

POLICY BRIEF

Introduction

This document summarizes the development and first use of the inaugural measure of women’s empowerment in Kenya – the Women’s Empowerment Index (WEI). Developing the (WEI) represents a major milestone in the country’s evidence-based policymaking and sets a baseline for monitoring the government’s progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) on achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

The Kenya Women’s Empowerment Index draws on important legislative and policy documents at the national and international level, is based on in-depth literature review and empirical analysis, and is contextualized through extensive consultations with numerous stakeholders in the country. Empirical analysis was carried out using the 2014 Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS)¹ and, as such, provides a baseline for the first comprehensive and systematic measure of women’s empowerment in Kenya. The analysis was conducted separately for *women in union* (married women and women residing with a partner), and for *women not in union* (single women, widows, divorcees, and separated women).

This popular version of Kenya’s Women’s Empowerment Index summarizes the results of the first study for women’s empowerment at the national level, based on place of residence (rural/urban), educational attainment of household head, wealth quintile, and other individual characteristics of women.

Women’s empowerment – role and place in international and regional legal instruments

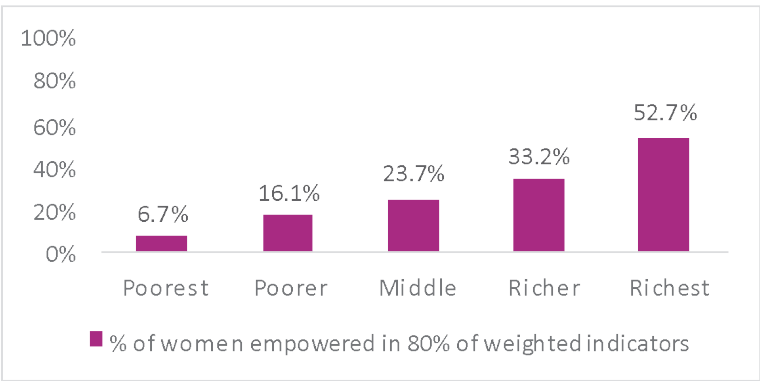
The concept of women’s empowerment gained momentum in the mid-1970s with the adoption of resolution 31/136 of the United Nations (UN) Decade for Women. The document called upon Governments to ensure equal and effective participation of women in political, economic, and cultural life.



¹ KDHS (2014) surveyed 14,371 women aged 15-49 years of which 8,857 were *women in union*, and 5,514 *women not in union*.

Women’s empowerment in Kenya: household wealth. Women’s empowerment in Kenya is associated with household wealth. While only six percent of women in the poorest quintile are empowered, this figure reaches 24 percent for women in the middle wealth quintile, while in the richest quintile more than half of women (53 percent) are empowered.

Figure 7 Incidence of women’s empowerment by wealth quintiles, 2014



Source: KDHS 2014

Recommendations

Given the overall low level of women’s empowerment in Kenya, efforts should be made to ensure that the 71 percent of women identified as disempowered are effectively empowered.

Recommendations for an improved WEI measure through improved data availability, quality and representativeness include: 1) Changing the KDHS sampling methodology to allow measuring women’s empowerment at the county level; 2) Expanding the range of indicators measured for different groups to reflect lifecycle needs and rights of women, and measure empowerment comprehensively for all; and 3) The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) involves all relevant stakeholders and partners in the process of measuring women’s empowerment, from measure design to results validation, including women themselves.

On policy and advocacy, the study recommends: 1) Improving advocacy on the use of the Women’s Empowerment Index to inform laws, policies and resources allocation towards gender equality and women’s empowerment; 2) Enhancing coordination of all relevant stakeholders and partners to increase demand and utilization of gender statistics including the WEI; and 3) Strengthening timeliness of production of WEI figures and its integration in reporting for achievements toward objectives and targets of Vision 2030, BPfA, CEDAW, and SDGs.

Resolution 31/136 also paved the way for the adoption of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA).

In 2000, the UN Millennium Declaration set the basis for incorporating women's empowerment in the global development agenda. Women's empowerment is further echoed by its inclusion in the Maputo Protocol², Africa Agenda 2063, and the Sustainable Development Agenda (Agenda 2030) adopted in 2015. The disproportionate incidences of poverty, illiteracy and disease faced by women are also recognized under the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, Aspiration 6, whose achievement is set out in the Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment (GEWE) for 2018-2028.

Kenyan context: laws and policies, progress, and setbacks

According to the 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census (KPHC), women comprise 50.5 percent of the country's population. Their empowerment is critical to realizing the country's sustainable development given the demonstrated role of women's empowerment in economic development, poverty reduction and social transformation.

Women's empowerment holds an important place in the Kenyan government's agenda. A signatory to the above international declarations, Kenya has further provided a legal framework to safeguard women's empowerment. It is embedded in the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and outlined under Article 21 on the implementation of rights and fundamental freedoms, Article 27 on equality and freedom from discrimination, and Article 81 and Article 100, which regulate women's representation in the legislature. Other laws include the Sexual Offences Act (2006), Prohibition of FGM Act (2011), Matrimonial Property Act (2013), and Prevention against Domestic Violence Act (2015).

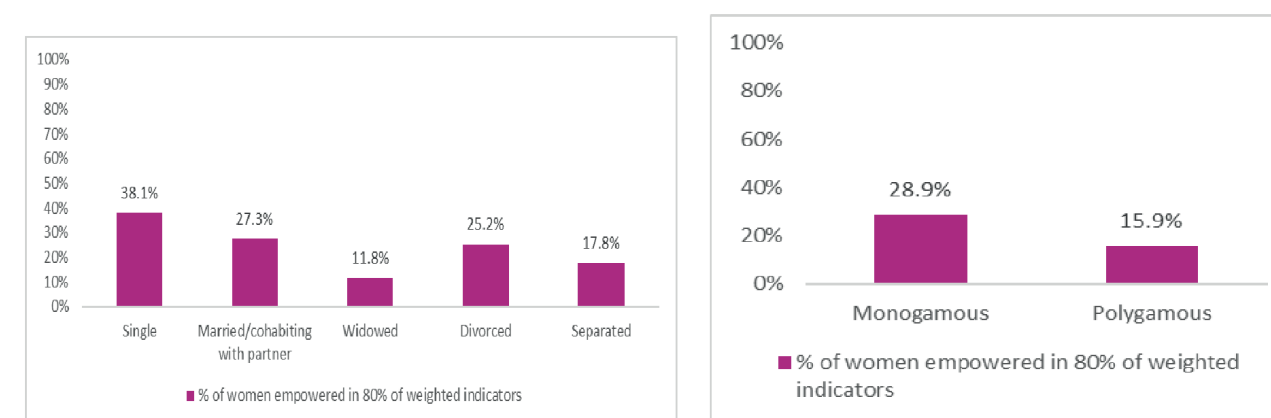
Policy frameworks, strategies and initiatives to promote gender equality and women's empowerment include Vision 2030, which is implemented through five-year medium-term plans (MTPs), the Women Economic Empowerment Strategy (2020-2024), and affirmation action funds such as the Women Enterprise Fund (WEF), Uwezo Fund, and Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO).

However, implementation and enforcement of these initiatives has not closed the gender gap or substantially enhanced women's empowerment. The Global Gender Gap Report 2020 ranks Kenya at position 109 out of the 153 countries rated on progress towards gender parity in 2019, well behind its peers in the region Rwanda (ranked 9), Uganda (ranked 65), Tanzania (ranked 68) and Ethiopia (ranked 82). Statistics demonstrate several challenges in achieving women's empowerment in Kenya.

² The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, better known as the Maputo Protocol, is an international human rights instrument established by the African Union that went into effect in 2005. African countries committed to guarantee women comprehensive rights to participate in the economic, social, and political spheres equal to men; enhance their autonomy to make decisions about their reproductive health and end female genital mutilation.

Women's empowerment in Kenya: marital status and type of marriage. Divorced, separated, and widowed women are less likely to be empowered than the other groups. The rate of empowerment is highest among single women, 38 percent, followed by married women and those cohabiting with partners (27 percent), and the lowest among separated and widowed women (18 percent and 12 percent respectively). The type of marriage is also relevant; significantly fewer women in polygamous marriage are empowered (16 percent) compared to women in monogamous marriage (29 percent).

Figure 4 Incidence of women's empowerment by marital status 2014, Figure 3 Incidence of women's empowerment by type of marriage, 2014



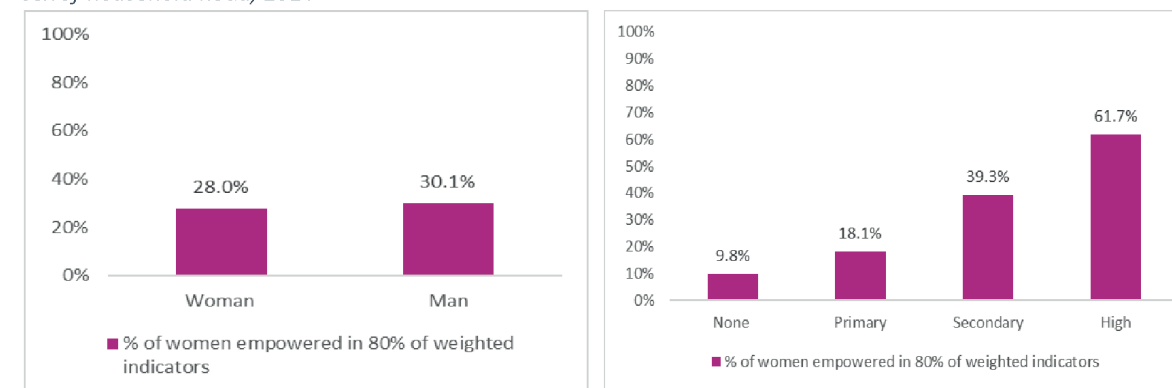
Source: KDHS 2014

Source: KDHS 2014

Women's empowerment in Kenya: sex and educational attainment of household head. Slightly more than 30 percent of women in men-headed households are empowered compared to 29 percent of women in women-headed households. The empowerment rate increases for each subsequent educational level of the household head. Incidence of women's empowerment among households the head of which has completed no education is 10 percent compared to 62 percent among households the head of which has completed high education.

Figure 6 Incidence of women's empowerment by sex of household head, 2014

Figure 5 Incidence of women's empowerment by educational attainment of household head, 2014



Source: KDHS 2014

Source: KDHS 2014

Designing and developing Kenya's Women's Empowerment Index (WEI)

Constructing the Women's Empowerment Index for Kenya followed several methodological steps. The first step comprised a comprehensive literature review to take stock of existing methodologies and practices for measuring women's empowerment with a special focus on developing countries.

Kabeer's (1999) conceptual framework - consisting of three interrelated dimensions: resources, agency and achievement - was then used in consultations with a wide range of stakeholders⁴,

as the basis for selecting parameters that best capture the ability of women in Kenya to exercise their choice. Selection of these parameters is also embedded in international and national policy and legal instruments.

Econometric analysis – Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis – was run on 2014 KDHS data to identify domains of women's empowerment and the constituting factors of each. For *women in union*, the econometric model identified five domains of empowerment:

Attitudes toward wife-beating; human and social resources; household decision-making; control over sexual relations; and economic domain. For *women not in union*, the model selected three domains of empowerment: economic, human and social resources, and attitudes toward wife-beating.

To construct the WEI, each of the domains was assigned equal weights, and the weight of the domain was then distributed equally to each of its constituting indicators. A woman is considered empowered if she is empowered in at least 80 percent of the total weighted indicators of empowerment.

The **economic domain** is comprised of paid employment and educational attainment for both *women in union* and *women not in union*. A woman is considered empowered if she is employed continuously throughout the year and paid, while women who are in seasonal or occasional employment or who are not paid (regardless of employment type), are considered disempowered. A woman is considered empowered in educational attainment if she has completed secondary or higher education, and disempowered if she has not completed any formal education or less than secondary education.

For both groups of women, access to media and attitudes toward FGM constitute the **human and social resources domain**. A woman is considered empowered if she reads a newspaper, listens to the radio, or watches television at least once per week, and if she thinks that FGM should be stopped. For *women in union*, the domain also includes exposure to family planning information and knowledge on modern contraception. A woman is considered empowered if she knows about at least two modern methods of contraception and if she has frequent access to family planning information irrespective of its source⁴.

⁴ Sources include radio, TV, print media, public forums, informational material, through visits by health workers, messages in social media, messages through text, email, political, religious, and community leaders' talks.

For *women not in union*, the domain also includes knowledge about where male or female condoms can be accessed in the community and comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention. A woman is considered empowered if she knows where female or male condoms can be obtained in the community, and disempowered if she does not have this information. A woman is considered empowered in the indicator of comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS if she:

i) has heard about HIV/AIDS, ii) knows that risk of getting infected with HIV can be reduced by not having sex, always using a condom during sex, and having sex with only one partner who has no other partners, iii) refutes three of the most common misconceptions about HIV transmission (that it can be transmitted through witchcraft/supernatural means, from mosquito bites, and by sharing food with people infected with HIV); iv) knows that a healthy looking person can have HIV, and v) she knows that HIV can be transmitted during pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. Women who do not have knowledge in any of the five questions are considered disempowered.

The **household decision-making (familial/interpersonal) domain**, applicable only to *women in union*, consists of the following indicators:

whether the woman decides alone or jointly with partner about large household purchases, own healthcare, visiting family or relatives, and how her husband's/partner's earnings will be spent. Women who participate in each of these decisions – alone or jointly with their husband/partner – are considered empowered, while women who do not participate in decision-making disempowered.

The **control over sexual relations domain**, applicable only to *women in union*, consists of the following indicators: woman can refuse to have sex with her partner/husband, woman can ask her husband/partner to use a condom during sexual intercourse, and woman has knowledge about where male or female condoms can be accessed in the community. Women who score affirmative in each of these questions are considered empowered, while women who cannot refuse to have sex with husband/partner, women who cannot ask their husband/partner to use a condom during sexual intercourse, and women who do not know where male or female condoms can be accessed in the community are considered disempowered. Five indicators measure empowerment in the **domain attitudes toward gender-based violence (GBV)**, that is, whether the woman (*in union* or *not in union*) justifies wife-beating in the following situations: i) if the wife goes out without telling her husband, ii) if the wife neglects the children, iii) if the wife argues with her husband, iv) if the wife refuses to have sex with her husband, and v) if the wife burns the food. Women who think that wife-beating is justified in any of the situations are considered disempowered, while those who believe that it is not justified are considered empowered.

Limitations

While the WEI represents a major landmark in Kenya's evidence-based policymaking and sets the baseline for monitoring the country's progress in achieving SDG5, several limitations related to data availability were faced in its construction.

Even though the KDHS 2014 was the most comprehensive dataset available for the purpose of this study, the analysis and definition of the Index, and therefore emerging policy recommendations, were constrained by the KDHS sampling methodology and questionnaire design. For instance, at the subnational level, the data collected only represents urban and rural areas and regions, even though the latter is not administratively relevant. Therefore, figures from the Index cannot be used for evidence-based policymaking and advocacy at the county level.

Available data also did not make it possible to exhaustively measure the decision-making power of women not in union and young women aged 15-24 years. This is because the KDHS questions on decision-making relate to women in union only by focusing on husband/partner, even though other parties including parents, siblings, in-laws, and other community members often greatly impact women's decisions. For all groups of women, decision-making on aspects such as HIV testing and lives of children in the present and the future, etc., are not included in KDHS even though they are important.

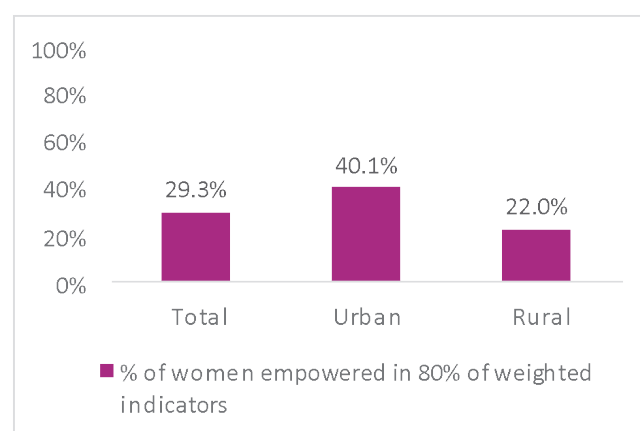
KDHS does not capture several domains of women's empowerment including psychological factors such as emotional stress and perceived self-confidence, legal knowledge, and participation, all of which are crucial for women's empowerment.

For the intrinsic agency domain, KDHS lacked data on perceptions and attitudes of women's family and community about women's roles, characteristics of an empowered person, the empowerment of other family members (spouses, parents, siblings and children) and participation. The literature found all these factors to be associated with women's empowerment.

Main Findings

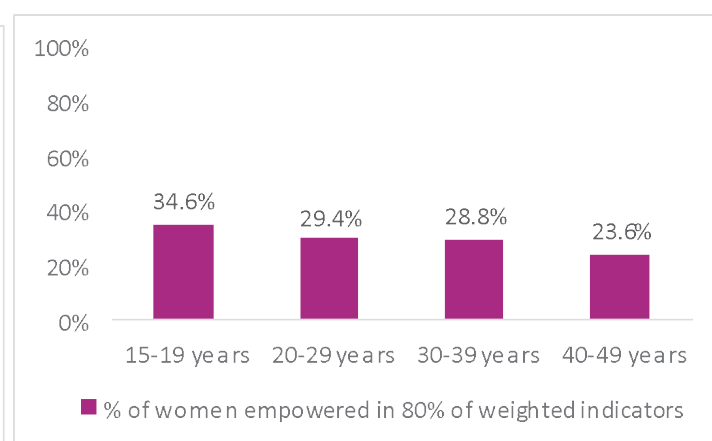
Women's empowerment in Kenya: age and area of residence. Only 29 percent of women in Kenya between the ages of 15 and 49 years are empowered. The empowerment rate of women in urban areas is 40 percent, nearly double the rate of empowered women in rural areas at 22 percent. The highest rate of empowerment is observed among women aged 15-19 years (35 percent) and the lowest among women aged 40-49 years (24 percent).

Figure 2 Incidence of women's empowerment, national level 2014 and by area of residence, 2014



Source: KDHS 2014

Figure 1 Incidence of women's empowerment by age group, 2014



Source: KDHS 2014

Not least of these is the absence of evidence and measures on empowerment, which has made it difficult to monitor progress.

This initiative aims to fill this data and knowledge gap by conceptualizing and developing a systematic methodology for measuring women's empowerment tailored to the Kenyan context.

The design, development and use of an index – a multidimensional, integrated assessment that provides one statistical measure – rather than applying various indicators separately, is imperative to adequately capture the complex phenomenon that is women's empowerment.

The Index as an inaugural tool to measure and plan for enhancing women's empowerment in Kenya

The call to "leave no one behind" is a key principle under the SDGs framework – it offers a blueprint for a better and sustainable future for everyone by 2030. That said, how can we track what we do not measure? The importance of systematically measuring women's empowerment thus cannot be overstated.

Over the past three decades, academia and other organizations globally have invested resources to define and measure women's empowerment. To date, even though there is no common definition or measure of women's empowerment, it is widely agreed that empowerment involves a 'process of change' which results from one's 'ability to make choices'³.

This measure of the empowerment of women in Kenya – the Women's Empowerment Index – thus not only offers a valuable tool for evidence-based policymaking, but also sets a baseline for monitoring the country's progress in achieving SDG5 on gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. The Index will also facilitate action towards better policies and increased financing to accelerate gender equality and women's empowerment.

Measuring women's empowerment is important in realizing their full potential. Both policy and practice demonstrate that ensuring that women and girls have equal access to education, healthcare, and decent work, benefits society at large. This ripple effect is also evident when women and girls are recognized for unpaid and domestic care work, represented in political processes, and participate meaningfully in decision-making at all levels and across all domains of life.

³ Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on measurement of women's empowerment, Naila Kabeer, 1999. ⁴ The State Department for Gender National Gender and Equality Commission, the Council of Governors, international development partners, and other state and non-state actors.