

## GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GESI)

### Country-level Assessment: Kenya

#### RISA Programme Overview

Research and Innovation Systems for Africa (RISA) is a programme funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) that aims to strengthen research and innovation (R&I) ecosystems in Africa. The RISA Fund is jointly funded by two separate FCDO programmes – Strengthening Research Institutions in Africa (SRIA) for research ecosystems and Africa Technology and Innovation Partnerships (ATIP) for innovation ecosystems. The intended impact of the RISA Fund is to strengthen national research and innovation systems in target countries; this in turn will contribute to economic growth and development. The RISA fund has three core objectives, 1) to support research organisations to have the capabilities necessary to produce relevant, high-quality research, 2) to create an enabling environment for researchers and research organisations, and 3) to strengthen the enablers for scaling of new and emerging technologies with high potential for poverty reduction and inclusive growth.

#### Addressing GESI in R&I Ecosystems

In the interest of ensuring that R&I ecosystems are intentionally gender equitable and socially inclusive, the RISA programme is committed to understanding and addressing the various GESI gaps and barriers that arise within such ecosystems. Drawing on the International Development Innovation Alliance (IDIA) framework, which articulates nine key Ecosystem Strengthening Goals, ‘equitable and inclusive participation’ (Goal #7) has been identified as a critical element to be addressed in the process of strengthening R&I ecosystems.<sup>1</sup> This goal explicitly recognizes the existing inequities and patterns of social exclusion that unfold in R&I spaces, and emphasizes the need for being more intentional about assessing how innovation is applied, in order to ensure that the inequalities of established systems are not reproduced.

Some of the key GESI challenges in research and innovation include:

- Underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups within R&I talent pools
- Ecosystem strengthening efforts that often do not address, and can even exacerbate, existing inequalities and patterns of social exclusion
- Lack of gender equality and social inclusion in research

The GESI country-level assessments undertaken for priority countries during the programme inception period (Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa) will serve to illustrate some of the key GESI gaps and barriers within each country’s unique context, as well as to illuminate the broader, overarching challenges that may also cut across countries. Country-level GESI assessments are informed by existing research and evidence, as well as key stakeholder interviews with different actors from typically excluded groups within the R&I space for each country. These assessments will help guide RISA in its efforts to provide targeted GESI support to country-level projects funded by RISA as well as shape and inform a high-level GESI strategy for the RISA programme, with the intention of strengthening the broader R&I ecosystems within each country in line with the nine Ecosystem Strengthening Goals.

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<sup>1</sup> Strengthening Innovation Ecosystems; IDIA, November 2021.

## Country Overview

Bordered by South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda, Kenya is a lower-middle income country with high levels of poverty and a large rural population.<sup>2</sup> Over the last 10 years, the country has made significant political and economic reforms that have contributed to sustained economic growth, social development, and improvements in political stability. Despite this progress, key development challenges persist; these include poverty, inequality, transparency and accountability, climate change, private sector investment that remains weak and the economy's vulnerability to internal and external shocks.<sup>3</sup>

Kenya is a country of over 54 million people, mostly living in rural communities.<sup>4</sup> It has the largest, most diversified economy and the second largest population in East Africa.<sup>5</sup> The country has well-developed national strategies on science, technology and innovation (STI), but only a draft STI policy and no dedicated research policy.<sup>6</sup> Its institutional framework for research relies on the role of the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), the National Research Fund (NRF) and the Kenya Innovation Agency (KENIA). Kenya was ranked 85<sup>th</sup> out of 132 economies in the Global Innovation Index (GII) for 2021, a slight decline from their ranking of 86<sup>th</sup> in 2020 but still a significant improvement from 2019 when the country was ranked 77<sup>th</sup>.<sup>7</sup> Among the 27 economies in sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya ranks 3<sup>rd</sup>. Kenya attained positive scores in four out of the seven GI pillars: institutions, market sophistication, business sophistication and knowledge & technology outputs, which are above average for the lower middle-income group of countries captured in the index. Conversely, Kenya scores below average for its income group in three pillars: human capital and research, infrastructure and creative outputs, with its weakest performance in infrastructure.<sup>8</sup>

Kenya's 'Big Four Agenda' is President Uhuru Kenyatta's legacy project, which he has committed to execute by the end of his presidential term in 2022.<sup>9</sup> The four pillars of the agenda are aligned with the country's high-level Vision 2030 strategy, and include food security, affordable housing, universal health care, and manufacturing and job creation. The agenda is meant to ensure that ordinary Kenyans are employed or have a reliable source of income, own a home, have adequate food and are able to access universal health care.

## Policy, Strategy and Institutional Environment in Relation to GESI

**2010 Constitution:** Kenya's 2010 Constitution prohibits gender discrimination in relation to land policy, establishes the requirement for political parties to respect and promote human rights as well as gender equality, and sets mandatory representation targets for women in key leadership roles and organs within government structures (including country governments).<sup>10</sup> It also explicitly bars discrimination against any person on any grounds, whether direct or indirect, including on the grounds of race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, age, disability, religion, culture or language, among others (though it does not specify 'gender' or differentiate between sex and gender in any way).

The Constitution also directly acknowledges and affirms the rights of children, people with disabilities (PWD), youth, the elderly and 'minorities / marginalized groups', guaranteeing these groups specific rights and freedoms related to dignity, representation, access and participation across different areas of public and private life. PWD are uniquely targeted by the State 'to ensure the progressive implementation of the principle that at least five percent of the members of the public in elective and appointive bodies are

<sup>2</sup> Assessing the needs of the research system in Kenya: Report for the SRIA programme; UK Department for International Development, October 2019.

<sup>3</sup> [Country Overview: Kenya](#); World Bank, September 2021.

<sup>4</sup> [UN Data Bank, Kenya](#); UN, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> [Country Profile: Kenya](#); USAID, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Assessing the needs of the research system in Kenya: Report for the SRIA programme; UK Department for International Development, October 2019.

<sup>7</sup> [Global Innovation Index, Kenya](#); World Intellectual Property Organization, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> [How the Government can Achieve the Big Four Agenda on Housing](#); KIPPRA, January 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Constitution of Kenya; Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2010.

persons with disabilities'. 'Minorities / marginalized groups' are not defined or articulated beyond this generalized reference term and the Constitution makes no reference to LGBTQ+ individuals or their rights.

**Vision 2030:** Kenya's high-level national development strategy, Vision 2030, addresses the importance of gender equality and inclusion within the social pillar of the Vision.<sup>11</sup> Specific strategies involve increasing the participation of women in all social, economic and political decision-making processes, improving access to all disadvantaged groups in different areas of life (including business opportunities, health, education, housing and justice), minimizing vulnerabilities by prohibiting harmful practices (such as child marriage and female genital mutilation), and scaling up training resources for people with disabilities and special needs. Reducing social inequalities overall is seen as a cross-cutting priority within Vision 2030.

**Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs & Special Programmes:** In September 2021, the State Department for Development of Arid and Semi-Arid Lands and the State Department for Social Protection, Pensions and Senior Citizens were transferred to the Ministry of Public Service & Gender.<sup>12</sup> The Ministry of Public Service & Gender was then reconstituted and renamed as the Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs & Special Programmes, whose mandate is to provide policy direction and management of human resources within public service, promote gender equity and equality and the empowerment of women, enhance the capacity of and opportunities for the vulnerable, and improve the socio-economic development of arid and semi-arid lands. Within the Ministry are several State Departments, including the State Department for Gender and the State Department for Youth Affairs.

**Kenya National Human Rights and Equality Commission (KNCHR):** Kenya's 2010 Constitution establishes the Kenya National Human Rights and Equality Commission, whose function is to promote the protection and observance of human rights in public and private institutions, including the promotion of gender equality and equity more broadly as well as to coordinate and facilitate gender mainstreaming in national development.<sup>13</sup> The Commission is responsible for two broad mandates, 1) to act as a watch-dog over the Government in the area of human rights, 2) to provide key leadership in moving the country towards a human rights state. The main goal of KNCHR is to investigate and provide redress for human rights violations, research and monitor the compliance of human rights norms and standards, conduct human rights education, facilitate training, campaigns and advocacy on human rights, and collaborate with other stakeholders in Kenya.

**National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC):** The Constitution of 2010 also establishes the National Gender and Equality Commission, whose mandate is to promote and ensure gender equality, principles of equality and non-discrimination for all persons in Kenya, as articulated in the Constitution.<sup>14</sup> The NGEC has a particular focus on key Special Interest Groups (SIGs), which include women, persons with disability, children, youth, older members of society, minority and marginalised groups.

**National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC):** While Kenya's Constitution guarantees non-discrimination on any grounds, LGBTQ+ rights in Kenya are not well protected. NGLHRC is a non-state human rights organization founded by members of civil society to encourage diversity and promote public dialogue on sex, sexuality, gender and non-conformity.<sup>15</sup> The Commission has three core objectives, 1) to achieve policy and legal reforms towards equality and full inclusion of sexual and gender minorities through strategic litigation, legal clinics, research and documentation and urgent action mission, 2) to promote freedom of expression and association by building LGBTIQ movement and culture in Kenya through activities and calendar events, and 3) to encourage political and civic participation of

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<sup>11</sup> [Vision 2030](#); Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> [Background](#); Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs & Special Programmes, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> [Constitution of Kenya, 2010](#); Government of Kenya.

<sup>14</sup> [Mandate and Functions of the Commission](#); National Gender and Equality Commission, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> [National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission of Kenya](#), 2021.

LGBTIQ individuals and communities in Kenya through dialogue, lobbying, civic education and technical support to LGBTIQ political aspirants.

**National Policy on Gender and Development 2019:** The objective of this policy is to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in national development in order to enhance participation of women, men, boys, girls, and vulnerable and marginalized groups to achieve sustainable development.<sup>16</sup> The policy also sets legislative and administrative measures to address existing barriers to the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment in Kenya. As part of efforts to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are cross-cutting and integrated into sectoral policies, planning and programmes, the policy identifies key thematic areas for intervention. These include labour and employment, education, health, land, housing, agriculture, environment and natural resources, peace and security, governance, power and decision making, information and communications technologies, respect for human rights, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), the girl child and boy child, intersectional discrimination, the media and access to justice.

**Persons With Disabilities Act 2003 (revised 2012):** Kenya's People with Disabilities (PWD) Act establishes a National Council for Persons with Disabilities, whose primary function is to work to achieve equal opportunities for persons with disabilities by ensuring that they obtain education and employment, participate fully in sporting, recreational and cultural activities and are afforded full access to community and social services. The Council also has the power to legally enforce accessibility requirements for any services or amenities that may be structurally inaccessible to PWD.

**Kenya Youth Development Policy, 2018:** "Youth" in Kenya are formally defined as individuals between the ages of 18 to 34 years, and the country's young people are seen as a critical national resource for faster economic development.<sup>17</sup> The policy outlines the various challenges youth face in the Kenyan context, including unemployment and underemployment, the inability of the economy to keep pace with population growth and inadequate job opportunities for youth, health challenges, education dropout rates, teen pregnancy, limited participation in political and economic spheres, housing issues, violence and abuse, and limited access to information and communication technology (ICT). The core mission of the policy is to effectively guide National and County governments as well as all other key stakeholders that are involved in the planning and implementation of interventions and programmes targeting youth in Kenya. In terms of obligations and responsibilities related to advancing the policy, the State commits to acting as the lead agent in supporting policy implementation, including the creation of sufficient employment opportunities for youth, education and training, setting up health facilities, providing quality education and skills development, and creating mechanisms and opportunities for the involvement of youth in internship roles and volunteerism.

**Penal Code 1930 (revised 2012):** Kenya's Penal Code still criminalizes same sex acts between men in Section 162, 163 and 165, which outlaw 'unnatural offences', 'attempt to commit unnatural offences', and 'indecent practices between males', respectively.<sup>18</sup> These colonial-era laws were challenged in April 2016 when a decriminalization suit contesting their constitutional validity was filed by the NGLHRC.<sup>19</sup> The suit was then formally supported by the KNCHR in July 2017, but a decision by the High Court in May 2019 dismissed the joint petition and the laws remain in effect today.

## The Gender Context of Kenya

Despite the country's fairly progressive policy and legal frameworks as well as governance structures, gender inequality, discrimination and violence continue in Kenya. Kenya's patriarchal social order is supported by persistent, discriminatory gender norms as well as statutory, religious and customary laws

<sup>16</sup> [National Policy on Gender and Development](#); Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> [Kenya Youth Development Policy](#); Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs, 2018.

<sup>18</sup> Penal Code; Government of the Republic of Kenya, 1930 (revised 2012).

<sup>19</sup> [Litigation: Our Wins](#); National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission of Kenya, 2021.

and practices. The State Department for Gender reports that improvements in laws and policies have not delivered gender equality in practice.<sup>20</sup>

Men participate more in Kenya's labour force, earn more money than women, and have greater opportunities to participate in the formal economy and political sphere.<sup>21</sup> World Bank data indicates that women's labour force participation rate as of 2019 is at 62 percent, compared with 73 percent for men.<sup>22</sup> Women tend to be poorer than men and have less access to the capital and assets they need for livelihood development, despite contributing the bulk of agricultural labour. Women tend to be underrepresented in wage employment (just 37 percent) and overrepresented in vulnerable employment (68 percent compared to 39 percent of men).<sup>23</sup> Women are also underrepresented in most sectors of formal employment requiring higher education or specialized skills, including information and communication (36 percent), financial and insurance activities (39 percent), real estate (23 percent), manufacturing (20 percent), administration and support services (10 percent), and professional, scientific and technical activities (29 percent). Twice as many young women as young men (18 percent and 9 percent, respectively) are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). Women comprise 42 percent of students enrolled in Vocational Education Training (VET). Gender norms play a key role in the fact that women are consistently overrepresented in sectors that promote women's traditional gender roles within society, in particular human health and social work activities (58 percent), as well as work within households providing domestic work services (61 percent).<sup>24</sup> Gender norms also influence women's limited financial agency and decision making power within the household, with men having much greater control over when, how and why money is spent, as well as having greater entitlement and control related to property and assets; stakeholder interviews from Kenya reiterated this as a critical issue for women's participation in the economy.<sup>25</sup>

In the political arena, the country has seen some improvements, though entry into political life remains a significant challenge for women, involving such risks and barriers as GBV and intimidation. Women in governance also face limited opportunities to influence and participate in decision-making spaces, even when they attain elected or appointed office. Women currently comprise only 21 percent of Kenya's parliament.<sup>26</sup> In 2017, the Government of Kenya launched the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Women in Political Leadership to support greater participation of women in elected positions. However, the 'two-thirds' gender rule in the Constitution, which mandates that each gender has at least one-third representation in both appointed and elected positions, has had mixed success, with a significant percentage of women leaders nominated/appointed to fill the gaps in election results and numbers still falling short. Targeted studies on women's political participation in Kenya reveal a diverse range of barriers that women must contend with, including discouragement and lack of support (from men as well as fellow women), competition among women in politics, political violence and propaganda (including threats, intimidation and smear campaigns from political opponents), and financial constraints related to funding effective political campaigns.<sup>27</sup> Further, male activists for gender equality in Kenya report that powerful patriarchal norms that define men as leaders and dominators mean that men in Kenya's government are not comfortable with the idea of being led by women, and male parliamentarians in this context are a core stumbling block to women's greater political participation.<sup>28</sup>

Women and girls continue to face significant risks to their health and safety including teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, child marriage and gender-based violence (GBV), including female genital mutilation (FGM). GBV response and referral mechanisms are not robust and weakened by limited coordination of reporting, low levels of budgetary allocation, poor investigation of GBV crimes, lack of approved county-level gender

<sup>20</sup> [National Policy on Gender and Development](#); Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> [USAID Kenya Final Gender Analysis Report](#); USAID/Banyan Global, March 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Labour force participation rate, female and male (% of female population ages 15+) (national estimate) – Kenya; World Bank Databank, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Women's Empowerment in Kenya; Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, July 2020.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> [An Analysis of Intra-household Spousal Decision-Making Intensities on Agricultural Income Use in Kenya](#); Osanya, J. et al, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> [Women in Politics in Kenya: An Analysis of Participation and Barriers](#); Anyango, B. et al., February 2018.

<sup>28</sup> [Kenya MenEngage Alliance \(KEMEA\) concerned about barriers to women's participation in politics in Kenya](#); Sonke Gender Justice, September 2020.



and GBV policies, poor quality medical services, and low rates of prosecution. This situation undermines GBV survivors' access to care services and justice through formal legal mechanisms, further discouraging reporting of GBV cases. Over 40 percent of women in Kenya experience physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetimes.<sup>29</sup> Further, nearly 23 percent of women aged 20-24 are married before the age of 18, and 21 percent of girls and women aged 15-49 have undergone FGM. The GBV situation in Kenya significantly worsened during the Covid pandemic, similar to most other countries around the world, and the Kenyan government has been accused by human rights groups of failing to institute preventative measures and effectively protect women and girls, particularly in light of the fact that the country has a previous history of heightened incidences of violence against women and girls during crisis.<sup>30</sup>

Unpaid care work (UCW) is a major and persistent barrier for gender equality and women's participation in the economy, both around the world and within Kenya. UCW refers to the often-invisible household, care and domestic work that largely falls on women and girls.<sup>31</sup> It involves all aspects of domestic and care work, including cooking, cleaning, all facets of childcare, fetching water and firewood, and caring for other family members, including the sick and elderly. It is largely invisible, unvalued and unremunerated labour, and has been well documented in terms of the impact it has on perpetuating women's poverty and gender inequality.<sup>32</sup> Before the Covid pandemic, women and girls were already spending 12.5 billion hours globally on unpaid care work every day. This amounts to a contribution of at least \$10.8 trillion annually – three times that of the global tech industry.<sup>33</sup> In Kenya, women spend an average of 11 hours per day on UCW, compared with just 3 hours for men. Due to the gender norms that perpetuate the expectation that women and girls are the ones primarily responsible for all UCW, women provide the majority of UCW in virtually all contexts; however, women and girls living in low-income settings, rural areas, urban informal settlements, and those with low levels of education and household income face an even greater care workload.

While the Covid pandemic has made UCW more visible as an issue of public policy, it has also undeniably widened the economic and gender inequality gap in Kenya and around the world. UCW responsibilities have significantly increased for most households during the pandemic, and women have shouldered the burden of this additional care workload. Despite the amount of time women spend on UCW in Kenya, it is largely overlooked by national and county level social and economic development plans and policies, further compounding the invisible nature of this work and entrenching the harmful gender norms that promote care and domestic work as the primary domain of women and girls.

Although there is near gender parity in primary education, gender gaps persist in educational attainment across regions, including in higher education and especially in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). The Government's roll out of free primary education in 2003 followed by free secondary education in 2008 helped to narrow the gap in participation between boys and girls in Kenya.<sup>34</sup> However, reforms in university education have not made a similar impact. Female students at higher levels of primary struggle to perform as well as boys, thus few qualify to join STEM disciplines within public universities. More men than women are enrolled in Kenya's universities, and this disparity increases at progressively higher levels of education.<sup>35</sup> Gross tertiary enrolment rates for women were at 9.7 percent as of 2017, compared with 13.2 percent for men.<sup>36</sup> Private universities tend to have slightly more female than male students at the undergrad level, but in post-graduate, masters and PhD programs, men again outnumber women. Roughly two-thirds of academic staff in universities are men.

<sup>29</sup> [Kenya: Prevalence Data on Different Forms of Violence Against Women](#); Global Database on Violence Against Women, UN Women, 2022.

<sup>30</sup> ["I Had Nowhere to Go": Violence Against Women and Girls During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Kenya](#); Human Rights Watch, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> [Addressing Unpaid Care and Domestic Work for a Gender-Equal and Inclusive Kenya](#); Care, April 2021.

<sup>32</sup> [Building Back Better for Women and Girls](#); Report of the G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council, 2021.

<sup>33</sup> [Addressing Unpaid Care and Domestic Work for a Gender-Equal and Inclusive Kenya](#); Care, April 2021.

<sup>34</sup> [Education in Kenya](#); Clark, N., World Education News and Reviews, 2015. [Exploring enabling interventions for increasing female students' access and participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines](#); Mbirianjau, L., September 2016.

<sup>35</sup> [State of University Education in Kenya](#); Commission for University Education, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> School enrollment, tertiary, female and male (% gross) – Kenya; World Bank Databank, 2017.

Of course, gender intersects with other variables to compound the marginalization that individual women and girls face. Not all women and girls experience the same disadvantages and marginalization; while gender discrimination and violence can and does impact the lives of women and girls from all walks of life, the nature, frequency and severity of these experiences varies based on other variables of life circumstance and identity, including age, disability, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, religion and culture, among others.

## The Social Inclusion Context of Kenya

Social inclusion is a broad term that can refer to any number of social groups that may experience systematic discrimination and thus exclusion from social, political and economic life.<sup>37</sup> This assessment focuses on how social exclusion creates barriers for individuals to access, participate in and benefit from R&I ecosystems within their country context. Factors such as poverty, rural / urban divides, age, disability and sexual orientation and gender identity play a key role in this regard, diminishing certain groups' and individuals' access to opportunities, resources and support.

Poverty is a primary driver of social exclusion, while social exclusion in turn worsens poverty.<sup>38</sup> Those who are socially excluded are often denied access to resources and opportunities available to others to increase their income and develop their households and communities by their own efforts. While the economy may grow and broader income levels may rise over time, socially excluded people are likely to be left behind, and make up an increasing proportion of those who remain in poverty despite improved overall growth levels. In Kenya, GDP growth has averaged 5.8 percent between 2010 and 2017 annually, alongside rising per capita incomes. As a result of this growth, Kenya was designated a lower-middle-income country in 2014. However, the overwhelming majority of Kenyans, nearly 80 percent, continue to be either income poor or hover near the poverty line.<sup>39</sup> The Covid pandemic had a significant negative impact on Kenya's economic growth, with the country registering negative GDP growth for the year 2020.<sup>40</sup> The 2020 Comprehensive Poverty Report produced by the Kenya Bureau of National Statistics indicates that 53 percent of the country's population are multidimensionally poor.<sup>41</sup> In terms of gender gaps in this regard, more than 65 percent of women are multidimensionally poor, compared with 56 percent of men.

While the scale of urban poverty in Kenya is a pressing issue in need of urgent attention, poverty is even more severe in rural areas, which is home to most of the country's poorest populations.<sup>42</sup> Another aspect of exclusion is disadvantage on the basis of where individuals live, known as 'spatial' exclusion. People who live in rural or remote/isolated areas are often prevented from fully participating in national economic and social life, and faced with the additional constraints of poverty, can be systematically left behind in a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle. Lack of access to electricity and internet connectivity compound the exclusion that poor, rural individuals and communities face, in particular economic exclusion. In Kenya, studies indicate the presence of a significant power imbalance between social and political elites and the general population, creating an additional barrier for excluded individuals to overcome.<sup>43</sup> Politics in Kenya is electorally competitive and largely patronage based, which means that opportunities for voice and for the representation of the interests of the poor and socially excluded are very few.

People with disabilities face a unique form of social exclusion that can be further exacerbated by other intersecting variables such as poverty, gender and geographical location. In everyday life, PWDs face a wide range of discrimination and denial of rights in Kenya.<sup>44</sup> As noted above regarding the policy environment in Kenya, Constitutional provisions and the PWD Act does allow for affirmative action related

<sup>37</sup> [Reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion](#): A DFID policy paper; DFID, 2005.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> [Understanding Poverty in Kenya: A multidimensional analysis](#); Diwakar, V. and Shepherd, A., Chronic Poverty Advisory Network, December 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Annual GDP growth, Kenya; World Bank Databank, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> [Comprehensive Poverty Report 2020](#); Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* [Reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion](#): A DFID policy paper; DFID, 2005.

<sup>43</sup> [Understanding Poverty in Kenya: A multidimensional analysis](#); Diwakar, V. and Shepherd, A., Chronic Poverty Advisory Network, December 2018.

<sup>44</sup> [Kenya Social Exclusion Analysis Report](#); VSO, August 2014.

to PWD and provides further detail on some of the rights that PWDs are entitled to. However, access to services is still extremely restricted and the diverse range of physical and mental disabilities that individuals face is often misunderstood in wider society. Language and behaviour that continues to stigmatize and systematically exclude PWD is widespread.

For the LGBTQ+ community in Kenya, exclusion persists in many spaces. Homosexuality, in particular relationships between men, is still illegal under the country's penal code, and challenges to these laws have recently been dismissed in Kenya's High Court.<sup>45</sup> The Legal Aid Centre within the National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission receives hundreds of reports every year dealing with human rights violations against individuals based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. LGBTQ+ individuals and communities in Kenya continue to face various form of violence, blackmail and extortion, police harassment and brutality, dismissal from employment, eviction from rental properties, and denial of services, access to premises and custody of children.<sup>46</sup> Due to such widespread stigma and serious consequences that directly impact an individual's home, livelihood and safety, members of the LGBTQ+ community are often extremely reluctant to come out to their families, workplaces and communities or to report violations of their rights to police due to ongoing fears of violence, harassment and social backlash. Recent studies indicate that LGBTQ+ discrimination and exclusion in Kenya costs the economy as much as \$1.3 billion USD every year, largely due to poor health outcomes, reduced tourism and lower productivity.<sup>47</sup> However, inherent contradictions seem to arise in the country's overall stance on LGBTQ+ rights and protections; Kenya currently hosts more than 512,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, including an estimated 1,000 LGBTQ+ refugees, and remains the only country in the region to provide asylum to those fleeing persecution based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.<sup>48</sup>

Similar to other developing countries, Kenya has a significant youth bulge. The proportion of Kenya's youth population (aged 18-34) constitutes 25 percent, with 43 percent of the country's total population under the age of 15 years old.<sup>49</sup> Young people in Kenya face a myriad of challenges that contribute to their social, political and economic exclusion, including youth unemployment and underemployment, youth labour migration patterns, skills shortages in the ICT labour market, limited participation in economic and political spheres, access to healthcare, early and unwanted pregnancies, limited and poor quality housing, and lack of start-up capital and assets for collateral to secure loans for entrepreneurship activities and business development. Youth living with disabilities face even greater exclusion, resulting from social rejection, isolation and discrimination, hindering their psychological, emotional, social and economic development.<sup>50</sup> Nearly half of the country's youth in the 18-34 age bracket are multidimensionally poor; deprivation in housing, education and nutrition are the three largest contributors to multidimensional youth poverty in Kenya.<sup>51</sup> It's important to also note that youth are not a homogeneous group; girls and young women face uniquely different barriers than boys and young men. More than half (52 percent) of all youth in Kenya are female, with young women more likely to be multidimensionally poor than young men; 50 percent of young women are multidimensionally poor compared to 47 percent of young men.<sup>52</sup> Low levels of educational attainment for girls and young women, coupled with discriminatory social and cultural practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced early marriages, put girls and young women at a unique disadvantage. These factors and others have resulted in low participation rates and low levels of representation of female youth in decision-making, while patriarchal gender roles continue to limit their opportunities for progression and self-development.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> [Litigation: Our Wins](#); National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission of Kenya, 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Annual Report 2018-2019, [Annual Report 2019-2020](#); National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission of Kenya, 2020-2021.

<sup>47</sup> [The Economic Case for LGBT+ Inclusion in Kenya](#); Open for Business, 2019.

<sup>48</sup> [UNHCR Statement on the situation of LGBTIQ+ refugees in Kakuma camp](#); UNHCR, March 2021.

<sup>49</sup> [Regional Analysis of Youth Demographics, Kenya](#); Research for Evidence, funded by the UK Department for International Development, 2019.

<sup>50</sup> [Kenya Youth Development Policy](#); Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs, 2018.

<sup>51</sup> [Comprehensive Poverty Report 2020](#); Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020.

<sup>52</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>53</sup> [Kenya Youth Development Policy](#); Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs, 2018.



## Key GESI Gaps and Barriers in Research and Innovation

Across Kenya's R&I ecosystem, a range of gaps and barriers persist when it comes to the equitable participation of women and other marginalized groups. Available research and evidence in this area has been further supplemented by in-depth interviews with a diverse range of key stakeholders within Kenya's R&I ecosystem.

Women face numerous barriers in terms of their ability to access, participate in and benefit from R&I ecosystems on par with men and others in positions of social privilege. Stakeholders report a diverse range of gaps and barriers when it comes to gender inequality in R&I spaces, including the gender pay gap, gender-based barriers to internal promotion and career progression, workplace discrimination, safety concerns, and the considerable burden of unpaid care work that reduces the amount of time and energy women have to invest in and grow their careers. In addition, low levels of knowledge and capacity related to gender equality and proactive inclusion mean that many institutions are neither aware of, nor intentionally focusing on, addressing these gaps and barriers within their organizations or approaches to their work.<sup>54</sup>

Barriers to women's participation in R&I in Kenya begin from a young age; due to discriminatory norms and other gender-related factors, girls struggle to perform as well as boys from the level of primary schooling, and are often unable to pursue higher education in STEM as a result.<sup>55</sup> Gender norms that promote science, technology and innovation as the domain of men and boys further discourage girls and women from entering into these spaces. Studies focused on women pursuing higher education in STEM within the Kenyan university system indicate that fewer women are choosing and completing STEM courses due to a range of unique gender barriers; these barriers include a lack of support for female students who are pregnant or nursing, lack of childcare support, balancing the demands of domestic unpaid care work with education and career progression, and persistent negative stereotypes about women in STEM.<sup>56</sup> A recent comprehensive report from the African Academy of Sciences corroborates these barriers and more, including the perception that women are less competitive and less committed than men, and the presence of workplace environments that favour men over women.<sup>57</sup> The study's analysis reveals that 75 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that "negative traditional beliefs that women are inferior to men are contributing to girls'/women's lack of enthusiasm for STEM in secondary and tertiary studies", while 78 percent of respondents agreed that "sexism and stereotyping of women's roles" is a primary driver of their exclusion from STEM spaces and careers. Though the report assesses and establishes such patterns of exclusion across the whole of Africa, over 55 percent of respondents for the study are Kenyan, providing further insight into some of the country's major barriers to women's participation in R&I.<sup>58</sup> Other recent studies reveal that both female faculty and female students involved in STEM at Kenya's universities feel they must work extra hard to overcome the unique gender barriers that women face in the STEM field, and there is a tendency for women students to at first underestimate the competence of women faculty members teaching STEM, until they spend more time in their classes.<sup>59</sup> A lack of female role models within the innovation ecosystem, particularly in STEM disciplines, contributes to women's lower levels of interest and participation in the STEM field.

Stakeholders in Kenya's research spaces indicate that there are very few organizations or institutions that support African women as researchers, and that the struggle to balance family and career remains a top barrier for women in research.<sup>60</sup> The need to continuously publish one's research in order to build credibility in the research sector as well as to achieve career progression is also a key barrier for women;

<sup>54</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Kenya; January 2022.

<sup>55</sup> [Exploring enabling interventions for increasing female students' access and participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines](#); Mbirianjau, L., September 2016.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Factors which Contribute to or Inhibit Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics in Africa; The African Academy of Sciences, April 2020.

<sup>58</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Kenya; January 2022.

<sup>59</sup> [Exploring enabling interventions for increasing female students' access and participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines](#); Mbirianjau, L., September 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Kenya; January 2022.

expectations around the prioritization of motherhood and domestic responsibilities continue to limit women's time and ability to prepare and publish their research, resulting in much slower or even stalled career growth for women compared with their male counterparts. The same expectations around childcare and domestic responsibilities do not apply to men, resulting in a persistent gender gap that also serves as a disincentive for women to pursue careers in the research sector.

Gender norms in Kenya present an inherent contradiction, as well; stakeholders report that women face significant pressure to be well-educated, but also to ensure they are 'good wives'. A 'good wife' in the Kenyan context is expected to look after everything in the home, to ensure her husband is consistently taken care of and supported, that the home is always clean and that dinner is ready and on the table in the evening.<sup>61</sup> Stakeholders report that women have much less time and freedom than men to achieve their own goals and dreams; women must first prioritize the home and find time for other things later on. This often results in exhaustion and burn out for many women. Getting married and having children also carries with it a significant shift in the expectations women face in their families and communities; once women are married, the pressure to prioritize the home and children intensifies, with husbands playing a very minimal role in domestic and childcare tasks. UCW was repeatedly cited by multiple stakeholders as a major barrier for women in R&I across the board.

Women also report specific challenges within the work environment driven by sexism and gender bias. Stakeholders indicate that women in higher education institutions are often treated like glorified secretaries, being asked to take on numerous administrative tasks that leave little time for professional development and career growth. Women report that even with a PhD, they struggle to be taken seriously and their voices and ideas are not valued the same way that their male colleagues' are. Racism also plays a role in terms of African women being perceived as less valuable and capable than white / western women and men are. For younger women starting out in their careers, there are additional struggles related to a lack of access to funding and training opportunities for them to become more competitive, as well as challenges around publishing research and accessing conferences, seminars and other critical resources, such as books and publications.

Women in Kenya's innovation sector report many of the same gender barriers, including negative stereotypes about women's competence as well as entrepreneurship and innovation being perceived primarily as the domain of men.<sup>62</sup> Within organizations, women often feel pressured or expected to fulfil a caretaking role that reflects gender stereotypes, such as providing coffee and tea to meeting attendees, even if they hold a senior position in the organization. Often times, going along with these expectations is seen as less stressful than speaking up and confronting these double standards. Stakeholders report that women are expected 'to be superheroes at work and at home', yet their capabilities are constantly questioned in the work environment and so they have to work even harder to prove themselves. These gendered power dynamics within the work environment are something that women are conditioned to expect in advance, and so they are already entering innovation spaces and institutions with the mindset that they will have to work twice as hard, say yes to virtually any requests or demands that come their way, and compromise their own boundaries in order to get ahead.

Stakeholders further report that the burden of managing unpaid care work alongside a career is one of the main reasons some women choose not to marry or have children at all, especially if they want to become independent entrepreneurs. Despite these numerous challenges, women-led start-ups are making serious contributions to Kenya's innovation sector, including fintech company FarmDrive, edtech app Eneza and booking platform BuuPass, where women entrepreneurs are finding creative ways to meet market needs and solve community problems, and not just those clustered in the capital of Nairobi.<sup>63</sup> However, even such successful women leaders in the innovation space report encountering persistent gender barriers along their journeys, including inadequate training and education suitable for the job

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<sup>61</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Kenya; January 2022.

<sup>62</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Kenya; January 2022.

<sup>63</sup> [These Women are Helping Shape Kenya's Tech Industry](#); Maritim, T., for Care Kenya, October 2019.

market as well as colleagues and leaders questioning whether or not they were doing the work themselves or had a man behind the scenes executing their ideas in practice. Access to start-up capital is another key barrier that women entrepreneurs face, and instances of sexual exploitation in exchange for credit facilities and compliance clearances have been reported by women entrepreneurs.<sup>64</sup>

When it comes to social inclusion beyond gender, supportive efforts are limited within Kenya's R&I ecosystem. Stakeholders report that gender and women's inclusion has become more of a focus in recent years, but is still seen as something relatively 'new' for the sector, whereas efforts to consider, engage or include PWD, LGBTQ+ communities or poor, rural communities are fairly limited. Poverty and geographical location play a major role in excluding individuals from access to education, opportunities and resources that would support their participation in innovation and entrepreneurship, and unless specific programmes or interventions are designed to address these barriers, poor communities (especially those in rural areas) will be left behind. In addition, certain groups that face unique social stigma, such as PWD and LGBTQ+ individuals, are systematically excluded by institutions, attitudes and behaviours that largely reflect and reproduce those prevailing discriminatory social norms and values.<sup>65</sup>

Stakeholders report that PWD and LGBTQ+ individuals or issues are not well mainstreamed into the R&I ecosystem in Kenya, and are often only addressed with singular, bespoke programs developed for a particular purpose, though LGBTQ+ communities appear to be even more excluded than PWD in this regard. Based in Kenya, the Assistive Technology Impact Fund (AT Impact Fund) was established to better enable frontier technology solutions to reach people with disabilities in Africa, and to test business models that are most likely to succeed.<sup>66</sup> Funded by UK Aid and led by the Global Disability Innovation Hub, AT Impact Fund seeks to facilitate the growth of the AT sector by combining grant capital with expert-led venture-building support to help AT innovators launch and scale solutions that are designed to reach populations in Africa. The Fund focuses on identifying and supporting AT solutions that provide significant improvement in quality of life for people with disabilities, and is currently providing £200,000 of grant funding coupled with expert-led venture-building support to facilitate the growth of the AT sector in Africa.

Social acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals is still not widespread in Kenya, and this in and of itself remains a critical barrier for their targeted inclusion in R&I spaces.<sup>67</sup> Stakeholders report that LGBTQ+ communities and their diverse concerns are not well understood to begin with, and that relevant insights and research about LGBTQ+ issues are not necessarily getting into the hands of policymakers or government leaders where they could potentially have an impact. Some actors in the research space indicate that there appears to be an increasing focus on socioeconomic variables for inclusion in research, but also report a general lack of knowledge and capacity to know how best to target marginalized groups in their work. While some stakeholders report that awareness and acceptance of the need for social inclusion is increasing within the R&I ecosystem more broadly, there is still a significant gap yet to be closed.

While popular discourse around research and innovation often highlights the critical importance of engaging youth, there are significant gaps and barriers here within Kenya's ecosystem. Young people report that the innovation ecosystem in Kenya lacks clear coordination and often describe it as "disjointed" or "individualistic".<sup>68</sup> Youth coming from informal settlements reportedly face even greater barriers when accessing resources and opportunities to participate in the ecosystem. While there are many key actors in the ecosystem and youth can identify their importance, many youth feel that innovation facilitators and initiatives do not really respond effectively to the needs of young people. Studies on youth barriers in innovation identify four main challenges for Kenyan youth, mainly lack of support, lack of

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<sup>64</sup> [Women in Manufacturing: Mainstreaming Gender and Inclusion](#); International Centre for Research on Women, 2020.

<sup>65</sup> [Reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion](#): A DFID policy paper; DFID, 2005. Stakeholder interviews, Kenya; January 2022.

<sup>66</sup> [Assistive Technology \(AT\) Impact Fund](#); AT Impact Fund, 2022.

<sup>67</sup> Stakeholder interviews, Kenya; January 2022.

<sup>68</sup> [Ujuzamili: Alleviating challenges in youth-driven innovation](#); UNICEF and partners, 2021.

funding, lack of information, and mindsets and attitudes among young people that perpetuate misleading ideals of fast-paced growth and success without first understanding the market for their specific innovation or taking enough time to develop their ideas more robustly.<sup>69</sup> Many youth innovators report receiving little or no support at all in the development of their ideas, troubleshooting problems, or understanding business development or legal requirements. Kenyan youth report that trying to ‘go it alone’ in the innovation space is extremely difficult, and young people need better networks and connections in order to succeed. Lack of start-up capital is a critical barrier, as well, and income insecurity in the start-up phase tends to demotivate youth from pursuing entrepreneurship and innovation opportunities altogether.

In the interest of helping to close some of the gender gaps for young women in innovation and STEM, Kenya also competes in the Miss Geek Africa competition, as a ‘Smart Africa’ member state.<sup>70</sup> Miss Geek Africa is an entrepreneurship competition that originated as Miss Geek Rwanda in 2014 but was renamed as Miss Geek Africa in 2017, and has since expanded to 22 countries across the continent. Girls and women between the ages of 13 and 21 submit applications that aim to solve problems through technological innovations. This capacity building experience provides all finalists the opportunity to compete and collaborate with their peers as well as to participate in the Transform Africa Summit (TAS) where they interact with industry leaders and their governments. The goal of the competition is to inspire more girls and young women to take up STEM education and careers in order to meaningfully contribute to solving some of Africa’s key development challenges using technology. When the competition first became continental in 2017, a young Kenyan woman, Ruth Njeri Waiganjo, took first place for her mobile phone application called Safe Drive, a data-driven way to protect road users by responding to transport problems like frequent accidents based on behavioural profiles of drivers.<sup>71</sup>

## Summary & Recommendations

Evidence from the Kenyan context illustrates that women and other marginalized groups face numerous barriers both within the broader social, economic and political landscape of the country, as well as within R&I ecosystems in particular. These barriers significantly influence how different social groups access, participate in and benefit from R&I processes and outcomes. Based on the findings of this assessment as well as suggestions and guidance provided directly by key stakeholders in Kenya, the following recommendations have been developed to address key GESI gaps and barriers in the country’s R&I ecosystem.

- **Baseline capacity building for firms and institutions to better mainstream GESI into their work:** It is crucial for individuals, teams and organizations to have a more robust grasp and nuanced understanding of GESI gaps and barriers and the drivers of exclusion, in order for them to be able to respond intentionally and effectively within their work. Teams should also have their knowledge built around how GESI barriers directly impact their work in R&I, and how GESI barriers manifest themselves in different ways within the R&I ecosystem across different levels and pillars.
- **Coaching top leadership within R&I:** Engaging and coaching key leaders, influencers and decision makers within the R&I ecosystem on GESI issues is a critical component for sustainable GESI transformation and inclusion. This enables top leadership to act as drivers of change and proactively foster enabling and inclusive environments within R&I spaces, including institutionalizing commitments to GESI awareness and mainstreaming through internal policies, strategies and practices within firms and other organizations.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> [Miss Geek Africa Competition 2020 for Young African Girls](#); Opportunities for Africans, February 2020.

<sup>71</sup> [Kenyan Waiganjo crowned Miss Geek Africa 2017](#); The New Times, May 2017.

- **Convening events/spaces where different R&I actors can come together to normalize GESI within the ecosystem:** Convening a diverse array of R&I actors as well as other key stakeholders in GESI offers a targeted and efficient way to foster collective knowledge and understanding around GESI issues and best practice approaches for GESI mainstreaming in the Kenyan context. Such convening could take the form of a member-led, participatory, collaborative Community of Practice for research and innovation actors from all backgrounds. Convening also helps to normalize and mainstream conversations about GESI issues and move away from the perception that GESI is a 'fringe' issue that only certain actors or groups need to care about or engage in. Convening also creates intentional space for different actors and organizations to network, learn from one another and strategize around priority issues to improve how GESI is addressed and mainstreamed across different levels and pillars of the ecosystem.
- **Mentoring and role models for women's career progression:** Putting in place mechanisms where women can engage with and learn from other women at different stages of their career growth provides support and solidarity for women pursuing careers in R&I, which are often male-dominated spaces. Such mentoring/role model engagement spaces could happen at a national or regional level, and/or within individual R&I institutions themselves. This approach could also be useful for connecting and supporting other excluded groups, such as adolescents/young people or people with disabilities.
- **Consult directly with women, youth and other marginalized groups to assess how best to respond to their needs and support their integration into R&I spaces:** Having intentional conversations with women and other excluded groups is key for ensuring that R&I actors and spaces are responding effectively to the unique needs and barriers that marginalized groups are facing, rather than assuming that they already know what different excluded groups will need. This is particularly important when it comes to the inclusion of youth in innovation, as one example. Participation is crucial for the process of inclusion to have impact and meaning, and excluded groups need to have a direct voice in the R&I ecosystems that are seeking to integrate and address GESI issues more proactively.
- **Targeted GESI capacity building for male leaders and allies:** In often male-dominated R&I spaces, it can be extremely helpful to have well-informed and supportive male leaders and allies who can help to change the status quo around GESI and normalize the importance of directly addressing these issues in R&I work. While engaging men in such activities and dialogues is a useful approach, it is important to ensure that existing systems of privilege and power are not further exacerbated by spotlighting men's voices only, which means ensuring that men's voices and views do not become overly centered and prioritized in GESI conversations at the expense of the voices of women and other marginalized groups. Ensuring that male actors and leaders have a clear understanding of how to be effective allies without reproducing harmful GESI hierarchies is critical for this approach to result in positive, transformative change.
- **Policy advocacy around GESI issues in the wider country context:** There is a distinct need to address the normative belief systems and institutional structures that drive gender inequality and social exclusion to begin with. Despite a progressive national constitution in Kenya, the rights of certain groups often remain unrealized, including the LGBTQ+ community as well as people with disabilities. R&I in Kenya would benefit from high level advocacy around policy and legislation that directly affects the ability of excluded groups to claim their human rights and participate in all realms of life, including in R&I ecosystems.
- **Engaging the media to change the public narrative around GESI:** Media plays a critical role in shaping wider social beliefs, attitudes and behaviours around key issues of gender and social inclusion, as well as perpetuating harmful stereotypes and misinformation about these issues. Engaging the media in critical conversations around key GESI issues and building their capacity



to produce higher quality journalism that is better informed about these matters can help to shift the powerful social norms that continue to perpetuate gender discrimination and social exclusion in the current country context.