



Gender Equality in Kenya

Factsheet

Overview

Kenya is the largest economy in East Africa, with most of the population living in rural communities. More than half of the country's population is women, and around a third lives below the poverty line.¹ The country faces several major development challenges, including gender inequality, and ranks 128 out of 189 countries in the United Nations Gender Inequality Index (GII).²

Gender-based Violence (GBV) remains prevalent in Kenya, and women are underrepresented in decision-making processes at all levels, including the national parliament. Although the status of women in Kenya has improved in recent decades, these trends are reflected across the tea industry, where women are more likely to experience poverty, violence, and unequal access to opportunities.

This factsheet highlights the extent of some of these issues using references and data points from third party sources.

Tea

The tea sector is a leading source of livelihood in rural Kenya, supporting an estimated five million people, or 10% of the population.³ Tea production in Kenya heavily relies on a female workforce, with women making up 60% of the country's agricultural workforce.⁴ Women occupy most of the tea sector's labour-intensive and low-paid jobs, including picking tea and transporting leaves to buying centres.⁵

Women's economic status

As is the case globally, women across Kenya are disproportionately affected by poverty. Men earn around 30% more than women and female-headed households are twice as likely to be poor (35%) than male-headed households (18%).⁶ Access to formal financial services such as banking and credit is 4.2% higher for men than women.⁷

At the household level, decision making often happens jointly; however, women are less likely to make decisions about how money is spent. Men are three times more likely to be the primary decision makers for household purchases.⁸

Women are underrepresented in leadership and management positions in all sectors, including tea.⁹ They often face workplace discrimination, have limited opportunities to progress, and are less likely to apply for higher positions or seek promotion.¹⁰ In the private sector, only 22% of women hold leadership positions.¹¹

Despite forming most of the workforce, women face an 8% gender gap in agricultural productivity. This means they experience lower crop yields and are more likely to suffer from poverty because of this.¹² This is mainly due to having less access to land, credit, and agricultural inputs and extension services.¹³



Land and property rights

Land ownership can be key to economic empowerment for women; without land, women have less control over resources and often have little to use as collateral when applying for formal credit.

The Kenyan government has developed several legal provisions to advance gender equality in land rights, but traditional laws and customs can often limit women's access to land.¹⁴ In 2014, 21% of women owned agricultural land, compared to 44% of men.¹⁵

In households, women working as smallholder tea farmers are often excluded from property and land ownership, despite their efforts and labour.¹⁶ They also have limited control and access to the earnings accrued from tea farming compared to men.¹⁷

Access to education

Education leads to improved health outcomes and increased opportunities for women and girls.¹⁸ A better education means that women are more likely to participate in formal employment, earn higher incomes, and be aware of their rights.¹⁹

Girls in Kenya, especially in rural areas, face barriers to accessing education. Poverty, child marriage, and poor infrastructure are among the main challenges preventing girls from receiving a decent education.²⁰

In the most recently available data, primary school completion rates in rural Kenya were 68% for girls and 82% for boys. Secondary school completion rates were lower at 29% and 34%, respectively.²¹

In 2021, the World Economic Forum ranked Kenya 126 out of 156 countries in educational opportunities for women and girls.²²



Child marriage

Child marriage is illegal in Kenya under the 2001 Children's Act, while the Marriage Act, of 2014, sets the minimum age of marriage at 18. Despite government efforts, child marriage remains a significant challenge.²³

Kenya has the world's 18th highest child marriage rate; 23% of girls are married before 18, and 4% are married before their fifteenth birthday.²⁴ Girls in rural, tea growing areas are at greater risk than those in urban areas. This is due to an enhanced vulnerability to poverty, poor law enforcement and cultural norms, among other issues.²⁵

Girls in poor communities are often seen as a financial burden and can be married off in exchange for livestock. Early marriage can lead to school dropouts, increased rates of gender-based violence, and a higher risk of maternal mortality.²⁶

Gender-based violence

GBV is an ongoing problem across Kenya, with cases of physical and sexual violence continuing to occur at home and in the workplace.

Data from 2022 shows that 34% of women aged 15–49 years old have experienced physical violence and 13% have experienced sexual violence. At least 7% of women experienced sexual violence in the 12 months before being surveyed. Cases are likely to be higher due to underreporting.

GBV exists within the tea sector, including on estates, smallholder farms, and among informal tea workers. This can be in the form of demands being made by supervisors of workers for sexual favours, domestic violence, and sexual harassment in public areas.²⁷ The Kenyan government has adopted various strategies to tackle GBV, including its [Policy for Prevention and Response to GBV](#), ratifying international conventions, and committing to ending GBV by 2026.²⁸

ETP's approach

ETP seeks to work in partnership with companies who want to ensure their business policy and practices respect workers and protect the environment. ETP adopts a participatory approach and community development fora to ensure tea workers' voices are heard. We seek to ensure that women and children have access to resources and opportunities; and we partner with organisations who share tried-and-tested approaches to tackle inequality in tea communities.

Addressing gender inequality and supporting women's empowerment is a priority for our work in Kenya. Many of ETP's activities in Kenya have a gender focus, ranging from advancing women's leadership in tea to promoting women's understanding and access to their rights. We work closely with local communities and women's rights organisations to ensure we tackle the most pressing issues in tea. In addition to our on-the-ground projects, our work on gender equality includes influencing policy and catalysing private sector change.

Read more about our initiatives in Kenya [here](#).

Sources

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