# Policy brief: promoting women's economic empowerment to County Governments to do more

This policy brief is an extract from a broad report that sought to examine the policy and legal frameworks that are relevant to women's economic empowerment (WEE) at national and county government levels through identifying opportunities, gaps and constraints within the enabling environment for growth and prosperity of women entrepreneurship.

The study found that nationally, a robust policy and legislative framework for women's economic empowerment exists as evidenced by recent policy evolutions such as: the Constitution of Kenya, introduction of complementary legislations such as the Matrimonial Property Act, the Marriage Act, the Land Act, the Land Registration Act, as well as the implementation of various catalytic Funds and programmes such as Uwezo Fund, Women Enterprise Fund (WEF), Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) and Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) initiative.

**Despite policies & legislative frameworks, challenges to women's economic empowerment still abound**

Nonetheless, despite the existence of these policy and legislative frameworks, several challenges to women's economic empowerment still abound. These include: the non-implementation of the 2/3 Gender Principle within national and county level elective and appointive institutions; and the lack of appropriate policy frameworks to support women's economic empowerment within County Governments (in spite of the various programmes currently being implemented by this level of Government); and limited programming and implementation capacity of County governments.

### Policy and institutional architecture for WEE at county level

County Governments provide broad recognition and commitment to women's economic empowerment and enterprise development as is recognised in key County Government documents. Specifically, County Integrated Development Plans reviewed from Kitui, Marsabit and Baringo give recognition to women's economic empowerment. Specific Annual Development Plans of these counties also give recognition to the women's economic empowerment and enterprise development themes. However, the three counties have no specific policy, legislative or strategic directives on women's economic empowerment specifically. The counties note that their interventions are anchored to national and global level policy and legislative provisions, visions and strategy papers such as: Vision 2030, the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO), the Constitution of Kenya and the various provisions (e.g. the 2/3 Gender Rule), various Acts of Parliament e.g. the Devolved Government Act, Public Finance Management Act etc. There are also significant legislative considerations for women's economic empowerment and enterprise development currently underway. For instance, the Baringo County Assembly is currently debating the Baringo Women's Economic Empowerment Bill.

### County government programmes and initiatives for women's economic empowerment

Despite lacking specific policy, strategy and legislative directions on women's economic empowerment and enterprise development, the counties are implementing a number of key programmatic interventions on women's economic empowerment and enterprise development. These include:

i. Establishment of Loan Scheme Fund that goes towards small and medium-sized enterprise development in Baringo County. Through the programme, women in business have undergone trainings on entrepreneurial skills and those in groups are able to access up to Kshs 100,000;
ii. Energy saving program where women receive the energy saving *jikos* (Swahili word for cookstoves) to save on use of fuel and deforestation effects in Baringo County. This contributes to reviving home economics where women no longer have to worry for search of firewood and instead save time to participate in businesses and other productive activities that may result in earned incomes;
iii. Marsabit County Enterprise Fund that targets women and youth as main beneficiaries. A series of capacity building trainings on entrepreneurial skills had been carried out in 18 out of 20 wards to sensitize women and youth on the need to apply for the funds and venture in businesses;
iv. Marsabit County has entered in Public Private Partnerships with USAID, UNDP, PACIDA and banking institutions like Equity Bank, KCB, Cooperative Bank, Family Bank to build capacities of women and youth particularly with business management skills, mobile banking and value addition initiatives aimed at empowering particularly the women and youth in businesses;
v. Exposing women entrepreneurs to opportunities: for example, through participation in trade fairs such as the Kampala East Africa Nguvu Kazi Exhibitions.

## Implications and recommendations

### Improve county planning by integrating gender

Almost all of the counties failed to integrate gender equality in their first County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP). The CIDP is a critical document that informs the counties' budgets based on the annual development objectives and priorities. Consideration of gender in the CIDP and other relevant documents like sector plans results in counties also developing annual budgets that are gender responsive, thereby increasing opportunities to achieve gender equality. With the first generation of the CIDP coming to an end, counties must consider gender equality especially in relation to economic empowerment of women in the subsequent CIDPs. They should develop programmes that have clear goals and objectives, an implementation plan with clear outcomes, monitoring and evaluation that is backed with gender disaggregated data and clear reporting mechanisms.

### Improve coordination

Catalytic funds entirely fail to recognize the county governments and their structures. They make no provisions for intergovernmental coordination and also lack any linkage to county planning structures. The existence of the various national initiatives such as WEF, YEDF and Uwezo Fund are good and commendable measures towards enhancing economic opportunities for women entrepreneurs. However, various operational and coordination challenges at county and national levels are likely to prevent these funds from effectively contributing to women's economic empowerment. These challenges include: lack of transportation and facilitation for loan officers at county level, a lack of synergy in coordinating capacity enhancement efforts by the various affirmative action (National and County Government) and private sector initiatives targeting women entrepreneurs. A tri-partite coordinating mechanism between national and county governments on one hand and the private sector on the other hand should be constituted at county levels to address capacity building strategies, and share information which would greatly enhance effectiveness of the various mechanisms currently instituted for women's economic empowerment.

For holistic and successful implementation of WEE programmes, the County Governments should establish inter-departmental coordination mechanisms for coordinating planning, implementation and monitoring effectiveness of government programmes and for policy.

### Develop and strengthen County institutional and technical capacity in WEE

A major challenge faced by County Governments in promoting women's economic empowerment is their limited capacity with relation to research and development, standardization, enterprise development skills, access to vital statistics, and ability to deliver targeted business trainings. To fill these gaps, it would be important that some of the national institutions with mandates in promoting business and entrepreneurship have

**Develop tools and mechanisms that ensure effective participation and engagement of women**

Department of Finance and Economic Planning presents the CIDP process and budgeting cycle in Narok County. *(Photo: Nguzo Africa)*

their functions administratively decentralised (perhaps through de-concentration) to support County Governments with these capabilities. Such institutions include Kenya Institute for Research and Development, Kenya Bureau of Standards, Kenya Institute for Business Training, Small and Micro Enterprise Authority, and Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.

### County governments need to improve targeting within current programmes

Although it is commendable that County Governments are implementing various programmes that empower women and women entrepreneurs, the targeting and selection of beneficiaries for current initiatives is somewhat haphazard. Moreover, the assumption that women are major beneficiaries in projects such as construction of market stalls is serious invalid. Increasing efficiencies and data on specific target women and women entrepreneurs would enable County Governments effectively redirect scarce resources to those who most need the support in addition to allowing them the capability to be able to capture, document and report upon the transformative impacts of these initiatives on women entrepreneurs.

To improve targeting of programmes, the County Governments should facilitate modalities and platforms for women participation and access to information, especially in county budget processes and in development and review of County Integrated Development Plans.

### Enshrine current programmes within policies and strategies to improve sustainability

With political considerations being a crucial factor in establishment and rollout of current county programmes and devoid of some enabling legislative and institutional frameworks to promote women's economic empowerment within counties, there is a real risk that current promising initiatives may be lost during electoral cycles. There is therefore need for the County Governments to work at enshrining current initiatives in county legislation, policies etc. With this inclusion, promising programmes and interventions are likely to survive volatile electoral cycles. Moreover, technocrats who work with County Government departments may use this grounding in policy to influence elected leaders to uphold such programmatic interventions.

### County governments need to improve access to information

County Governments should adopt an open governance policy especially through proactive disclosure of information to enhance meaningful participation. This should promote sharing of information through use of accessible channels of communication such as county websites, transparency boards, bulk Short Message Service (SMS), local newsletters, local or community radio, television, barazas and any other media. County Governments should provide timely information and sufficient notice for forthcoming meetings; and provide information in formats that are accessible to a wide group of people including persons with disabilities. This includes the translation of information to local language where necessary for wider reach. Most importantly, counties should develop tools and mechanisms that ensure effective participation and engagement of women. Such a strategy can be employed to some of the women groups currently targeted under the various women's economic empowerment programmes and initiatives being implemented by the County Governments.

**Increasing data on women entrepreneurs enables effective redirection of resources**

### County governments need to develop gender-responsive budgets

Gender neutrality of budgets does not imply that budgets will not have significantly different impacts on women and men of different economic/social groups. A gender-neutral approach means ignoring the gender impact of policy because it does not consider the different positions women and men occupy in the economy and in society. Gender-sensitive budgets seek to reduce gender gaps and inequalities. They are intended to break down, or disaggregate, the Government's entire budget according to its impact on different groups of women and men with cognisance being taken of the society's underpinning gender relations, roles and opportunities to access and control resources. Gender-sensitive budgets are therefore fundamentally about mainstreaming gender issues and ensuring that these issues are integrated into all national and county policies, plans and programmes rather than regarding women as a special "interest group" to be catered for separately.

In as far as the approach to budgets is concerned; gender-responsive budgets should not only be factored in each sector, but must also be factored in the initial design of development projects and plans, such as the County Integrated Development Plans, Annual Development Plans and sector strategy documents, by specifying the needs of men and women at the onset. This will involve investment in a rigorous analysis of the gender dynamics and allocation of funds accordingly.

### Counties should empower women beyond providing financial support

Current women's economic empowerment efforts have extensively focused on providing financial facilities to women. Other ways should include providing more than just credit facilities to women. Women in small and medium-sized enterprises should benefit through innovative financial approaches that include packages offering them health insurance or weather insurance in the cases where they practice farming. Certainly, access to credit should be complemented by other initiatives that address gender dynamics within the household. These could involve initiatives that increase control of resources, as well as those that enhance the strategic choices available to women.

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