHAT IT ENTAILS

● The project will involve analytical studies that encompass impact evaluations on women's roles in the public and private sectors; skilling and mentoring; and, violence, crisis, and women's work.

● It will also involve capacity building and stakeholder engagement, where the public, the policy makers and civil society will advocate for evidence-based WEE programmes.

● The project came from a need for gender data and robust evidence that informs the WEE architecture in the country and region.

and robust evidence that informs WEE architecture in Kenya and the Eastern Africa Region.

"The goal of the hub is to build programme and policy evidence on "What Works" to advance and scale-up WEE in Kenya through research and innovation. This evidence will be used to shape policies, programmes, interventions, and advocacy efforts related to supporting WEE in Kenya," she says.

## Gender responsiveness

She adds that the hub is coming to bridge the research gap, which is there with a mission of providing quality research-based evidence and innovations on advancing WEE in Kenya.

The research has projects under three pillars: Women's Roles in the Public and Private Sectors; Skilling and Mentoring; and; Violence, Crisis, and Women's Work. Its objective is to enhance women's engagement and influence in all spheres of the economy, increase women's employability through training, internships and skilling, prevent and reduce sexual and gender-based violence and secure women's empowerment and agency as well as constructing women's economic empowerment indices for tracking progress made in empowering women.

The hub also hopes to promote gender responsive budgeting processes, strengthen capacity to conduct policy driven research and to generate gender data and statistics to advance the well-being of women, girls, men and boys. Primary outcomes envisaged to be achieved through this project is to boost the representation of women in leadership positions, corporate governance, manufacturing sector, as well as reduce gender-based violence by half, by 2025.

Apart from that at least four gender-responsive policies must be implemented to



protect women and communities against sudden adverse socio-economic shocks by 2025.

"We also hope that a new women's economic empowerment measurement index will be constructed and demonstrated. Additionally, we hope that a new gender-responsive budgeting tool will also be developed and shared with stakeholders by 2025," Prof Waudo adds.

Prof Simon Onywere, the hub's Field Coordinator, says there are data gaps when it comes to knowing what works for WEE and that is why research is needed to understand success factors and track

progress. Once statistics are available, they will help researchers and implementers track progress and understand the full extent and nature of women's economic opportunities.

To ensure they get accurate information, they have been sending researchers to collect data. They are also using different approaches to get to the target population. Among the main partners working with the university are Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), Tharaka Nithi County government, the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) and the Ministry of Public Service and Gender.

"We have made a lot of progress with the project. So far all concepts have been drafted, all projects approved, initial stakeholder engagement done and some policies made. We have about 102 researchers onboard and we have carried out three pilot projects," says Onywere.

He reveals that to address the weak nexus between WEE policies, programmes and gender data in Kenya, the hub has initiated 12 research studies to gather the required data. The studies are using mixed methods, which include collection of quantitative and qualitative data and one Randomised Control Trial (RCT). The project's aim is to use credible research evidence to shape policies, programmes, interventions, and advocacy efforts that move Kenyan women forward in all spheres of the economy.

## Creche programme

"We will be producing foundation research to understand what matters for WEE and understand pathways that enable women's work. We will carry out an impact evaluation in one of the thematic areas using RCT to generate evidence on causal relationships and the effectiveness of a promising intervention to improve WEE," adds Onywere.

The project will involve capacity build-



Women participate in a discussion under the Women in Corporate Governance study in Kitui Central. PD/COURTESY/KU WEE-HUB







ing to ensure that strong institutions and networks emerge and are available to partner with governments and others on evidence generation for WEE. They will also train researchers in advocacy and communications strategy to ensure that they package the evidence well so that it is impactful.

“The hub is expected to build capacity of junior researchers, postgraduate students, and partners in research, policy advocacy, and communication strategies on women economic empowerment,” he says

Wauodo says some findings from the research done so far shows that unpaid work, especially child care, is one of the major reason most women don't participate in the labour force actively or are not economically empowered as most of them spend between one hour to 16 hours offering child care.

**Scaling up**

To come up with a solution to this problem, the centre has initiated a further research in Tharaka Nithi county to evaluate the effectiveness of the crèche programme, set up in Chuka market to enable women traders accomplish the duo role of childcare and participation in income generating activities.

“In partnership with the Economic Growth Center-Yale University, the research aims to establish crèches with children's feeding rooms and mothers' lactating rooms, and evaluate the effects of such a programme on child development, women's labour force participation and psychosocial well-being of both children and mothers,” she adds.

Researchers will seek to determine and evaluate factors that influence use of crèche, and quantify time spent on childcare and its application on women's livelihood strategies, economic empowerment and well-being. They will then make a policy recommendations, based on evidence, for institutionalisation of the crèche and

**Researchers conduct a focus group session in Kitui Central.**

COURTESY/KU WEE-HUB



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lactating rooms programme.

“The primary outcome of the study is improvement of women economic productivity or well-being by 20 per cent through reduced childcare burden in at least five sub-counties in Tharaka Nithi County by 2025. Anticipated research outputs will be key in informing governments and other stakeholders at the county, national and regional levels on what works to enhance WEE, particularly through female labour force participation,” she adds.

She explains that they opted to work with Tharaka Nithi county because it is the only county that had an ongoing child care programme and were willing to partner with them. Once the programme is successful at the county level, they aim to replicate it to other counties.

To ensure this is a success they are training those who will be manning those facilities and are also coming up with a curriculum to ensure that children who will be using those facilities are handled professionally. This will help improve not only the children welfare, but also the well-being of the caregivers.

Prof Wauodo, however, reveals that it has not been easy to achieve this because of several obstacles such as lack of infrastructure, lack of policy to guide those taking care of children below the age of four years, shortage of funds among others.

“We have been forced to improvise the existing early childhood development and education centres for this research to go on. We didn't foresee this, but since there is no other way out, we have to work with what is readily available. Our vision was to build modern childcare facilities with play areas, sleep areas, lactating rooms and toilet and all relevant tools and equipment. With such facilities we will improve the child care services and be able to relieve mothers from child care and enable them to participate in other economic activities,” she says.

# Implement policies for women to participate at all levels in society

Considerable efforts and commitment has been made by government and non-state actors towards the realisation of the sustainable development goals geared to ensure gender equality and decent work and economic growth.

Kenya has made great strides in the quest to increase women's equality through policies and legislative frameworks such as the Sexual Offences Act 2006, the Prevention Against Domestic Violence Act 2015, Policy on Eradication of FGM 2019, and the National Policy on Gender and Development 2019. However, reports such as the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 show the country is still lagging in progress towards achieving gender parity, scoring lower than some of its peers in the region.

A report on the Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index (CRII) in East African Community (EAC), shows that commitment has been minimal among the member countries in 2020 with South Africa doing twice as much. Kenya ranks at 76 with a score of 0.51 followed closely by Tanzania at 130 with a score of 0.35 while South Sudan tails at 158 out of the 158 countries under study. With regards to taxation Kenya ranks 9th with a score of 0.66 on tax policies among the EAC countries. On labour policies, the study found that most labour rights are only on paper with poor implementation, and most countries scoring low in respect of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions in Law and Practice. None of the countries including Kenya meets the ILO threshold.

With these grave statistics of high inequality, women are over-represented in informal and vulnerable employment. *Recent statistics indicate that the portion of women in formal employment is 4.6 per cent higher than that of men.* A research report on women's empowerment, using the novel measure, the Kenya Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) by Kenya National Bureau of Statistics released in 2020 shows that only 29 per cent of Kenyan women can participate equally and effectively in political, economic, and cultural life and that their involvement is largely dependent on household circumstances. These reports reflect a situation that is far from the anticipated economic empowerment for women.

A report by UN Women also suggested women are less likely than men to have access to financial institutions or have a bank account. In this study, 65 per cent of men report having an account at a formal financial institution, only 58 per cent of women do worldwide and the fact that women entrepreneurs face more challenges when starting and running a business as opposed to the main counterparts. With women earning less, the likelihood of decision-making within the household on the “internal”



**EMILLY OWITI**

**Data driven interventions are key to crafting solutions**

household budget is minimal.

In the just concluded Women Economic Forum organized by CRAWN Trust in partnership with the University of Nairobi Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Hub, the discussions pointed to improved deliberate opportunities at the workplace for women to participate in technology. Although organisations such as Huawei, Google and Safaricom making intentional decisions to open the tech-space for women, statistics still indicate a grim situation where the digital divide remains gendered; women and girls still experience less access to technology, especially those in the rural areas.

Data driven interventions are key to crafting solutions that will ensure women's economic empowerment. With the support of Bill and Melinda Gates the University of Nairobi WEE Hub has embarked on rigorous, cutting-edge research that is already informing policy. The findings also help identify what works for WEE initiatives. Such interventions must have a critical focus on affirmative action initiatives such as funds and how they ensure women's economic empowerment, childcare services, which is a critical area to the success of women's enterprises, women's business incubation and women's self-mobilisation for their economic empowerment. Women should be able to hold each other's hands and grow without over-relying on initiatives by others and hence the need to support and build the capacity of women from all spheres of life to be able to build and nurture such initiatives.

For women in Kenya to be empowered, they must be able to participate equally in decision making, have access to and control of the productive resources, their livelihoods must be protected, they must access decent work and have control over their own time, lives and bodies; and increased voice, agency and meaningful participation in economic decision. The government's support is critical in the implementation of the policies and guidelines already set and the constitutional provisions that enhance the process of realisation of WEE in Kenya.

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